

10-1-1955

The Scholarship of Professor George Dession

Jerome Hall
Indiana University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview>



Part of the [Legal Biography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Jerome Hall, *The Scholarship of Professor George Dession*, 5 Buff. L. Rev. 7 (1955).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol5/iss1/7>

This Memorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact law scholar@buffalo.edu.

IN MEMORIAM GEORGE H. DESSION

inal procedure and of the American Law Institute in connection with the model penal code.

His intellectual influence will long endure.

SHELDON GLUECK
*Roscoe Pound Professor of Law
Harvard University Law School*

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF PROFESSOR GEORGE DESSION

Twenty-five years ago, when George Dession began to teach criminal law, that subject was not regarded as an "important" course in law school circles. An explanation of this attitude could be given in terms of the dominant mores in the United States concerning property and commerce. In any case, the consequences of this attitude were much more serious than the neglect of a particular course. For the neglect of criminal law also represented the narrow vocationalism of legal education, since the study of criminal law had long included various phases of philosophy and social science.

The status of criminal law in most law school curricula today is a vast improvement over the situation a quarter of a century ago; and Professor Dession was one of the small group of scholars who brought about this change. If this achievement is evaluated with reference to the progress of legal education in the United States, one may appreciate the kind of scholarship in which Professor Dession excelled and reach the core of his thinking.

While many were hospitable to cultural legal study and there was considerable speculation about methodology, there was very little work in the interrelation of law and non-legal disciplines which equalled the standards of the best traditional legal scholarship. Professor Dession's contributions demonstrated what could and ought to be done in university law schools. He proved that legal scholars can master non-legal disciplines and thereby increase our understanding of law in ways which traditional scholarship left untouched.

Let me cite two instances. Professor Dession had a thorough grasp of psychiatry and his essays on the relations of that discipline to criminal law are illuminating contributions. In one of these essays—*Psychiatry and the Conditioning of Criminal Justice**—written seventeen years ago, Professor Dession pointed out

* 47 YALE L. J. 319.

BUFFALO LAW REVIEW

the value of psychiatry in the administration of the criminal law and, also, the severe social and financial limitations on the actual use of psychiatry. I wish this essay, sympathetic and even optimistic regarding psychiatry, would be read by those literary psychiatrists whose forensic discourse is devoted almost exclusively to one segment of the substantive law—the M'Naghten Rules!

Another instance I would cite to indicate the quality of Professor Dession's scholarship is his analysis of the problem of legal sanctions. Here, a philosophical perspective was revealed and formulated in terms which can be employed significantly in legal research. Anyone concerned with the theory of law and socio-legal research, not only in criminal law but also in many other branches, will profit from the suggestiveness of Professor Dession's analysis. One could supplement these instances with many other examples of Professor Dession's major contributions, e.g., to criminal procedure and evidence, the functions of investigative bodies,

comparative criminal law, and so on.

But enough has been said, I hope, to delineate the principal interests of this sensitive, broadly-gauged, thoughtful scholar who lives in the minds and hearts of many colleagues both in this country and abroad.

JEROME HALL
Professor of Law, Indiana University

GEORGE DESSION

George Dession died at the summit of his powers, and at the time when he had cleared his desk in order to concentrate on the great and systematic work for which his life was preparation. He had engaged in active practice on behalf of private and governmental clients. He had an imposing list of imaginative and authoritative articles in the journals of the Profession. His casebook, of course, was a standard in the field. For many years George Dession had special psychiatric training and continually worked in close cooperation with physicians and social scientists in the study of correctional problems. He was continually engaged in teaching and was on call incessantly for advisory opinions. All of this constituted a scholarly career of great weight and distinction. So far as George Dession was concerned, however, all these activities were prologue to what he hoped to do in the way of developing certain fields of law by applying the concepts and procedures in which he had come to have great confidence. His supple and superlative mind and his unique experience cannot be duplicated in