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# SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY IN EUROPE

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**Abstract.** Scotland witnessed an intellectual flowering in the 18th century that generated a large number of important philosophical works. These works attracted interest across Europe, most notably in Germany and France, where many of them were translated within a short time of their publication. This interest endured for well over half a century, until the Idealism of Kant and Hegel discredited and displaced it.

*Keywords:* Scottish philosophy, Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, Adam Smith, David Hume, Kant, Hegel, Victor Cousin, eclecticism

Scottish philosophy in the 18th century – the period of the Scottish Enlightenment – reached exceptional heights of intellectual brilliance. Its origins, however, lie in the medieval period when all intellectual inquiry had an international rather than a national character. "International" in this context simply meant European. Scotland long boasted an "auld alliance" with France and it is with France that the earliest philosophical connections are to be found. In the late 13th century John Duns Scotus studied and lectured in Paris and Cologne. In the 15th century, the leading figures in the foundation of Scotland's own universities – notably Laurence of Lindores at St Andrews and Hector Boece at Aberdeen – had both studied and taught at the University of Paris. A generation later, when Scotland's universities were firmly established, the French connection was still strong. The logicians John Mair (1467 – 1550) and George Lokert (1485 – 1547) moved easily, and surprisingly frequently, between France and the universities of St Andrews and Glasgow.

In the next generation Andrew Melville (1545 – 1622) went from St Andrews to Paris, and taught at Poitier before moving (for political reasons) to Protestant Geneva, where he held a Chair of Humanity for five years. An enthusiastic advocate of the innovative logic of Peter Ramus, Melville returned to Scotland and instigated university reforms in Glasgow and St Andrews. These prepared the way for the "new foundation" of the Scottish universities in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Francis Hutcheson was an early beneficiary of one consequent change, namely the replacement of generalist Regents by specialist Professors, a change that contributed significantly to philosophical developments within Scotland.

Hutcheson may be said to have inaugurated many of these developments, but he was undoubtedly influenced in this respect by his teacher and predecessor, Gersholm Carmichael, who had also looked to Europe for intellectual stimulus. Carmichael's interest focused on northern Europe rather than France, and in his own philosophical work, both teaching and writing, he drew extensively on the natural law theory of Samuel Pufendorf (1632 – 1694), who in turn had been building on the thought of the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645). It was inevitable, perhaps, that eighteenth century Netherlands should be regarded as a more obvious intellectual conversation partner for Protestant Scotland than Catholic France, and no doubt this explains why French connections were less marked than previously. What is more striking, however, is the fact that the relationship with Europe became remarkably one sided.

In a history that looked back to the 15th century, philosophical influences generally moved from Europe to Scotland by means of the Scottish universities, as the examples of Mair, Melville and Carmichael demonstrate. But in the later 18th century, the movement was the other way; philosophers in Europe looked to the works of Scottish philosophers, while philosophers in Scotland were relatively ignorant of debates in Europe. This tends to be overlooked because of the personal experience of Europe that some of the most important figures had. It is well known that Hume, having completed his studies at Edinburgh University (of which he had a poor opinion) went to France where he undertook the composition of his first great work. A Treatise of Human Nature was completed at the Jesuit college of La Flache. Later in life he spent a further period in France as a Secretary at the British Embassy in Paris, where leading socialites and intellectuals heralded him as a celebrated man of letters. Similarly, when Adam Smith resigned from the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow in 1763, he travelled extensively in France and Switzerland as personal tutor to the young Duke of Buccleuch. It was there that he began to write his great work The Wealth of Nations, and in the course of his travels he met several intellectual figures whose work interested him, notably Francois Quesnay (1694 – 1774) and Jacques Turgot (1727 – 81). A few decades later Dugald Stewart, who occupied the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh for many years, made four extended journeys to France, the third to Paris in 1789 at the time of the French Revolution.

These personal journeys, while interesting in themselves, give a somewhat false impression. In the introduction to his Treatise, Hume lists some figures that have been important forerunners in the project he is about to engage in. None of them are French, and there is little indication that its having been written in France is of much consequence. Rather, it was Newton and Bacon on whom his method of inquiry was modeled, and Hutcheson and Butler who provided the conception of human nature that animates the book.

Unlike Voltaire, whose thought was transformed by the intellectual circles he found in Britain during his exile, Hume, Smith and Stewart did not travel to Eu-

rope hoping to find new philosophical ideas. On the contrary, it was their innovative works, along with those of other Scottish philosophers, that were providing stimulus to a continental intelligentia, especially with respect to aesthetics, morals and politics. It is astonishing, in fact, how many works by Scottish authors were translated, often quite speedily, into both French and German. Francis' Hutcheson's Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, first published in 1726, had appeared in a French translation by 1749. Hume's Essays and Enquiries were translated into French soon after their first publication. Within five years of its original publication Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments appeared in French (and a few years later in German) as did Thomas Reid's Inquiry. Hume, Smith and Reid are the "big" names (nowadays) but translations appeared in both French and German of works by many other Scottish authors – Lord Kames, Hugh Blair, Alexander Gerard, James Beattie, and George Campbell. Adam Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767) appeared in Germany within a year of its appearance in English. The Elements of Moral Philosophy by David Fordyce, a Regent at Marischal College Aberdeen, first appeared in Robert Dodsley's educational hand book The Preceptor in 1748. In 1754 it was posthumously published as a separate textbook, and within three years had been translated into both French and German. Six years after Fordyce's death, he was hailed in Germany as a "celebrated" author (Fordyce 2003: x) [1]

This remarkable flow of philosophical thought from Scotland to continental Europe was not matched by any similar movement in the other direction. Hume encountered d'Holbach and Diderot, but only when his own reputation was already made, and his philosophical work complete. Reid's Inquiry reveals a close familiarity with Descartes but it nowhere mentions Condillac. The "physiocrats" undoubtedly influenced Smith, but in his economic theory rather than his moral philosophy. In general, it seems, few continental works of philosophy were translated into English, and continental philosophers got little attention in Scotland until well into the 19th century. Indeed, the length of time it took for the Kantian revolution in philosophy to have any impact there is striking (on this see Chapter 6). It is the one-sided nature of this relationship that justifies Michel Malherbe's assertion as a "fact" that "Scottish philosophy exercised an ascendancy over Europe from about 1760 to about 1840" (Malherbe 2003: 299).

Why was this? The answer lies in the philosophical doldrums into which both France and Germany (in their different ways) had drifted. In France, Condillac's version of Lockean psychology had come to look exhausted, leaving no clues as to what could replace it. In any case the moral, political and aesthetic topics that so occupied the Scottish philosophers seemed much more pertinent to the cultural and political changes afoot. In Germany, it was the rationalism of Leibniz, as expounded by Christian Wolff, that ran out of steam, thus leaving a philosophical lacuna which the works of the Scottish philosophers appeared to fill. Kant's famous admission that

it was Hume who woke him from his "dogmatic slumbers", and his almost equally well known rejection of Hume's Scottish critics, easily leaves the impression that German philosophy in the 18th century knew little, and probably cared less about "common sense" philosophy. But, thanks to the energy of translators such as Christian Garve (1742 – 98), Scottish philosophers were well known in Germany before the Kantian revolution took place, and played a constructive and not merely a negative role in philosophical discussion there. Of course, as Manfred Kuehn has shown (Kuehn 1987), these works were taken up in different ways, so it cannot be said that their impact was straightforward. Garve's interest was chiefly in the intersection of practical ethics and empirical knowledge, and thereby consonant with some central aspects of the "science of human nature" that animated the Scottish philosophers. His circle included Johann Nicholaus Tetens (1736 – 1807), sometimes known as "the German Hume" because of the similarities between his major work Philosophische Versuche über die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwickelung (1777) and Hume's Treatise. Tetens certainly popularized Hume, and influenced Kant. The world of German academic politics may make the precise significance of Kant's famous remark in the Prolegomena – that any philosophical appeal to common sense should be treated as "the means by which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinker and hold his own" (Kant 1783 [1950]: 7) – rather hard to assess. Still, this remark appears in reasonably extended consideration of "common sense" and Kant plainly states his view that it is "positively painful to see how utterly [Hume's] opponents, "Reid, Oswald, Beattie and lastly Priestly, missed the point of the problem" (6) Hume had formulated, while Tetens and others thought that "common sense" could be used to underpin some of Hume's insights. [2]

Despite Kant's negative view, Reid was accorded considerable significance by German philosophers into the nineteenth century. Part Three of Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy, entitled Modern Philosophy, includes a section headed "Scottish Philosophy". Interestingly, it is preceded by a longer section on Hume, placed with Berkeley under the umbrella classification "Idealism and Scepticism". Hegel makes this separation because he sees (correctly) that "the Scotch are the foremost of Hume's opponents" and comparable with Kant as "another opposing force to that of Hume" (Hegel 1896: 375). Clearly Hegel identified "Scottish Philosophy" with the School of Common Sense, since he expressly devotes subsections to Reid, Beattie, Oswald and Dugald Stewart "who is living still, [and] appears to be the last and least significant" (378)[3]. Since he also makes mention of Hutcheson and Ferguson, as belonging to this "school", his knowledge of the corpus of Scottish philosophy was evidently limited.

Hegel's contemporary Schopenhauer (1788-1860), however, had evidently read Reid as well as Thomas Brown, to whom he refers in the revised version of his earliest and foundational philosophical work On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The reference is not entirely flattering.

Thomas Brown's book On the Relation of Cause and Effect . . . [a]part from its tedious, pedantic and rambling prolixity . . . does not handle its subject badly. [T] his Englishman (!) quite rightly recognized that it is always changes with which the law of causality is concerned, and that every effect is therefore a change. Yet although it cannot possibly have escaped his notice, he will not admit that a cause is likewise a change from which it follows that the whole thing is merely the uninterrupted nexus of changes succeeding one another in time. (Schopenhauer, 1974 [1844]: 57)

In contrast to both this highly qualified commendation of Brown and Kant's negative view of "common sense" philosophers, Schopenhauer is emphatic in his praise of Reid. In the second volume of The World as Will and Representation he writes "Thomas Reid's excellent book, Inquiry into the Human Mind . . . is very instructive and well worth reading, ten times more so than all the philosophical stuff which has been written since Kant put together." (Schopenhauer, 1966: 21)[4]

Scottish influence probably lingered longest in the area of social philosophy. As late as 1867, in Das Kapital, Karl Marx makes favorable reference to the Essay on the History of Civil Society that Ferguson had published a hundred years earlier – though since he seems to have thought that Ferguson taught Adam Smith, his knowledge of the subject was clearly somewhat imperfect. The dubious quality of some of the translations, in fact, did lead to Ferguson being misinterpreted quite widely, one result of which has been a continuing debate about the true extent of Ferguson's influence on the early history of the social sciences. Something of the same may have been true of Adam Smith. It was German philosophers who first formulated "das Problem" of reconciling Adam Smith's appeal to human sympathy in his moral philosophy, with his invocation of an "invisible hand" that socially coordinates egoistical interests. This "problem", it can be argued, is a largely manufactured one, and arose only because Smith was substantially misunderstood.

In France, by contrast, it was interest in the Scottish philosophy of perception that lasted longest, and the popularity of Reid and "Common Sense" received a second powerful stimulus in the early decades of the 19th century. Before 1800 interest had largely focused on aesthetic and moral subjects, but in works on the philosophy of mind published in 1802 and 1805, Maine de Biran reveals a significant familiarity with Hume, Reid and Smith, culminating in 1815 with the publication of his Comparison of the Three Points of View of Reid, Condillac and Tracy on the Idea of Existence and the Judgment of Exteriority, a work that included a note on Reid's account of sight. Reid came to still greater prominence in the years immediately following, thanks to Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard, professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne, and his most famous student and successor, Victor Cousin, who drew attention to the hitherto little known Maine de Biran. His first teaching position (in 1815) was as Royer-Collard's assistant on his history of philosophy course at the University of Paris, a course that had included the Scottish philosophers since the

session of 1811 – 12. Cousin succeeded Royer-Collard in 1815 and gave twelve lectures on Scottish philosophy in 1819 – 20. These were published in 1829 under the title Philosophie ecossaise, and though never translated into English, this may be said to be the occasion on which the expression "Scottish philosophy" made its first appearance. These lectures, interestingly, expound the major Scottish philosophers from Hutcheson to Ferguson, but do not include Hume. It was Cousin's disciple Theodore Jouffroy who produced a French edition of Reid's Collected Works in 1823, twenty years before his collected works appeared in English. It was Jouffroy, too, who was responsible for making Dugald Stewart's philosophical writings more widely available when he published a translation of the Outlines of Moral Philosophy in 1827.

By the end of Stewart's life (1828), his intellectual reputation was European-wide, as evidenced by his election to several learned academies, including the Royal Academy of Berlin and the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg. As this suggests, serious interest in the Scottish philosophers extended beyond France and Germany. In Italy, Stewart's work was sufficiently well known for him to be elected a member of the Royal Academy of Naples, and in 1830 the prominent Catholic philosopher Antonio Rosmini published some "Observations on the systems of Locke, Condillac, Reid and Stewart". It was in France and Germany that interest was strongest, however, and its subsequent history was significantly different in the two places.

The "Scottish School of Common Sense" was largely discarded in Germany by the early years of the 19th century. This was undoubtedly in large part a result of Kant's blistering attack in the Prolegomena, though, his view seems to have been based on the "vulgar" Common sense of Beattie and Oswald, since he did not have any firsthand knowledge of Reid. Reid's Inquiry was published in German just one year after Kant's first Critique, and the translator clearly saw it, and presented it, as another valuable answer to Hume's skepticism. This comparison of the respective merits of Kant and Reid as critics of Hume emerged as a subject of continuing interest within Scotland, once Kant had become better known. But in Germany, Kant was followed by the succession of thinkers who saw him as having himself bequeathed a problematic philosophical agenda, and whose attention, accordingly was focused on philosophy in Germany. Chief among these thinkers are Fichte, Schelling and above all Hegel, in whose works (his history of philosophy apart) there are fleeting references to Hume, but none to most of the other philosophers whom Garve had assiduously translated. Over the course of the 19th century, in fact, the older pattern of Scotland's philosophical relationship to Europe reasserted itself. Beginning with Hamilton, Scottish philosophers increasingly turned to Germany and German Idealism began to displace Reid and common sense in Scotland also. Whether this amounted to an abandonment of "the Scottish philosophy" became an issue of considerable debate.

In France, interest in Scottish Common Sense philosophy arose just as it was declining in Germany. Indeed, thanks to Victor Cousin it reached a remarkable prominence. Having once been suspended from his teaching post for what were perceived to be anti-government sentiments, Cousin eventually became a remarkable philosophical power in the land when he became Minister of Instruction in 1840, a position that enabled him effectively to control who taught philosophy and what they taught. Indeed, his power in this respect even extended to Scotland; Cousin's negative assessment of J. F. Ferrier was a significant factor in Ferrier's failure to succeed Hamilton in the Chair of Logic at Edinburgh.

Cousin's preferred expression for his philosophical position was the "justemileau", widely known as "eclecticism". His principle concern was to re-affirm the necessarily spiritual nature of human beings against the materialistic sensationalism that French philosophy had inherited from Condillac (1715 – 80), and in support of this endeavor philosophical insights were to be welcomed and employed regardless of the philosophical system from which they came. Scottish philosophers such as Hutcheson and Reid were especially attractive in this respect, since they appeared to succeed in combining equally strong commitments to empirical science and to religion. Furthermore, eclecticism had a natural affinity with the anti-dogmatic element in Scottish philosophy. The attraction is still further increased when this anti-dogmatism is presented as the best answer to skepticism, as it is in Reid's criticisms of Hume.

On the other hand, the "pick-and-mix" character of eclecticism both threatens conceptual instability, and makes it ultimately intellectual unsatisfying to the systematic mind. The charge of being unphilosophical was also brought against Reid both within and without Scotland, though it can plausibly be argued that Reid's Inquiry and Essays aim to be systematic without espousing or elaborating any "System". Cousin's philosophy, in fact, was not as eclectic as here presented it; nothing that might be thought to support atheism was included. Furthermore, it was unable to sustain the claim that perception, reason and emotion had, in some sense, equal standing. In the decades that followed, the spiritualism of Maine de Biran, from which Cousin had drawn one element, began to take center stage, being transformed eventually into the "vitalism" of Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941), a name now far better known, and more readily identified with French philosophy than either Royer-Collard or Cousin.

Scottish philosophy also attracted interest in Spain and Italy, though it was not taken up by major figures in either country. There are detectable traces in other parts of Europe also, but it was the philosophers of France and Germany who gave the closest attention. By the late decade of the 19th century, however, interest had faded almost entirely and only interest in Hume detached from his intellectual context that remained.

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**NOTES**

1. David Fordyce *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* edited with an introduction by Thomas D. Kennedy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003) p. x.
2. This passage seems to reveal that Kant did not know that Reid's great scourge was Priestley.
3. Hegel's *Lectures*, first published almost a decade after his death, are an amalgam of texts written when he was at the University of Jena (1805 – 6) and notes added to them over the next twenty-five years. At the time of his death in 1831, he was delivering these lectures for the tenth time at the University of Berlin. Since Stewart died in 1828, this reference must come from an earlier version.
4. My attention was drawn to these references in Schopenhauer by Atanaska Cholakova to whom I am grateful.

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