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Hume's Philosophical Development (review)

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Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 13, Number 2, April 1975,
pp. 259-260 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/hph.2008.0765](https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.0765)



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tivity to the demands of different circumstances, rather than a genuine understanding of any defect of right liberalism. Montesquieu amends Hobbes, makes him more gentle, less "sauvage." Yet, such a reading leaves it unclear how deep the defect goes. That Montesquieu should have been concerned with the necessity of enshrouding modern regimes in a faith that more lay at their foundations than was really there suggests a radical understanding of the defect. Surely, one inescapable conclusion that emerges from the central books of *The Spirit of the Laws* is the idea that the entire globe will not necessarily support right politics. Hence, the history of progress to be written by modern natural philosophy is a history that may be confined to select regions. The world need not be made safe for democracy, since nature has made many parts of it unsafe for any moderate government. Montesquieu raises, in the context of modern science, the possibility that it may justifiably be the eternal human prospect that men should be divided into high cultures and barbarian cultures. On this basis, the city and man can remain the themes of political philosophy without requiring political philosophy to reconcile itself to the fundamental inadequacy of the human. It is to the practical accomplishment of this objective that his history of the republic is directed. It is a history of right politics—not the history of man on earth—that is intended to serve as the principle of right for the citizens of the modern regime. Montesquieu, one might say, sought to ensure the possibility of universal politics, but only for particular regimes. Such reflections would lead to consideration of the sense in which Montesquieu was more radical than his predecessors. What is at stake is man's capacity to discern and choose legitimate politics and the necessity of rejecting tyranny as an error. That is a theoretical goal, and we wish to know the nature of that political prudence which might ensure it.

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Hume's Philosophical Development. By James Noxon. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973. Pp. xiv + 197. \$8.25)

Hume's Philosophical Development is one of the most interesting books to have been written on Hume in a long time. It reverses the deplorable trend of treating some specific philosophical issue in Hume in isolation from the rest of his philosophy. Not only does Noxon take the totality of Hume seriously, but he advances an interesting and provocative thesis about a change in Hume's orientation.

Noxon begins with noting the generally accepted view that in the *Treatise* Hume proposes to apply the Newtonian experimental method to the analysis of philosophical problems, and what this amounts to is the reduction of both the social sciences and philosophy itself to a theory of empirical psychology. This constitutes both a constructive aim on Hume's part and a basis for subverting his theological and philosophical opponents. Noxon then summarizes the main features of Newton's method and shows how Hume adopted them. Although much is said in the literature about Newton's influence on Hume, very few specific details are ever spelled out. Noxon goes a long way toward making the details more apparent. The main part of the book is then devoted to exposing the metaphysical, methodological, and logical obstacles to the successful completion of the Humean project.

Noxon argues that the two novel features of Newton's method are the application of mathematics to empirical data and the insistence on confirming hypotheses with experiments. Hume's methodological difficulties with extending the Newtonian method were his lack of a mathematical format and a rather attenuated notion of experiment. The latter was further complicated by the metaphysical problem of a dualism in Hume's system.

Before discussing the logical difficulties in Hume's program, I shall present Noxon's developmental thesis, a development which Noxon argues was necessitated by the foregoing difficulties. Noxon clearly sees that what held the *Treatise* together was a theory of the passions wherein Hume developed a theory of sympathy which he applied to morals in Book III. By the time Hume wrote the second *Enquiry*, he abandoned that theory of sympathy. Hence, when Hume republished his treatment of the passions the overarching structure of the *Treatise* was gone. Even in the first *Enquiry* Hume, according to Noxon, began to emphasize almost exclusively the critical and subversive elements in his philosophy. Eventually, Hume came to emphasize the historical basis of the social sciences rather than the psychological basis. Noxon's description of the change in emphasis in Hume is very well done indeed, and this by itself constitutes an important addition to Hume scholarship. Those who have increasingly come to take Hume the historian seriously will welcome this.

The crucial logical obstacle to Hume's program is the distinction between criteria of meaning or standards of reasoning which are normative and factual assertions which concern how people actually reason. Noxon argues that as Hume became more conscious of the distinction he moved away from his psychological theorizing and more toward the critical aim of showing the inconsistencies between everyday reasoning and the reasoning of his theological and philosophical opponents. Noxon buttresses this contention by showing how the later works of Hume are independently readable and how the psychological theory becomes less and less prominent.

The most thought-provoking part of Noxon's book is the discussion of the relationship between psychology and philosophy in Hume. Aside from a brief article by Jessop, Noxon is the first writer to take this issue seriously. There are in fact at least two issues here. First there is the question of the relevance of psychological facts to clarification of questions of meaning. Here Noxon comes to Hume's defense and chides Flew for believing that such issues can be resolved at the verbal level. Noxon considers this a piece of pernicious dogma. Of course this important philosophical dispute goes beyond the question of clarifying Hume, but it does indicate how Hume might be made relevant to contemporary discussions. For the Noxon-Flew controversy see pp. 148-152 and pp. 180-187.

There is a second issue on which it seems to me that Noxon and Flew do agree, and that is where psychology can be an appropriate supplementary explanation. When discussing why we have the rules we do in fact have Flew says: "it would be excessively difficult if not impossible consistently and systematically to advocate and employ any criterion of rationality opposed to that to which we ourselves are thus committed. . . . Something like this may perhaps be salvaged from Hume's psychological speculations in Section V" (*Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, p. 87). Noxon puts it this way: "The formal peculiarities of scientific thinking are the features of natural processes of association reflected upon, corrected, and refined in order to avoid the slipshod conclusions of an undisciplined imagination" (Noxon, p. 89). Both Flew and Noxon have gone far beyond anything to be found in either Kemp-Smith or Passmore, and Noxon is to be congratulated for reopening the discussion of this important issue.

If I may be permitted one comment, I would suggest the even more radical thesis that Hume would argue consciously against any fact-norm distinction. Hence Hume's disenchantment with his psychological theory signifies an awareness of the shortcomings of introspective psychology and not with his entire program. This would make the historical emphasis even more important.

Noxon's book shows how reading Hume is one sure way to raise the fundamental issues. It is a valuable contribution to Hume scholarship, one which no serious scholar can afford to ignore.

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