

Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers

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Volume 19, Number 1, 1984

Guelph 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030918ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/030918ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)

1712-9109 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Emerson, R. L. (1984). Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 19(1), 63–90.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/030918ar>

Article abstract

"Conjectural history" is used here to "denote any rational or naturalistic account of the origins and development of institutions, beliefs or practices not based on documents or copies of documents or other artifacts contemporary (or thought to be contemporary) with the subjects studied." Many recent historians have focused on the apparent emergence within Scotland of a large number of sophisticated conjectural histories around 1750, and analysed them within the framework of a Marxist-oriented social science. This paper argues that such a perspective is "inappropriate and misguided." If one looks at these works as an outcome of what went before, rather than a forerunner of what came after, they begin to lose their modernistic flavour.

Conjectural histories of the Scottish Enlightenment were based essentially on four sources: the Bible and its commentaries, the classics, modern works of philosophy and travel accounts. Each had an influence on the works produced. The parallels between the Biblical and the secular conjectural histories are, for example, instructive and it is clear that no Scottish historian could consistently hold a doctrine of economic determinism or historical materialism and still reconcile this position with his Calvinist beliefs. Works such as Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* had influenced the conjectural histories of the Renaissance and continued to be used by the Scots just as they were by the English deists, whose speculations about historical development were also helpful to Scottish writers. Travel accounts provided information concerning mankind at various stages of civilization, but no explanation of the developmental process.

While the study of history was a popular pursuit during the Scottish Enlightenment this interest followed trends on the continent and elsewhere. Furthermore, an examination of the great works of this period suggests that they were firmly based on the writings of scholars of a generation before. Certainly the leading writers of the "golden age" from roughly 1730 to 1790 gave a more sophisticated, detailed and elaborate treatment of these ideas, but the sources, problems and concepts which they elucidated were not new. In their analyses, they did not employ historical materialism or economic determinism, though they were undoubtedly more political-economic, dynamic and secular in their attitude. They desired change for Scotland out of a patriotic regard for the comparative backwardness of their country, but the causes and cures for that condition were not fundamentally economic in nature. If these writings are examined as a unit, and seen in context, the conjectural historians of the Scottish Enlightenment appear to be an understandable outcome of their intellectual milieu. The author supports this conclusion by a close examination of the work of Hume and Smith. This further explicates his theme that a nascent economic determinism was not the impetus for this writing that recent historians have read into these works.

Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers

ROGER L. EMERSON

Résumé

"Conjectural history" is used here to "denote any rational or naturalistic account of the origins and development of institutions, beliefs or practices not based on documents or copies of documents or other artifacts contemporary (or thought to be contemporary) with the subjects studied." Many recent historians have focused on the apparent emergence within Scotland of a large number of sophisticated conjectural histories around 1750, and analysed them within the framework of a Marxist-oriented social science. This paper argues that such a perspective is "inappropriate and misguided." If one looks at these works as an outcome of what went before, rather than a forerunner of what came after, they begin to lose their modernistic flavour.

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While the study of history was a popular pursuit during the Scottish Enlightenment this interest followed trends on the continent and elsewhere. Furthermore, an examination of the great works of this period suggests that they were firmly based on the writings of scholars of a generation before. Certainly the leading writers of the "golden age" from roughly 1730 to 1790 gave a more sophisticated, detailed and elaborate treatment of these ideas, but the sources, problems and concepts which they elucidated were not new. In their analyses, they did not employ historical materialism or economic determinism, though they were undoubtedly more political-economic, dynamic and secular in their attitude. They desired change for Scotland out of a patriotic regard for the comparative backwardness of their country, but the causes and cures for that condition were not fundamentally economic in nature. If these writings are examined as a unit, and seen in context, the conjectural historians of the Scottish Enlightenment appear to be an understandable outcome of their intellectual milieu. The author supports this conclusion by a close examination of the work of Hume and Smith. This further explicates his theme that a nascent economic determinism was not the impetus for this writing that recent historians have read into these works.

L'expression "histoire conjecturale" est utilisée ici pour "définir toute description rationnelle ou naturaliste des origines et de l'évolution des institutions, croyances ou pratiques, description qui n'est pas fondée sur des documents ou des copies de documents, ou sur d'autres artefacts contemporains (ou jugés contemporains) des sujets étudiés". Récemment, plusieurs historiens ont porté leur attention sur l'émergence apparente d'un grand nombre d'histoires conjecturales en Ecosse, vers 1750. L'exposé qui suit soutient qu'une telle perspective est "impropre et peu judicieuse". Si l'on considère ces travaux comme le résultat de ce qui s'est produit auparavant, plutôt que comme précurseurs de ce qui a suivi, ils commencent à perdre leur saveur moderniste.

*Les histoires conjecturales du siècle des lumières en Ecosse étaient fondées essentiellement sur quatre sources: la Bible et ses annotations, les classiques, les ouvrages modernes de philosophie et les récits de voyages. Chacune a eu une influence sur les travaux réalisés. Par exemple, les parallèles établis entre les histoires conjecturales bibliques et séculaires étaient instructives, et aucun historien écossais ne pouvait soutenir en toute logique une doctrine de déterminisme économique ou de matérialisme historique, tout en conciliant cette position avec ses propres convictions calvinistes. Des travaux tels *On The Nature of Things* de Lucretius, ont influencé les histoires conjecturales de la Renaissance et continuent d'être utilisés par les Ecossais tout comme par les déistes Anglais dont les spéculations relatives au développement historique étaient aussi utiles aux écrivains Ecossais. Les récits de voyages fournissaient des renseignements sur l'humanité à divers degrés de civilisation, mais aucune explication du processus de l'évolution.*

Alors que l'étude de l'histoire était une activité répandue en Ecosse pendant le siècle des lumières, les tendances vers cet intérêt se retrouvaient aussi sur le continent et ailleurs. De plus, un examen des grandes oeuvres de l'époque permet de croire qu'elles étaient fermement fondées sur des travaux d'érudition réalisés une génération plus tôt. Assurément, les principaux auteurs de cet "âge d'or" entre 1730 et 1790 approximativement, traitaient ces idées avec plus de raffinement et de détail, mais les sources, les problèmes et les concepts qu'ils elucidaiient n'avaient rien de nouveau. Dans leurs analyses, ils n'utilisaient pas le matérialisme historique ne le déterminisme économique, quoique leur attitude était indubitablement plus politico-économique, dynamique et séculaire. Leur désir de changement pour l'Ecosse découlait d'un sentiment patriotique, suscité par le relatif retard de leur pays; mais les causes et les solutions à cet état de fait n'étaient pas de nature fondamentalement économiques. Si ces écrits sont étudiés comme un tout et placés dans leur contexte, les historiens conjecturaux écossais du siècle des lumières apparaissent comme une émanation compréhensible de leur milieu intellectuel. L'auteur appuie cette conclusion par un examen attentif du travail de Hume et Smith. Cela explique plus à fond son thème qui est que, contrairement aux impressions des historiens contemporains, un déterminisme économique naissant n'est pas la force dynamique sous-tendant ces écrits.

i

A paper on conjectural history should begin with a definition of the term because conjectural histories are all too often seen as synonymous with theories of progress or

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general histories of human development grounded in theories of human nature and elaborated deductively.¹ In this paper conjectural history will denote any rational or naturalistic account of the origins and development² of institutions, beliefs or practices not based on documents or copies of documents or other artifacts contemporary (or thought to be contemporary) with the subjects studied. All histories of the origins and progress of language, civil society and government, the origin of ranks, sciences such as astronomy, fine arts like painting or of pagan religions are by this definition wholly or in part conjectural.

ii

Recently historians have been struck by the seemingly sudden appearance around 1750 of conjectural histories containing sophisticated social analysis and theory. Lord Dacre (Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper) has even seen these works as important in defining the Scottish Enlightenment as opposed to the Enlightenment in Scotland.³ He⁴ and the late Ronald Meek have related these inquiries to "the rapidity of economic advance" and to "the facility with which a contrast can be observed between areas which are economically advancing and areas which are in different stages of development."⁵ Sidney Pollard and Hans Medick have argued that these Scottish works were profoundly related to the growth of bourgeois capitalism in Scotland.⁶ Duncan Forbes has found in some of the conjectural histories insightful and even prescient discussions of alienation, the ethos of capitalism and the division of labour in which he includes the growth of bureaucracy.⁷

1. Dugald Stewart, *Dissertation Exhibiting a General View of the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy* (first ed., Edinburgh, 1815) in *Works* (Cambridge, 1829), Vol. VI, pp. 3-4. Stewart had discussed the genre earlier in the *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith*, read 21 January and 18 March 1793 to the Royal Society of Edinburgh and later published as a preface to most editions of Smith's *Works*.
2. Development and progress were used synonymously by eighteenth century Scots for whom progress did not usually imply a necessarily better state but only a change.
3. Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* [hereafter *SV*], Vol. LVIII (1967), p. 1658; *Blackwoods Magazine*, Vol. 322 (1977), pp. 371-88.
4. Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment."
5. Ronald Meek, "The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology," in *Economics and Ideology and Other Essays* (London, 1967), p. 34-50; "Smith, Turgot, and the 'Four Stages' Theory," in *Smith, Marx, & After: Ten Essays in the Development of Economic Thought* (London, 1977), pp. 18-31; Meek says the Scots did no more than "demonstrate a relationship between the [economic] substructure and the [social] superstructure" but many suggest that the bound variables are all social and that long-run determinants are all economic. For this reason it is not surprising that Meek should write of the Scots' "materialist approach" to sociology and political economy; *Economics and Ideology*, p. 49.
6. Sidney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress* (London, 1968); Hans Medick, *Naturzustand und Naturgeschichte der burgerlichen Gesellschaft: die Ursprunge de burgerlichen Socialtheorie als Geschichtsphilosophie und Socialwissenschaft bei Samuel Pufendorf, John Locke und Adam Smith* (Göttingen, 1973).
7. Duncan Forbes, "Adam Ferguson and the Idea of Community," in *Edinburgh in the Age of Reason*, ed. Douglas Young (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 40-7; see also Duncan Forbes' edition of Adam Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh, 1966), p. xiii.

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Andrew Skinner too has seen the conjectural historians and their work as products of a country undergoing rapid but uneven economic change which had to be comprehended with new moral and political-economic theories.⁸ The conjectural historians had begun to understand aspects of a commercial society which had not yet been realized in their own time and country. For all of these commentators, the conjectural histories are to be understood using concepts which owe their definitions to the development of the very theories they foreshadowed, by a Marxist-oriented social science. There are reasons to think that these approaches to the conjectural historians are inappropriate and misguided. It is the purpose of this paper to state some of these reasons.

The best reason to think that the conjectural historians have been misunderstood lies in the fact that commentators have consistently looked forward rather than backward for the context in which to place these accounts of human affairs. This gives to the histories of the origins and progress of the many topics the Scots discussed a spurious novelty and an improper background. Lord Kames, David Hume, William Robertson, Hugh Blair, John Millar, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, James Dunbar and the others had been brought up with conjectural histories and the genre had periodically flourished since the Greeks. To judge the achievements of the Scots properly, the tradition within which they stood must at least be noticed.

iii

The European scholarly literature which provided materials for Scottish conjectural historians is vast but it can be reasonably divided into four categories: the Bible and works dealing with it; the classics as presented by their editors and commentators; modern works of philosophy and scholarship; and travel accounts. From these sources Scots gathered ideas, recognized problems and found their data.

It is ironic that the secular conjectural histories of the Scots philosophers in many ways echoed what most of their contemporaries took to be the real history of the world given in the Bible. The parallels are worth noting.

For most Europeans and all eighteenth-century school boys, the Bible was the oldest and most reliable history book dealing not only with the nature and destiny of man in time and eternity but also with more mundane topics not irrelevant to the conjectural historian. Genesis has a stadial progression which looks familiar: Adam and Eve were originally gatherers of fruit. While they were to dress and keep their garden, they were not tillers of the soil or shepherds as were Cain and Abel. In time, men became traders and city dwellers and the arts were invented and developed. Noah and his grandson, Tubal Cain, were respectively a ship builder and the first brass founder. The first masons

8. See Andrew Skinner, "Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith," *Political Studies*, Vol. XV (1967), pp. 32-48; "Adam Smith: An Economic Interpretation of History," in *Essays on Adam Smith*, ed. Andrew S. Skinner and Thomas Wilson (Oxford, 1975), pp. 154-78. Skinner's articles and his edition of *The Wealth of Nations* (Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 29-43 and 86-9 provide good bibliographies of works dealing with Scottish conjectural histories. See also Anand Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment* (London, 1976), pp. 91-123.

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and tower builders lived in Shinar where Babel was located. After the flood the patriarchal families of the Noahicides grew into the diverse warring tribes, cities and peoples ruled by kings rendered familiar in Old Testament stories which had meant much to a covenanted people. The earth was repopulated by men of a common culture, who were dispersed by divine command and thereafter spoke languages miraculously created or slowly evolved. The later history of fallen men is also periodized by God's interventions in history which are seen as purposeful and in some sense explicable, a view which is strengthened in the New Testament writings. The Bible too has its flux and reflux of pure and corrupt religion, just as it sets out accompanying developments in secular affairs. Arts arise, commerce leads to luxury, luxury to corruption and corruption to judgement and chastisement. That, in part, is the story of Jerusalem and the Hebrews.

No one would argue that there existed in the Bible (or the Bible as it was glossed and understood by seventeenth and eighteenth century scholars) a conjectural history as this term has been defined. But conjectural historians could find within it facts, ideas and ways of looking at history that were useful to them. These familiar materials were brought to bear on other problems.⁹ Men no longer captive to the word of God had not forgotten it when they wrote their philosophical histories. Moreover, with the exception of Hume, all of the Scottish conjectural historians remained at least nominal Christians. They never quite accepted the Bible or its history as being on a par with classical sources or with the anthropological data upon which they also drew. They might regard portions of the scriptures as allegorical, or push the Creation back beyond 4004 B.C., but there still remained a sense in which the Bible was a privileged source.¹⁰ This meant that none of the Scots, not even John Millar,¹¹ could consistently hold a doctrine of economic

9. See A.O. Lovejoy's discussion of Tertullian's theory of progress in "Nature as Norm in Tertullian," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (1948, rep. New York, 1960).

10. See E.L. Cloyd, *James Burnet Lord Monbodo* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 45 and 177-8; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay*, p. 74.

11. John Millar is commonly held to be the conjectural historian whose views come closest to an assertion of historical materialism and economic determinism. This may well be the case but the operative word is closest. Millar held that Christianity had exercised upon men's minds an influence separable from that of the churches which had indeed been closely related to or enmeshed in the material conditions of life. While believing in the four-stages theory of historical development Millar saw this as a probable typical pattern of development, not one which was inevitable. Moreover, the various stages of civilization are only "usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs." "Various accidental causes" among which are the efforts of charismatic political leaders regulate, distort and give uniqueness to the pattern of "advancement in different countries." Insofar as Millar found analogies between ancient and modern instances of advancement, the progresses which he noticed were and had to be contingent. Finally, one should notice that his most distinguished conjectural history, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* occasionally points to its general exclusion of political and religious causes: "It is not intended, however, in this discourse, to consider those variations, in the state of women, which arise from the civil or religious government of a people, or from such other causes as are peculiar to the inhabitants of different countries. The revolutions that I have mentioned in the condition and manners of the sexes, are chiefly derived from the progress of mankind in the common arts of life, and therefore make a part in the general history of society." William C. Lehmann, *John Millar of Glasgow* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 80-1, 136, 362, 176-7, 100-106, 168 and 228.

determinism or historical materialism without doing violence to their religious commitments. Had they been historical materialists, it is difficult to see how they could have reconciled this position with their Calvinist beliefs. The Bible and its commentaries¹² remained very much in the background of their works not only as sources of data but also of concepts.

Seventeenth century Christian scholarship had dealt in an analytic fashion with many problems to which the conjectural historians often returned. Perhaps it would be useful to consider briefly one of those which received extensive treatment in the conjectural histories and the economic literature of the Scots, namely, population increases.

Was it, and how was it, possible for the primal pair and their descendants to people the world? These questions had been debated for years by Christians of varying orthodoxy and their answers are well enough known.¹³ Two writers with whom the Scots were familiar give sufficient examples of the sorts of materials which religious controversies provided for the philosophical historian: Sir Matthew Hale and Isaac de la Peyrère. In 1677 Hale showed to his own satisfaction that the net reproduction rates of the patriarchs and their descendants could easily account for the world population thought to exist in the seventeenth century.¹⁴ Migrations due to war, colonizing, famine or the movements of sea-going peoples accounted for the dispersion of men who had fruitfully multiplied throughout the Old and New Worlds. The mechanism driving this process depended primarily upon population pressures on resources and resulting conflicts which could be documented or plausibly assumed. Isaac's wells, the hunger of Joseph's brothers, the flight of peoples before the armies of great kings and the dispersion at Babel were all in Hale's mind and his arguments were inseparable from this biblical context. If one disagreed, as de la Peyrère did,¹⁵ then it was the increase-ratios and the time and numbers involved in migrations which counted. He postulated separate creations for the gentile nations which solved this problem while creating others. For him there was no

12. The biblical commentaries which are of importance in this context are those of the sort discussed by D.C. Allen in *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science and Letters* (Urbana, 1963); originally published in *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, Vol. 33 (1949).

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 6; see also James Bonar, *Theories of Population from Raleigh to Arthur Young* (London, 1931).

14. Sir Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind, Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature* (London, 1677).

15. For further information on La Peyrère see Richard H. Popkin, "La Peyrère, Gregoire, and the Jewish Question," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. H.E. Pagliaro (Madison, 1975), Vol. 4, p. 218, n. 9; for discussions about the relevance of these theories to eighteenth century Scottish enquiries, see Popkin's "The Philosophical Basis of Eighteenth-Century Racism," in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. H.E. Pagliaro (1973), Vol. 3, pp. 245-62; and "The Philosophical Bases of Modern Racism," in *Philosophy and the Civilizing Arts: Essays Presented to Herbert W. Schneider*, eds. Craig Walton and John P. Anton (Athens, Ohio, 1974), pp. 126-65; H.M. Bracken, "Essence, accident and race," *Hermathena*, Vol. CXVI (1973), pp. 81-96.

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diffusion of an original common culture nor, possibly, a uniform human nature. Autochthonous peoples developed without enjoying the special relation to God which the Hebrews possessed and their demographic histories were clearly different. What was important for the eighteenth century in this debate about the “begats” was the demographic theory which concerned nearly every one of the conjectural historians. A similar case could be made using the origins of pagan religions, government philosophy, languages, the arts or many other questions canvassed by seventeenth century writers. They strove to reconcile biblical accounts to what they took to be rational standards and true beliefs about their own world and the ways in which it had evolved over time. So did their eighteenth-century counterparts.

If the Bible and its commentators did not offer real conjectural histories, some classical works did. Particularly useful were those which dealt with what Lovejoy and Boas called “hard primitivism”.¹⁶ At least two ancient authors well known to eighteenth century men discussed the processes of social change in ways which appealed to the Scots — Lucretius (c.99-c.55 B.C.) and Diodorus Siculus (?-after 21 B.C.).¹⁷ Because the account of the former was better known and fuller only it will be discussed here.

Book V of Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things* contains a sketch of the progress of mankind from savagery to refinement, a sketch particularly attractive to men who appreciated the connections between religious belief and the passions of anxiety and fear.¹⁸ Mankind in Lucretius’ history moves through economic stages. From gathering and hunting, men progress to herding and husbandry; then “property was invented and gold found, which easily robbed the strong and beautiful of honour.” The arts were invented, commerce thrived and luxurious societies were created. Each step was of course characterized by other developments of which the political ones seem dominant though not rigorously related to the rest. For example, property arises after “kings began to build cities and to found a citadel, to be for themselves a stronghold and refuge; and they parcelled out and gave flocks and fields to each man for his beauty or his strength or understanding; for beauty was then of much avail and strength stood high.” Power flows to wealth in Lucretius’ poem as it did in Harrington’s political theory, but also to the able, strong and glamorous. Changes in government are associated with the invention of religion by men in whom “is implanted ... a shuddering dread, which raises new shrines of the gods over all the world.” The practical arts develop; when they do even sex roles change. As order, security and a sure subsistence are established, the fine arts appear. Book V ends with Lucretius telling us that poets “began to hand down men’s deeds in songs” at about the time writing was discovered: “Therefore our age cannot look back to see what was done before, unless in any way reason points out traces.” This conjectural

16. Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore, 1935); see also, Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, ed. and trans. W.N. Fenton and E.L. Moore (Toronto, 1974), 2 vols.

17. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, I, 8; II, 47; IX, 26.

18. *Lucretius on the Nature of Things*, trans. Cyril Bailey (Oxford, 1950), pp. 216-34; Bk.V, 11, 925-1457; quotations are from pp. 223, 224-5 and 234.

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history, he showed, was possible. Indeed, Book V ends with a paragraph on the perfection of the arts in a luxurious world in which "little by little, time brings out each several thing into view, and reason raises it up into the coasts of lights. For they saw one thing after another grow clear in their mind, until by their arts they reached the topmost pinnacle." When history is rationally reconstructed, its driving force appears to be the passions served by reason. The "shores of light," however, are deceptive because men are as happy in earlier periods as in later ones, as Scots like Ferguson continued to believe.

Lucretius' philosophical history or the shorter but similar one by Diodorus Siculus were by no means the only classical works to which the Scots went for factual information or theoretical insight. Many other sources have been discussed in a provocative and suggestive study by Varnard Foley, who has tried to show that Adam Smith's philosophical and conjectural histories were indebted to a host of classical works.¹⁹ Speculative as his conclusions are, they provide a salutary reminder that the men who helped to fashion the Athens of the North were well versed in classical history and in ancient speculations about the progress of mankind and its social institutions. This knowledge constituted the basis of what Peter Gay has felicitously called "modern paganism."²⁰

Modern paganism rested upon a view of classical societies comprehended in their totality if not all their details. It involved an enhanced sense of their importance as models in art, letters, thought and manners and an appreciation of their system of non-Judaeo-Christian values. Lucretian or Ciceronian patterns of thought were stimulating but they had to be reconciled with the biblical traditions, with the experience of Christian societies, and with the increasing volume of travellers' accounts of peoples largely unknown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The attempt to do this reflected both the values which Lovejoy saw as underpinning the Enlightenment²¹ and the new philosophy derived from Bacon, Newton and Locke. Historical and antiquarian works and travel accounts greatly expanded the intellectual horizons of the Scots and helped to change their attitudes toward the classical past. That began to appear as the product of developments possible in all or most cultures. The Scotland of Ossian and Homeric Greece, like the Athens of Pericles and Hume, were or could be much alike. If one wished to improve Scotland and to make it great, then it was incumbent upon patriotic philosophers to understand the forces which shaped and determined social change.²² In arriving at this understanding the histories of Greece and Rome were of primary importance and sketches such as that of Lucretius were important guides. Attending to them in a new frame of mind made Greece rather than covenanted Israel the spiritual home of the Scottish philosophes.

19. See Varnard Foley, *The Social Physics of Adam Smith* (Purdue, 1976).

20. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York, 1966). Volume I is subtitled "The Rise of Modern Paganism"; the term is discussed on pp. 9-10.

21. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 29 (1932) pp. 281-99; reprinted in his *Essays in the History of Ideas*, pp. 78-98.

22. I have discussed this issue in "Natural Philosophy and the Problem of the Scottish Enlightenment," *Studies on Voltaire* (forthcoming).

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Knowledge of the classics had in large part been made possible by the humanists who had edited, annotated and commented upon the works of the ancients. To do their work the humanists had been forced to become historians of language, law, manners and much else. They had carefully compared modern and ancient societies, and sacred and secular histories and had speculated about the nature and causes of historical change. In Italy and then in northern Europe, these activities produced reflections on methods and forced historians to ponder the relationships which obtained between religion, politics, the construction of states and the climates in which they were set.²³ Among the humanists well known in Britain who had engaged in such learned speculations was Luis Vives, an important educational thinker whose ideas still resonated in eighteenth-century Scotland.²⁴ Vives wrote a conjectural history of the progress of mankind. From brutish cave-dwellers lacking language and the arts, men had evolved through stages partially defined by their modes of production. Pushed first by their needs and then by "curiosity" and "the pleasure of discovery" they had created "the superstructure of knowledge through which man comes to understand himself and the universe." Vives was by no means alone in his views about the ascent of man, some of which were echoed by Francis Bacon one hundred years later.²⁵

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23. The best treatment of this subject is Arthur B. Ferguson's *Clio Unbound: Perception of the social and cultural past in Renaissance England* (Durham, North Carolina, 1979). Portions of F. Smith Fussner's *Tudor History and the Historians* (London, 1970) are also useful. Among the humanist historians read and used by the Scots was Garcilaso de la Vega, El Inca whose *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* (Part I, Book I, Chs. XV-XXII) contain materials dealing with the origins and progress of mankind which reflect not only an Incan heritage but a classical education. There is a recent translation of this work by Harold V. Livermore published in Austin and London in 1966, reprinted in 1970.
24. Ferguson, *An essay*, pp. 362-4; Vives' life and thought have recently been studied by Carlos G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague, 1980).
25. Ferguson's discussions of Vives and Bacon show this. Bacon's discussions of civil and natural history also made the Scots selfconsciously theoretical historians as Dugald Stewart noted (above, n. 1). Perhaps the clearest expression of this interest in Bacon's theory of history is to be found in John Hill's "An Essay upon the Principles of Historical Composition With an application of these principles to the writings of Tacitus," Edinburgh University Library MS. DC. 8.174, pp. 363-80. A version of this paper was published in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, I (1784), pp. 181-209. John Hill saw a mutual relation between data and the principles of explanation applicable to them. Histories were not mere heaps of facts but collections related to a subject requiring some explanation. Explanations rely upon principles, what he called metaphysics. But metaphysical principles rest ultimately upon inductions. As principles change, the facts required to verify and confirm them alter; as the facts vary, so will the theories. For others, including Hume and Smith, the long chain of causes and effects which constituted history made it theoretical as did the historians' reliance upon moral or physical causes to explain the effects with which they dealt. Among medical men William Cullen had perhaps the sharpest sense of the importance of theories in empirical investigations. For a discussion of Cullen's views, which were analogous to those of most conjectural historians, see Arthur L. Donovan, *Philosophical Chemistry in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 53-61. Cullen lectured annually on the uses of theories and their relation to science: eg. *Lectures on the History of the Practice of Physic* (n.d.), Cullen MSS., no. 27, pp. 32-78, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

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Bacon was typical of many Renaissance figures concerned with history. Like others he wrote historical works, thought about methodological questions and the place of history in the economy of knowledge and discussed numerous questions concerned with historical causation. In many of these works and fragments he was a controversialist as were most of the historical writers of his age. Controversy and the important issues around which it swirled helped to popularize historical literature. This was not less true of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scotland than it had been elsewhere. The Scots, however, came late to this development and inherited historical methods and conceptions developed earlier in France and England.²⁶ Among these was the notion that history was not past politics but the story of the development of cultural wholes. This belief had been clearly stated in France by the 1570s and had been exemplified in England by the 1640s in works by John Seldon and Sir Henry Spelman. Between the Restoration and the 1730s this conception of perfect history marked the works of many distinguished English antiquaries and ancient historians.²⁷ It is not surprising that such a modern conception of history should have been appealing to Scots struggling to overcome their deep-rooted cultural and economic backwardness. Many of them showed an equal receptivity to the philosophy of the late seventeenth century.

Between roughly 1680 and 1730 many Scots came to accept quite new patterns of thought. Determined to modernize and improve their intellectual life, a few had done so by 1730.²⁸ A revival of science teaching in the early 1700s had brought Newtonian ideas to all the universities by 1710. With Newton had come knowledge of other experimental scientists and an appreciation of an analytical/synthetic method relying upon observations and experiments. The introduction of Lockean philosophical ideas not much later had given further impetus to the acceptance of philosophical empiricism. Grotius and Pufendorf had entered the moral philosophy curriculum somewhat earlier.

In this new philosophy Scots found an emphasis upon genetic explanations and numerous references to history both real and conjectural. For the natural philosopher, science was progressive and cumulative. For Locke an "historical plain method" was best designed to show the origin, extent and certainty of human knowledge. For Locke and other natural lawyers, a quasihistorical exposition of the rights and obligations of

26. Stuart Piggott, "The Ancestors of Jonathan Oldbuck," in *Ruins in a Landscape* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 133-70; Emerson, "Natural Philosophy".

27. Nancy S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetorical and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton, 1970), especially pp. 193-9; George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Chicago, 1970); Ferguson, *An Essay*; David Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660-1730*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1951).

28. Hugh Ouston, "York in Edinburgh: James VII and the Patronage of Learning in Scotland, 1679-1688," in *New Perspectives on the Politics and Culture of Early Modern Scotland*, eds. John Dwyer, Roger A. Mason, Alexander Murdoch (Edinburgh, n.d. [1981]), pp. 133-55; *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds. R.H. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner (Edinburgh, 1982).

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men seemed a sensible way to proceed.²⁹ In religion there were fewer signs of novelty and less history but Scots, like Englishmen, were challenged by the appearance of deism which did have historical views to propound.

The wholly secular conjectural histories of mankind contained in deistical works postulated an original natural state of innocence from which men had been seduced by the schemes of the crafty, who, to satisfy their own selfish desires, played upon the emotions of their credulous neighbours. In doing so they had created religions and governments. The history of the world could be periodized in terms of the religious and political beliefs accepted at different times; these had still had their effects upon the world of the arts, sciences and commerce. Deistic histories did not stress the importance of economic forces.³⁰ They usually lacked a sense of progress, preferring to treat change either in declinist or cyclical terms with brief ages of relative enlightenment, freedom and prosperity followed by others of ignorance, credulity and superstition. The wise in every age were much alike; whatever progress there was belonged to them. The good ages usually turned out to be those in which rational religion, toleration and good morals went hand in hand with relative equality among the property-holding elite which formed republican governments. The Rome of Cato, the Dutch Republic and an England as it might be reformed by Independent Whigs stood in stark contrast to the Rome of Nero, Byzantium or the France of Louis XIV. Deistical history eliminated all special providences and saw the actions of men as resulting from mundane secondary causes, particularly to the interplay of passions among men who, if they chose, could shape a rational future for themselves. The deist did not regard ecclesiastical history as privileged but rather treated the history of the Jews and Christians as being on a par with that of the Persians or Celts. While deists sometimes noticed such impersonal social forces as population increases or the quantity of useful knowledge available to the majority of men, the real mechanisms of historical change remained psychological. No deist produced a long coherent conjectural history of mankind but their writings were full of conjectural historical scraps and materials which would later resurface in philosophical histories.

Along with the new philosophy, science, jurisprudence and religious controversy Scots found other scholarly developments which helped to shape their conjectural histories. The debate over the ancients and the moderns was in part a debate over the progress made by mankind, its inevitability and the reasons for it. The discussions about

29. These developments have been discussed by David Fate Norton in *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, 1982), chs. 1, 2, 4, and by Knud Haakonssen in an essay contained in Campbell and Skinner, eds., *Origins*, and another entitled "Natural Law and the Scottish Enlightenment," *Man and Nature/L'Homme et Nature*, Vol. IV, ed. David Jory (forthcoming).

30. See R.L. Emerson, "English Deism 1670-1755: An Enlightenment Challenge to Orthodoxy", Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University 1962, ch. IV: A Deist's World History, pp. 201-310. It is instructive to compare the conjectural histories of the Scots with Lord Bolingbroke's "Letters or Essays Addressed to Alexander Pope, Esq." contained in his *Philosophical Works* published by David Mallet (London, 1754). There is hardly a topic dealt with by them which he had not treated.

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the nature of man, best exemplified by the works of Hobbes and Shaftesbury, focused attention upon the roots of human sociability and the forms in which this might be manifest. To all these concerns travel accounts were relevant and increasingly used by the Scots.

During the eighteenth century Scots came to know a good deal about other peoples.³¹ Beginning as early as the 1670s trade, warfare, emigration, missionary activities and the changing intellectual outlook in Scotland promoted a growing familiarity with peoples of varying sophistication. The increase in the quantity of information available was paralleled by a change in its quality. More of it was now coming from Scots, while that produced abroad was also better. Before 1724 there had been no studies of American Indians which could match in thoroughness the one Lafitau published in that year. Scots began to read Lafitau, Cadwallader Colden, Charlevoix and older French and Spanish accounts just when they were becoming interested in the problems of cultural development and had accepted philosophical views which placed a premium on factual information. The new sources could be used to produce inductive generalizations about mankind in rude and barbarous ages but they also seemed to allow scholars direct access to periods of human history which had hitherto been obscure. The ways of thought and the day-to-day activities of primitive men seemed accessible as never before. Speculation could now move away from classical and biblical evidence. Relying upon data from the travel accounts one could create theories which embraced the experience of all nations or at least create a conjectural history model which might apply to most of them.

iv

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, history was growing in popularity throughout Europe, especially among the class of comfortable, well-born professional men from which the Scots philosophers were mostly recruited.³² An increasing number of histories and antiquarian works were being produced by men who often belonged to bodies created to pursue historical inquiry, bodies such as the Parisian Academy of Inscriptions or the Royal Society of Antiquarians in London. Antiquarian work, which may have declined in quantity and quality in England around 1730, showed no sign of doing so in continental Europe or Scotland. The popularity of history as a polite subject was shown by its teaching in colleges and universities. Increased opportunities for travel brought forth books on Rome and other places designed for those who wished to

31. R.L. Emerson, "American Indians, Frenchmen and Scots Philosophers," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, Vol. IX (1979), pp. 211-36.

32. The rationalistic philosophy and science of the seventeenth century produced antiquarian works and investigations such as those contained in Sir Robert Sibbald's numerous works on Scottish geography and antiquities. For accounts of these developments in England and France, see David Douglas, *English Scholars* (London, 1939); James Sutherland, *English Literature of the Late Seventeenth Century*, Oxford History of English Literature [hereafter *OHEL*], Vol. VI, (1969, rep. Oxford, 1976), pp. 271-88; Bonamy Dobrée, *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century: 1700-1740*, *OHEL*, Vol. VII (1959, rep. Oxford, 1976), pp. 377-88; Lionel Gossman, *Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, 1968), pp. 44-174 *passim*.

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appreciate antiquities in an historical context. Similar works catered to boys studying Latin.³³ These tended by the 1730s to include sections on manners, customs and thought as well as on politics, war and religion. All of these trends were present in Scotland.

Scottish interest in history and belles lettres is shown by attempts from the 1680s to the early 1700s to found historical chairs in the universities, where the demand for the subject was provided not only by candidates for the ministry but by polite gentlemen like Sir John Clerk of Penicuik. Between 1717 and 1753 secular history teaching came to all five universities³⁴ where library purchases seem also to have reflected this change in the curriculum. Moreover, history teaching had been integrated into many courses not specifically concerned with history such as logic, moral and natural philosophy, mathematics and medicine. The same period also saw a spate of antiquarian and historical works produced by men who wished to uphold the honour, independence, integrity and dignity of their people and kingdom in the face of denigration and threats from abroad. Antiquarian circles met informally in Edinburgh from about 1688 into the 1730s.³⁵ A scattering of library catalogues also remain to show that Scottish gentlemen were purchasing historical works and were interested in what European scholars were doing. Because of the importance of the history taught in the universities prior to 1750, we should examine this more carefully.

Prior to 1750 the history taught to Scottish university students was of four types: ecclesiastical history, which was biblically oriented and polemical in its purpose; a more or less secular world history course formally taught before 1750 only at Edinburgh; the histories of Greece and Rome; and conjectural histories of the rise and progress of various disciplines. The last two alone concern us here.

33. P. Laubriet, "*Les Guides de Voyages au début du XVIII^e siècle et la propagande philosophique*," *SV*, Vol. 32 (1965), pp. 269-326; R.D. Middleton, "The Abbé de Cordemoy and the Graeco-Gothic Ideal," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 25, pp. 278-320, and Vol. 26, pp. 90-123; Basil Kennet, *Romae Antiquae Notitia: or the Antiquities of Rome* (London, 1696, 15th edition, 1776). The preface lists other guides and histories commonly used in England. Lois Whitney's *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1934) can still be read with profit by those interested in the degree to which the Scots philosophers were addressing topics of great interest to eighteenth-century British readers.

34. D.B. Horn, "The University of Edinburgh and the Teaching of History," *University of Edinburgh Journal*, Vol. 17 (1953-1954), p. 161; see also the essay by R.G. Cant in Campbell and Skinner, eds., *Origins*, p. 48 and R.L. Emerson, "Scottish Universities in the Eighteenth Century, 1690-1800," *SV* Vol. CLXVII (1977), pp. 453-74; Sir John Clerk, *Memoirs*, Scottish History Society, 1st series, ed. John M. Gray (Edinburgh, 1892), pp. 15-6.

35. David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture* (London, 1964), pp. 12-28; Douglas Duncan, *Thomas Ruddiman: A Study in Scottish Scholarship of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 41-71; Ian S. Ross and Stephen Scobie, "Patriotic Publishing as a Response to the Union," in *The Union of 1707*, ed. T.I. Rae (Glasgow, 1974), pp. 94-119; L.W. Sharp, ed., *Early Letters of Robert Wodrow*, Scottish History Society, 3rd series, Vol. XXIV (Edinburgh, 1937), p. 262; William Smellie, *Account of the Institution and Progress of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1782), p. 12.

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During the first half of the eighteenth century, Scottish university professors of Latin and Greek began to add to their course lectures on the histories of the classical societies whose language and literature they taught.³⁶ This made their courses both more useful and attractive to polite gentlemen, many of whom would travel abroad or qualify as civil lawyers. The change was imitative of patterns of instruction in France and Holland. Two things distinguished these ancient history lectures: an attention to the component parts of a culture seen as reflecting an underlying set of national characteristics and a concern to relate their concomitant development over time. Scottish students in both lectures and recommended readings were led to see classical cultures at least in somewhat holistic terms.³⁷ Such an approach to ancient history had been commonly adopted by members of the French Academy of Inscriptions and it helped to structure the accounts of North American Indians produced by Lafitau (1724) and Charlevoix (1744).³⁸ It was not a great step from this method of presentation to the working-out of the mutual and reciprocal relations obtaining among these cultural components and between them and the climatic and geographic setting of the society in question. Between 1721 and 1748 this was a step taken by Montesquieu.

Scottish classicists also sought to trace Greek and Roman history from beginning to end. In doing this they tended to see the history of Greece as paradigmatic of the histories of other peoples. As a Glasgow professor of Greek told his class in 1751, the history of Greece was a model for that of Rome; both shed light upon the development of Western societies and teach lessons which must be learned in decline in European and Scottish society was to be avoided.³⁹ The analogies between ancient and modern civilizations were instructive and wide-ranging but the history containing them had in its earliest sections to be conjectural. The most interesting conjectures about Greek history came from Thomas Blackwell Jr., a regent and later principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen.

Blackwell is best known today for his *Enquiry into the Life and Writing of Homer* (1735), a work which should be read in conjunction with his *Letters Concerning Mythology* (1748) which is in part a commentary upon it. His work on Homer grew out of

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36. Roman history and geography may have been taught earlier than this but the one detailed description of a Latin course dating from the early eighteenth century does not mention history classes although students did get some formal instruction in geography. See, Andrew Ross "The Method in which Humanity is taught in the University of Glasgow," Glasgow University Library ms. gen. 357. D.B. Horn's manuscript history of Edinburgh University seems to make John Ker the originator of "Humanity and Roman Antiquities" at Edinburgh. If this is the case, Ker had probably introduced a similar course at Aberdeen's King's College before coming to Edinburgh in 1734. D.B. Horn Papers, EUL ms. gen. 1824, Box 2, "The Chair of Humanity".
37. Examples of such treatments of classical cultures can be found in Charles Rollin's *The Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians...* (1st French edition, Paris 1731), a work recommended to Scottish students. Gossman, *Mediaevalism*, pp. 109-14.
38. Joseph Francois Lafitau, *Customs; also Moeurs des Sauvages américains, comparées aux moeurs des premier temps* (Paris, 1724); Paul François-Xavier de Charlevoix, *Histoire et Description générale de la Nouvelle France* (Paris, 1744).
39. James Moore, untitled and fragmentary lecture notes, National Library of Scotland, Advocates' ms. 23.6.18. The notes belong probably to 1751 or 1752.

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a literary discussion of the reasons why “no Body has equalled Homer in Epic for now 2700 years & None, that we know off surpassed him ever before.”⁴⁰ It was this “Poetical Problem” which he sought to resolve. The context from which it came is a polite literary one having nothing to do with Scotland or its economy. Blackwell’s motives for writing his conjectural history of prehistoric Greece relate to his literary studies, to the promotion of polite letters in Scotland and to the improvement of university education in his college. He seems to have read parts of his *Enquiry* in the history course which he gave.⁴¹

Blackwell’s *Enquiry* and *Letters* sought not only to study the manners, arts, politics, religion and language of the Greeks but also to show that they “are all linked together, and necessarily influence one another.”⁴² Each developed in relation to the others and each reflected the earlier conditions which had formed it. The study of one set of institutions, therefore, allowed a person to make well-founded conjectures about the rest and to draw inferences about earlier periods. The earliest Greek writings, such as the works of Homer and other Greek poets, contained even earlier myths, traditions and beliefs. These constituted for Blackwell sources for the study of a period hitherto hidden and inaccessible. The inferences which Blackwell drew about the origins and progress of Greek society did not lead him to state a general theory of inevitable social progress but they did allow him to associate economic and other changes as had Lucretius, his principal source for the conjectures he made. Blackwell’s Greeks emerge from the unknown, fabulous and wild periods to the historical one glimpsed first in mythology and then in the Homeric epics. Homer’s world contained societies still barbarous, poor and violent, others becoming civilized and some almost polished. Reading the epics with care, Blackwell thought he could reconstruct the earlier and transitional stages of these societies.⁴³

[The early Greeks] had no constant nor fixed Possessions; but there were frequent Removes, one Nation or Tribe expelling another, and possessing themselves of their Seats....there being no Traffic among them, or secure intercourse, they had but the bare Necessaries of Life: They planted no Lands [i.e. colonies], acquired no Superfluities and built only Shelters from the Weather.⁴⁴

Piracy not trade was honoured and wealth was synonymous with plunder.⁴⁵ This state of violent disorder ended when it became unendurable and men saw alternatives to it:

40. Scottish Record Office [hereafter SRO], ms. GD 18/5036/18, Clerk of Penicuik Manuscripts, Thomas Blackwell to Sir John Clerk, 31 May 1732, The literary discussion probably took place in London.

41. *Ibid.*, Thomas Blackwell to Sir John Clerk, 7 December 1729, SRO ms. GD18/5036/5.

42. Thomas Blackwell, *An Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (London, 1735, rep. New York, 1970) pp. 14, 36, 44 and 54.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 23. Blackwell’s *Letters* refers to many of the “ancient Cosmogonies” which, he noted, “proceed to the History of the first Ages, interweave the Inventions of Arts, and as it were account for the present Face the World Wears.” See *Letters*, pp. 350-62.

44. *Enquiry*, p. 15.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

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But as every Misfortune forces Men to think of a Remedy, the Calamities, to which this barbarous Way of Living was exposed, taught the *Greeks*, in process of time, the Necessity of Walling their Towns; which, in turn, produced *Subordination*; the less powerful being contented with the Protection of the Rich and Brave; and these, on the other hand, glad of Numbers for carrying on their Affairs.⁴⁶

The remedies for disorder produced unintended consequences. In city walls and riches lay the origins of ranks. Institutions, while they may be created by men, had in Blackwell's work a sort of life of their own which produced restraints upon actions, modified calculations and stimulated new ones. Blackwell's world, unlike that of the deists, is one in which societal facts are important.⁴⁷ The development of language and manners were given careful consideration and were shown to change in relation to other components of the culture. Changes in language, such as those effected by the Homeric poems which defined good usage, had an effect upon manners and even religion. What Homer wrote to amuse and instruct his audience also had unintended consequences. Blackwell did not stress this or treat it abstractly but he recognized it, just as he recognized an economic or political-economic order of causation. Government, wealth, city life and warfare evolved together and life became increasingly more complex and sophisticated:

from these hard beginnings and jarring Interests the Greeks became early Masters of the *military* Art, and by degrees, of all others that tend to enrich or adorn a City, and raise a Commonwealth: shipping and commerce, a domestick Order and Foreign Influence, with every subservient Art of Policy and Government, were invented or improved; and some of them brought to a very great degree of perfection.⁴⁸

When this stage was reached we, like Homer, view "Cities blessed with Peace, spirited by Liberty, flourishing in Trade, and increasing in Wealth."⁴⁹

The history of Greece, as Blackwell depicted it, was one in which each age had its ethos and unique characteristics. The Homeric epics could have been produced only in the age in which they were written. That was the reason why Homer had no earlier rivals and no later equals.⁵⁰ Similarly, myths created in one time were corrupted in another through the "*Stupidity and Superstition* of the blind and credulous Vulgar."⁵¹ Despite

46. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

47. For a definition of this term see Maurice Mandelbaum, "Societal Facts," *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. VI (1955), reprinted in Patrick Gardiner, ed. *Theories of History* (Glencoe, 1959), pp. 476-88.

48. Blackwell, *Letters*, p. 22.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-2, 334-5; *Letters Concerning Mythology* (1748, reprinted New York, 1976), pp. 36-7. This problem also interested John Miller; see Lehmann, *John Millar*, p. 389.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 176. Blackwell as a mythographer believed that myths embodied truths about both nature and men. These, misunderstood, had corrupted religion among "all Mankind except the Jews" as he noted parenthetically (*ibid.*, p. 363). Biblical history remained privileged and beyond the range of "*the Rise of the Arts and Progress of Languages and Learning*" which his books traced (*ibid.*, p. 4.)

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this view, Blackwell also thought, as did some deists, that “among the Heathen Nations” there was a fixed pattern of religious change which involved a flux and reflux of monotheism and polytheism. The pattern did not seem to have been an inevitable one; this professor’s somewhat Calvinist world was paradoxically still one of contingent events.⁵² To a remarkable degree he had worked out by 1732 a conjectural history in which ideas associated with later thinkers were already present.⁵³

The conjectural histories of other university professors are also interesting. For a public-spirited surgeon like Alexander Monro, the Edinburgh professor of anatomy from 1720-64, an historical preface allowed him to appear as a polite man of letters capable of writing a polished literary essay. For a surgeon who lectured in English, this was a status-enhancing activity which showed his wide reading in classical authors and more modern sources. Monro’s history of anatomy (it began on the sacrificial altars of pagan priests) showed the subject to be progressive.⁵⁴ Over time men accumulated and compared ideas just as they developed proper methods and attended to the facts of nature. This easily translated into a general demonstration of the progress of science during times when observations, experiments, clinical work and dissections were not curbed and when they were guided by the most up-to-date and probable scientific theories — in Monro’s mind the natural philosophy of Newton and the physiology and chemistry of Stephan Hales. His sketch on the history of anatomy thus vindicated philosophical empiricism as the only philosophy which led to real progress. Monro used his historical preface not to teach morals but methods, and to inculcate by example attitudes about his subject which he thought important. Among these was the notion that he and his students were placed in a great tradition which had been glorious when societies had been free and flourishing, but decadent during periods of authoritarianism, intolerance, credulity, and civil turmoil. The history of anatomy reflected the vicissitudes of culture generally but these were primarily related to changes in politics and religion.

Similar views about the progress of science and its relation to the general culture in which it is pursued can be found in the lectures of Monro’s colleagues and friends such as

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 363-411.

53. SRO, ms. GD18/5036/21, Thomas Blackwell to Sir John Clerk, 16 September 1732.

54. Students’ notes of Monro’s lectures are fairly numerous. The set used here seems to have been taken around 1740 and is at Edinburgh University Library, Ms. DK. 6.24. There is little difference between it and others which can be dated. Monro was only following the practise of continental medical professors, such as Boerhaave with whom he and many other Scots studied; see G.A. Lindeboom, *Herman Boerhaave: The Man and His Work* (London, 1968), pp. 68-9. The earliest Edinburgh medical lectures to include historical materials seem to have been those of the botanist George Preston who taught somewhat sporadically between 1712 and 1738. Horn Papers EUL ms. gen. 1824 Box 2, “The Chair of Botany.”

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Colin MacLaurin, Robert Simson and James Stirling of Keir.⁵⁵ If sciences and mathematics had their conjectural histories, so too did painting and the fine arts.

In 1740, George Turnbull, an admirer of Shaftesbury and a former Marischal College regent, published a work which argued that the arts, like the sciences, progressed in relation to other elements in a culture and flourished under the same conditions.⁵⁶ His *A Treatise on Ancient Painting containing Observations on the Rise, Progress and Decline of that Art amongst the Greeks and Romans* (1740) tried to show that art relied upon a study and imitation of nature analogous to that pursued by natural philosophers. Artists and philosophers both sought "nothing else but the knowledge of the general Analogies and Harmonies which take place in Nature, to which particular Appearances are reducible."⁵⁷ The arts and natural philosophy were logically and ontologically connected: "All the Sciences must be one, or very strictly connected and allied because Nature, their Object is one."⁵⁸ The beginnings of philosophy and art were, therefore, coeval since painting arose "in the most ancient times to preserve the Memory of Facts, and likewise to represent religious and philosophical Opinions."⁵⁹ Philosophy and art had always developed under the stimulus of emulation, the cultivation of public good taste and support and during "Ages in which all the other Parts of useful and polite Learning were greatly promoted and encouraged, and accordingly made very eminent Advances."⁶⁰

Turnbull was particularly interested in the similar origins and patterns of development shown by Greek, Roman and modern painting. He related these to political changes, to advances in the technical and practical arts and to national character and to the times:

They will all partake of the same prevailing Temperature or Taste. The general or national Character of a People may be conjectured from the State of the Arts amongst

55. "A Treatise of Algebra in three Parts by Mr. Colin MacLaurin MP in the University of Edinburgh", EUL ms. gen. 75D, p. 2. This set of notes probably dates from 1744-45. MacLaurin's own published version of this work contains no historical section. Book I, Chapter II of MacLaurin's *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries* (1748) contains the sort of historical background material provided Scottish students in natural philosophy courses. Among Stirling's papers still at Garden House, Buckleyvie, Stirlingshire are about twenty manuscript volumes of varying size dealing with these topics. I wish to thank their present owner, James Stirling, Esq., for allowing me to see these papers. Simson was known for his historical reconstruction of the work of Greek geometers.

56. The great eighteenth century source of this view was Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, Treatise III, "Advise to an author," Part II.

57. George Turnbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting* (1740, ed. Vincent M. Bevilacqua, Munich, 1971), p. 131. For further information on Turnbull, see David Fate Norton, "George Turnbull and the Furniture of the Mind," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXXV (1975), pp. 701-16 and Norton, *David Hume*, pp. 152-74.

58. *Treatise*, p. 179.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 47-8.

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them: and reciprocally, the State of the Arts amongst any People may be pretty certainly divined from the general prevalent Temper and Humour of that People, as it discovers itself by other Symptoms in their Government, Laws, Language, Manners, & c.⁶¹

Turnbull found it possible to periodize the progress of painting in a way which would not have seemed peculiar to Heinrich Wolfflin writing nearly two centuries later.

Hogarth found no merit to this book which in “Beer Street” was consigned with other useless works to the trunkmaker. But, Turnbull was right when he wrote that the set of topics he considered constituted a “Phenomenon which...seemed to me to deserve a Philosopher’s Attention.”⁶² His interest in these, like Blackwell’s interest in Homer, was rooted in concerns to improve polite education and to join in what he saw as an international effort to understand ancient art, particularly painting. It had no obvious connections with his perceptions of economic life in Scotland but it has a great deal to do with the extension of the views of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and various learned abbés belonging to the Paris Academy of Inscriptions.

Many other university lecturers are known to have included conjectural historical materials in their courses. Notes of the lectures with which George Fordyce prefaced his Marischal College philosophy prelections still exist at Aberdeen University and are worthy of mention because he used them to instill a suspicion of systems. Fordyce’s conjectural history was short and he was clearly happy “to proceed to Greece, that favourite Country, where Arts and Sciences made quickest Progress, & arrived at their great perfection”⁶³ — and, we might add, where documented history begins. In 1742-43 Fordyce considered it important to tell his students that philosophy or abstract thought was possible only in societies enjoying some “Ease & Security.” The arts and sciences must therefore follow upon the introduction of government whose quality always influences their course. He too used his sketch of the earliest times to show that only observation and attention to experience allow for intellectual progress, one of the obstacles to which he saw as men’s willingness to form systems “without regard to fact or nature...to which they afterwards reduce all appearances.”⁶⁴ Systems exist to be overthrown.

v

By 1750 most of the materials, problems and ideas which were of central importance in the conjectural histories of Kanes, Hume, Blair, Smith, Robertson, Millar and others had been touched upon or suggested in the conjectural histories of the professors. They lay at hand ready to be reworked by men whose education and outlook allowed them to rethink

61. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 48, n. 117.

63. Aberdeen University Library ms. M. 184, George Fordyce, “A Brief Account of the Nature, Progress, and Origins of Philosophy delivered by the late Mr. David Fordyce P.P....1743-4,” Paragraph 10.

64. *Ibid.*, para. 7-9.

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and reorganize these materials in ways already adumbrated by numerous thinkers as old as Lucretius or as contemporary as Montesquieu. In general, the great generation of Scottish thinkers (fl. 1746-1776) gave a more sophisticated, detailed and elaborate expression to ideas which were already in the air. In doing so they did not become historical materialists or economic determinists but remained committed to the complex analyses of political and social change sketched in the works of Blackwell or Turnbull. Like these men, they continued to draw upon works of European scholarship and believed themselves to be engaged in dealing with problems of a learned world not specifically Scottish. In so far as they attended to Scottish conditions, they saw them in the same way as had their predecessors. Scotland had to be generally improved. The improvements of arts, letters and philosophy counted for as much as the economic and social changes which they were bound to effect. The Scottish literati lived in a very complex society which they sought to change, but their motives to change this, like their motives to study it, were as much rooted in their scholarly and patriotic concerns as they were in social and economic perceptions or in their personal circumstances.

vi

No one would deny that the new understanding of man and his changing world produced by Scots between about 1730 and 1790 was naturalistic, secular, dynamic and increasingly political-economic in outlook. It does not, however, constitute a view best understood from a Marxist perspective. The Scots did not root their speculations in an historical materialism which gave an undue role and importance to economic change. The four-stage theory was not new with them nor did it lack a contingent element which put progress in doubt if it were to be construed as implying necessary improvement and constant moral betterment over time.

Scottish conjectural histories, like those of other Europeans, were rooted in aesthetic, scholarly, literary and philosophical contexts which were often very old. The Scots were no doubt aware of the rapid changes within their society but it is not clear that their perceptions of these made them either economic determinists or historical materialists. By about 1700 many thinking and articulate Scots had come to feel a generalized sense of shame because of the backwardness of their kingdom. Their patriotic urge to improve was indeed important to the conjectural historians but it did not make of them economic determinists but men committed to complex and usually idealistic theories of social change. They believed that changing standards of taste and improvements in education would have an effect upon their economy, but the need to upgrade both taste and education was rooted in other than economic desiderata and values. Similarly, they were not historical materialists because they argued that religion and taste might, like some sciences, develop independently according to patterns of their own. Economic conditions could influence this process — indeed, they might constitute necessary conditions for some developments — but they could not provide sufficient conditions for understanding and explaining such things as the history of taste, science or religion. Genius, enthusiasm, a dialectic of ideas appropriate to a science like mathematics, or an institution such as language, or a particular confluence or conjuncture of causes might also be necessary to explain their rise and progress. The Scots' conscious and uncon-

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scious motives to study and change their heterogeneous society are more plausibly found in their scholarly and patriotic concerns than in their perceptions of economic and social life.

The Scottish conjectural historians have been rather selectively read by their commentators. The Scots sometimes wrote as if they were economic determinists or historical materialists⁶⁵ but in other places they did not argue in this fashion and it is difficult to see how they could have done so given the other beliefs they are known to have maintained with sincerity. None of them were unwilling to see the material culture of an age influenced by the tastes, philosophy, religious beliefs or political ideals which it inherited or which men of genius produced. They were still closer in outlook to Lucretius, Vives or Bacon than to Marx. Moreover, within their works can be found reasons for trying to understand social change which are at variance with the motives attributed to them by historians like Ronald Meek or Lord Dacre. These views could be supported by an analysis of the works of any of the Scottish conjectural historians. Because Hume and Smith are commonly accessible, frequently studied and seem more than other writers to have influenced subsequent thinkers, what follows will deal only with their work.

vii

Hume's conjectural histories appear most impressively in the various essays which he wrote between the 1740s and the mid-1760s. They deal with a wide variety of topics which are nowhere systematically related and developed in a coherent and integrated fashion, a fact often overlooked. If we began with *The Natural History of Religion*

65. Andrew Skinner has quoted the following passage from William Robertson's *History of America* as an example of the Scots commitment to economic determinism: "In every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence. According as that varies, their laws and policy must be different." It is a sufficient refutation of that view to point out that *first* does not mean *only*. Doubtless men do legislate and formulate policies about the things they do to secure a living. Robertson well knew and said that men also legislate and form policies about many other things. His account of feudalism, for example, is one in which political and security needs and the ideas and manners of "barbarians" helped to change conceptions of property. The unintended consequences of these changes included some which were economic. Moreover, when Robertson dealt with more polished societies noneconomic causes became more prominent. The Crusades exhibited an "extraordinary frenzy of the human mind" resulting in part from superstition and "the zeal of fanatical work: Chiliastic expectations, the custom of going on pilgrimages, religious economic and political privileges granted to crusaders, fear and hatred of the Turks" — all produced an "enthusiastic rapture." The Crusades themselves had unintended consequences "both on the state of property, and of civil government." Andrew Skinner, "Natural History," p. 172; William Robertson, *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (Edinburgh, 1769), Sections I and II, n. 5,6,8. See also H.M. Höpfl, "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment," *Journal of British Studies*, No. 17 (1978), pp. 19-41, esp. p. 36.

(1757)⁶⁶ we would find that the earliest barbarous ages were polytheistic because “a barbarous, necessitous animal (such as man is on the first origin of society), pressed by such numerous wants and passions, has no leisure to admire the regular face of nature, or make enquiries concerning the course of those objects, to which from his infancy he had been gradually accustomed.”⁶⁷ Leisure came with economic developments such as the specialization of labour and the rise of the arts and commerce. But religious ideas followed a dialectical development of their own and were not bound to the stages of economic life. The first “obscure traces of divinity” were to be found in the “agitated hopes and fears” with which trembling men “examine the various contrary events of human life.”⁶⁸ Projecting their own natures upon things in the natural world, they produced an animistic universe which was elaborated by poets, artists, politicians, priests and ordinary men into systems of idolatry and superstition. Only later did these receive the critique of philosophy and evolve toward monotheism. But then the inability of enthusiastic men to think always in abstract and dispassionate terms meant that there would be a “flux and reflux in the human mind” between polytheism and theism.⁶⁹ While this was a statement about the learned and the vulgar in all polite societies, it was also a statement about the societies in which men live and about the quality of life within them. Religiously benighted societies, such as modern Rome and Madrid, were no better than fifteenth century Mexico⁷⁰ or ancient Carthage, although the material conditions of life within them were very different. One could only conclude that religious beliefs and institutions were at least somewhat independent of social and economic determinants. For Hume in 1757 neither historical materialism nor economic determinism was an acceptable position. Moreover, because religious change was not related to a stadial view of the economic progress of mankind, there was no necessary progress, only contingent developments.

If one looks at Hume’s accounts of another institution, property, one finds not the primacy of economic forces but of political ones. In the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) he tells us that “property is nothing but those goods, whose constant possession is established by the laws of society; that is by the laws of justice.”⁷¹ Law and political conventions were antecedent to property and rooted not only in a desire to protect “the enjoyment of such possessions as we have acquired by our industry and good fortune”

66. We should perhaps remember that Hume had been attacked for infidelity in the General Assemblies in 1755 and 1756. His interest in enthusiasm and the conditions of toleration was very personal.

67. H.E. Root, ed., *The Natural History of Religion* (London, 1956), p. 24.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-51. Hume’s theory is a much more sophisticated version of that given by Blackwell who saw the need to connect “the Changes in Religion, with the Changes in Government and Manners.” Indeed, Blackwell criticized his (and Hume’s unnoted) source, John-Gerard Vossius, for not making such connections in *Of the Origin and Progress of Idolatry* (1641); Blackwell, *Letters*, p. 364. For an analysis of the scholarly context of the works of Vossius, Blackwell and Hume, see Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, 1959).

70. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

71. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (1888, rep. 1955), p. 491.

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but also in two other goods, “internal satisfaction of our minds and the external advantages of our body.”⁷² These were defined not only by “the original frame of our mind” but by the artifices of reason amongst which are the rules of social life tacitly assented to and grounded in utility. Languages no less than “common measures of exchange” and laws were included in the set of social rules of a conventional or artificial sort. The primary motive for establishing these rules was convenience and the security of our various goods. However, the process by which this was done was so gradual and shifting, and the definition of property such a long continuous affair, that the stages of society were no more than analytic fictions, fictions which refer to political as well as economic considerations.

In 1752 in the essay “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences” Hume stated that the progress of the arts depended much upon chance manifestations of genius but that leisure and “the blessing of a free government” were also essential.⁷³ Leisure had an economic determinant but it was not clear that “free government” was any more the necessary characteristic of a stage of human development than was tolerant monotheism. Hume’s conjectural historical sketches contained accounts of social forces working casually over time but his historical world lacked inevitable progressions and was moved as much by noneconomic forces like religion or genius as it was by changes in technology, property, population levels or the specialization of labour. In the same essay, Hume tells us that external environmental factors such as one’s neighbouring states were also important. He concluded by saying that the coincidence of conditions which produce a period of national greatness was rare and not likely to last.⁷⁴ This was surely a comment provoked by his perception of the conjunctures which produced eighteenth century Scottish society. Its enlightenment was promoted by political and economic forces but it also depended upon manners, “noble emulation” and a confluence of other moral causes. To understand these or the roles played by geniuses or enthusiasts, one needed to be something more than an historical materialist.

Hume’s view of his own time is best set out in the essay entitled “Of Refinement in the Arts” (1752). There he sought to show that ages of refinement were “the happiest and most virtuous” and remained so as long as luxury did not lead to indolence and the avoidance of one’s duty or preclude generosity and public spirit.⁷⁵ He argued that ages of refinement were ones of freedom. Those who lived in them cultivated a way of life which offered the means of satisfying the needs of most people living in it. He tells us “education, custom, and example, have a mighty influence in turning the mind to any of these pursuits; and it must be owned that where they promote a relish for action and pleasure, they are so favourable to human happiness.”⁷⁶ Industry, “refinements in the

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 487, 488-90 and 490.

73. John W. Lenz, ed., *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), pp. 74-5.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

76. *Ibid.*, These qualities in Scotland had given “a share of the same spirit and genius” which promotes the arts and sciences to “the people among whom they arise.” *Ibid.*, p. 74.

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mechanical arts,” and progress in the fine and liberal ones were all connected during such periods which owed something to the “turning of the mind” which Scotland experienced between roughly 1680 and 1730.

The same age which produces great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets, usually abounds with skillful weavers and ship-carpenters. We cannot reasonably expect, that a piece of woollen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation which is ignorant of astronomy, or where ethics are neglected. The spirit of the age affects all the arts, and the minds of men being once roused from their lethargy, and put in fermentation, turn themselves into every art and science. Profound ignorance is totally banished, and men enjoy the privilege of rational creatures, to think as well as to act, to cultivate the pleasures of the mind as well as those of the body.⁷⁷

This is not a bad picture of Scottish development in the eighteenth century with its stresses upon education and the mutual relation of all the arts and sciences to economic development, to genius and to public spirit. Since the latter are independent of the material conditions of life, though not of political ones, Hume's views cannot be assimilated to those of the historical materialist. The paragraph which follows this quotation reflects even better the quality of Edinburgh life as it was perceived by Hume and his friends. Too long to quote, it is admirably summarized in its last sentence: “Thus *industry, knowledge, and humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience as well as reason, to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the most luxurious ages.”⁷⁸ To understand and to further this development in all its complexity had been his object. His conjectural histories and those of his contemporaries were identical in spirit and purpose, however different in sophistication. The “spirit of the age” to which he refers is in this case a synonym for a spirit of general improvement. In the works of Smith, this and the conditions which allowed for it were studied with greater care and with an emphasis not only upon economics but also upon those aesthetic characteristics of systems which can give the mind repose.

All eighteenth century scholars had some acquaintance with Smith's major works, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1757) and the *Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776); fewer seemed to have read his histories of astronomy, ancient physics, logic and metaphysics. These should not be neglected, particularly the first.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1. Hume goes on to say that the causal lines do not run in one direction only: “This industry is much promoted by the knowledge inseparable from ages of art and refinement; as, on the other hand, this knowledge enables the public to make the best advantage of the industry of its subjects.” *Ibid.*, p. 52.

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The *History of Astronomy*⁷⁹ is a conjectural history which refers only incidentally to social and economic matters. It stressed instead quite different causal factors in the evolution of ideas, ones which here bear no clear relation to a history of man in four stages. In this work Smith traced the effects which curiosity, wonder, surprise and admiration had upon men much as he traced the social consequences of sympathy and self-interest in his greater and longer works. For him, as for Hume, the savage was a fearful creature “whose subsistence is precarious, whose life is every day exposed to the rudest dangers.”⁸⁰ He had little time or inducement to contemplate either the beauty or regularity of nature. Superstitious belief “supplied the place of philosophy” in the barbarous world and only began to be uprooted when “law has established order and security, and subsistence ceases to be precarious.” Then curiosity born of leisure made men “more attentive to the appearance of nature.”⁸¹ As with Lucretius and Hume it was a political change which made a difference. The introduction of property led not only to social inequality but allowed the emergence of men “of liberal fortune” who became the first philosophers free to indulge their curiosity and wonder in a disinterested manner. In time this indulgence gave rise to philosophic or scientific systems whose purpose was to “connect together in the fancy those different movements and effects which are already in reality performed.”⁸² War, too great a veneration of authority, too little attention to discrepant facts and a sectarian spirit amongst thinkers — all affected the longevity and dissemination of systems which finally ceased to be viable when their inaccuracies became apparent and they were found “too perplexed and intricate for the imagination to rest in [them], with complete tranquillity and satisfaction.”⁸³ When the paradigm could no longer guide normal science, when anomalies were too great and numerous to be corrected, some philosophers sought to destroy it and to replace it with a new “machine” which was recommended to the imagination by its “beauty and simplicity” and by its novelty.⁸⁴ Opposed by adherents of the old system for good and bad reasons, the new machine triumphed only when the conceptual schema of science and philosophy had been radically altered. Then a new normal science was created, once again eliminating wonder and allowing the imagination and tranquility which it sought to find in the regularity of nature.⁸⁵ As it was confirmed by observation and verified by experiment,

79. Smith referred to this work in 1773 “as a fragment of an intended juvenile work” noting that “I begin to suspect myself that there is more refinement than solidity in some parts of it.” He was nevertheless not unwilling to have it published after his death as it was, in 1795, by his executors, Joseph Black and James Hutton, in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (1795, rep. New York, 1971); see p. cxv. One should notice that this essay is not really about astronomy but about *The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophers’ Inquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy*. It is an essay about the history of philosophy or correct methods of thinking clearly and critically. It may well have come from Smith’s classroom.

80. Adam Smith, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, general eds. D.D. Raphael and A.S. Skinner; Vol. III, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, eds. W.P.D. Wightman and J.C. Bryce (Oxford, 1980), p. 48.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

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the latest system came to seem not an imaginative construct but a real explanation of the way things are.⁸⁶

Smith's rather Kuhnian account of the history of astronomy is a most remarkable example of a conjectural history because it sets out as the real determinants of scientific or natural philosophical progress, curiosity, and those things which delighted and satisfied the imagination: novelty, beauty, simplicity, elegance, coherence and the utility which came from accurate predictions. There is not a word here about the relation of astronomy to navigation and commerce, to religion, to the black arts or to politics. Smith's political economy was the product of selfish interests and prudential, rational calculations. The sciences in this scheme of things had an inner dynamic which drove them on regardless of other developments. The work which Smith destroyed just prior to his death was presumably one in which his various conjectural histories would have been brought together and related to one another in a coherent and systematic theory of social development. In that he would have had to draw connections between the development of science and social evolution, but it is difficult to see how he could have made the progress of astronomy wholly dependent upon economic forces or integrated it into a system which assumed historical materialism to be true. A similar problem would have confronted him in dealing with the origin of language.

In his "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages," Smith again developed his theory of language without references to economic stages. The actions of the mind in the shaping of languages obeyed an order of causation all their own. The somewhat later *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1762-3) did not alter this position in any fundamental way. There Smith argued that associations of ideas, abstraction, the cultural contacts between primitive peoples and preferences for "melodious sound" were the causally important forces shaping the evolution of languages from the time in which they emerged as small sets of substantives and words denoting relations between them to the period in which complex rules could be abstracted by grammarians from common usage.⁸⁷ While the existence of grammarians presupposed a complex society and economies characterized both by a leisured class and the specialization of labour, neither seems to have been stressed by Smith. The need for clarity and the expression of sentiment, which was communicated by sympathy,⁸⁸ remained the shaping forces determinative of literary forms and styles. For Smith, the history of language

86. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

87. Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. John M. Lothian (London, 1963), pp. 7-28. For commentaries on these topics as treated by other Scots, see Christopher Berry, "Eighteenth-Century Approaches to the Origin of Metaphor," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, Vol. 4 (1973), pp. 690-713; "Adam Smith's Considerations on Language," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXXV (1974), pp. 130-8; Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 441-691.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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found its causal explanatory principles outside the sphere of political-economic concerns.⁸⁹

Smith's motivation to study the process of historical change and improvement probably did not originate in economic perceptions but in his concerns with polite letters and their furtherance which was so pronounced a feature of eighteenth century Scottish intellectual life. The promotion of literature improved society and social changes were reflected in the fine arts. To improve both society and letters had been the aim of Scottish patriots ashamed of their kingdom's backwardness.⁹⁰ It is instructive to look at what Smith had to say about patriotism and improvement. These he specifically associated in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, arguing that the utility of improvements possessed a sort of beauty, that schemes of improvement "please us, and we are interested in whatever can tend to advance them."⁹¹ The patriot who put them forward may have mixed motives for doing so — some selfish and some other-regarding and altruistic — but his projects, whether they be economic or political policies and reforms or "political

89. Andrew Skinner has argued that Smith had an economic interpretation of history in which the economic factor "finally asserts itself as the ultimate, rather than as the sole, determining factor." Skinner's argument does not show how this dictum applies to language, religion, astronomy or philosophy. I suspect it cannot be shown to do so. Moreover, it requires one to believe that self-interest, the human characteristic in which economic developments are rooted, is always a paramount consideration. To deny that principle had been one of the great concerns of Scottish moral philosophy and of Adam Smith as a moral theorist. If the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is to remain a serious consideration in assessing Smith's work and his intentions, Skinner's view of his conjectural histories cannot be maintained since it denies any ultimate significance to our unselfish characteristics. To say that they are important but not ultimately so makes little sense whether he says it or quotes Engels. The "production and reproduction of real life," as Smith knew, involved the languages in which men conceived of it, the moral distinctions which they sought to affirm within it and the laws they imposed upon it for a host of reasons other than economic ones. Engels' question-begging statement is not helpful. All of the Scots distinguished sharply between that period when they assumed men had no leisure and later times when some could and did think about things other than subsistence. Skinner, "Natural History," p. 175.

90. For Smith and his friends, historical inquiry and writing were useful and important practical activities designed to instruct not merely to entertain. "[History] sets before us the most interesting and important events of human life, points out the causes by which these events were brought about, and by this means points out to us by what manner and method we may produce similar good effects or avoid similar bad ones" (*Lectures*, v., p. 85). As Smith's friend Hugh Blair wrote, at its most useful it will attend to "laws, customs, commerce, religion, literature, and every other thing that tends to show the spirit and genius of nations... whatever displays the state and life of mankind in different periods, and illustrates the progress of the human mind..." (Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [1783, rep. London, 1841], p. 496). The understanding of the principles of historical causation implied not the primacy of political-economic explanations but a scheme of general progress and improvement or change in every area of life. Political economy is but one discipline supplying explanatory principles and for Blair, who praised Voltaire as the greatest modern historian, it could not have been the most important.

91. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1853, rep. New Rochelle, 1969), p. 265.

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disquisitions,” were “noble and magnificent objects.”⁹² They “animate the public passions of men and rouse them to seek out the means of promoting the happiness of the society.”⁹³ This was precisely what Smith did as a patriotic Scottish man of letters and as a clubman in the various literary and improving societies which he and his friends founded. To promote the practical and fine arts, to argue for a Scottish militia, to refine manners or to improve the Scottish economy were all aspects of a single programme rooted in a sense of Scottish deficiencies and a patriotic urge to overcome them.

To relate the perceptions of these Scots primarily to social and economic changes is to misrepresent radically the interests which they displayed and the activities and theories which were so important to them. The real relation which their philosophy bears to that of Marx is to be found in the commonly held Enlightenment belief that the purpose of philosophy was as much to change the world as to understand it. Their conjectural histories were analytic aids in this endeavour but they were tied to broader cultural preoccupations which antedated and accompanied economic change in Scotland. If we are to understand the Scottish conjectural histories or their place in the Scottish Enlightenment we must consider causes other than economic and social ones and we must place the conjectural histories in a tradition stretching back to ancient Greece.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 268.