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## The Setting of the Play

### 1.1 Introduction

This book deals with the Scottish Enlightenment in an innovative way, relating Rhetoric, rationality and economics. It contributes to the comparison between the theory of David Hume and Adam Smith and shows, against some recent scholarship, that interest lies more in the differences between Hume and Smith than in their similarities. The birth of economic rationality determines the roots of different rhetorical usages of economic science. Therefore, this chapter sets the scene in the Scottish Enlightenment and shows that authors from this period had different concepts of time, which meant that the newborn baby of Rhetoric had different growth paths. In Chapter 2, we analyse the friendship of Hume and Smith, pointing out the similarities between them, but also the differences, which implied long-term bonds and commitments. In particular, in their objective to revolutionize knowledge and faith, Hume and Smith displayed different literary strategies. These different strategies also led to dissimilar appraisals of religion and the exhibition of piety. In Chapter 3, we provide an interpretation of Hume's thought, supplying an explanation for the more important

elements that have traditionally defined his philosophy: his scepticism, his conservatism and his doctrine of utility. In Chapter 4, we prove that Adam Smith criticizes all of those theses presented by Hume: he was a realist and he gives a different definition of perception and pleasure, sympathy and rationality. Actually, Hume was describing “the mortal self” of Smith, but for Smith the active, ever present self, is the principal actor of morality. In Chapter 5, we discuss Rhetoric and acknowledge differences also in the early formation of language, the basis for rationality. Then, literature, imitative arts and the theatre have different objectives in the theory of Hume and Adam Smith. Chapter 6 shows the consequences in economic theory of the different philosophies: the concept of time and language affect the objective of economic growth and also affect the instrument of money, blood and channel of production and growth. The book concludes with some important conclusions to be drawn on current philosophy. The comparison between these two great and fundamental philosophers, David Hume and Adam Smith, is a good setting for reconsidering the path the world will take in the future.

## 1.2 The Scottish Enlightenment

Recently, the dominant tendency has sought to connect Scottish thought of the eighteenth century with the general Enlightenment, particularly the French. A first group of pioneering historians such as G. Bryson, D. Forbes and H. Trevor-Roper introduced the expression the European Enlightenment movement.<sup>1</sup> However, more recent studies have questioned the validity of such a reading. The existence of a Scottish Enlightenment with its own characteristics clearly distinguished from the French or British Enlightenment is now evident.<sup>2</sup> As against the French Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment broke

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<sup>1</sup>Bryson (1968), Forbes (1975), and Trevor-Roper (1972, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Bryson (1968), Hont and Ignatieff (1983), Skinner (1979), Campbell and Skinner (1982), and Berry (1997).

with the a priori reason of the Middle Ages to go into the study of common sense and the common world, to individual perception instead of the perception of an Almighty and inapprehensible Creator of human existence.

In the opinion of Berry, Scotland was affected by the loss of the Scottish Parliament, as well as the loss of the capital in 1707 with the Act of the Union.<sup>3</sup> Although the Scottish Parliament had decamped for London early in the century, Scotland remained the legal and ecclesiastical capital. Edinburgh was at the time one of the most cosmopolitan cities in all of Britain, boasting a rich cultural life and a group of prominent literati. This prompted the novelist Tobias Smollett to call it “a hot-bed of genius”. The Union brought times of peace, but the enlightened Scottish feared their disadvantageous position with respect to England. The concern of creating in Scotland a national character related and different from the dominant English culture led to the insistence on the need to stimulate everything that contributes to refinement in interpersonal and social relationships such as the creation of clubs and universities. The authentic heart of Scottish painting is shaped by the theoretical background developed by a heterogeneous group of authors known as Scottish literati (philosophers or moralists): Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson are some of the best-known characters, but no less significant are Hugh Blair, John Miller, William Robertson, Lord Kames (Henry Home) and poets and artists such as Robert Burns and Henry Raeburn.<sup>4</sup>

Robertson reinforces the sense of intellectual unity that, in his opinion, the Scottish Enlightenment movement has, which made “scientific” efforts in the fields of moral philosophy, historical narrative and “political economy”.<sup>5</sup> One of the issues that most worried all those authors was the complex relationship between historical progress, economic or material, and the no less desirable moral improvement of the human

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<sup>3</sup>Berry (1997, 8–19).

<sup>4</sup>Schneider (1967) and Gill (2006).

<sup>5</sup>Robertson (2000).

being.<sup>6</sup> From this relationship arise, in turn, certain paradoxical situations that must be accepted as they are the result of one's own historical circumstances.

The field of moral philosophy was always one of the favourites of the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century. The key international figure is undoubtedly Francis Hutcheson, considered by Campbell to be the authentic “father” of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> One of the main problems addressed in common from the moral sphere—but also from different angles and with confrontations by authors such as Hutcheson, Hume and Smith—was the challenge of Mandeville's provocative “cynicism” to the belief in innately benevolent moral dispositions and solidarity among people. According to Scottish Enlightenment authors, the moral philosopher should inquire whether such benevolent qualities could arise from a society exposed to the temptations brought by material opulence. They needed to discern if sociability, virtue and justice are natural to humanity or artificial constructions of the individual. Although it was not an incompatible approach in all cases with the religious sentiment, in the end its more radical versions would be incompatible. The “moral philosophy” consisted largely of an effort to apply the basic principles of “experimental philosophy” to the economic, political and social spheres. As against Hobbes, who based morals and political philosophy on a priori reasoning, first Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, and then Hume tried to create a moral science based on the experimental method. Thus, Hume's science of man sought to propose “experiments” that would contribute to unveiling the common mechanisms (such as the “association” principle) of individual psychology and social life.

In the Scottish Enlightenment, this experimental method was applied to the social self, and the idea of reality as a mirror presented by Hume was key: “the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated, and may

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<sup>6</sup>Rosales (2003).

<sup>7</sup>Campbell and Skinner (1982).

decay away by insensible degrees”.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of morality was in the eighteenth century still very much anchored in the public sphere since in the period the authentic solitary individual was still exceptional and relative. The eighteenth-century thinkers of the Scottish enlightenment when they spoke of human passions divided them between personal and those related to happiness or survival of the group. They sought for a balance between both passions. For example, sympathetic passions were not always positive: going too far would lead to a repressive intolerance of differences, cultural fanaticism or aggression towards foreigners. A “sympathetic” nationalism emerged: the moral philosophers were convinced that it was the social bonds, the small-scale sympathetic exchanges and not the wisdom of the ruler or the laws, that gradually united individuals into a larger national unity. So, the concept of the nation was to be relevant to reinforce people’s moral attitudes.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 The Birth of Rhetoric

Rhetoric has been defined as the art or study of using language and discourse effectively and persuasively; it may also be bombast or excessive use of ornamentation and contrivance in spoken or written discourse. The first concept, which implies persuasion, may be understood in two different ways: language used as an instrument for making someone come to your terms aiming at the search for some utility, be it more wealth or more contacts, influences or power; but language can also be an instrument of communication with the common-to-all world. Then, it is the raw material for creating new situations or sharing memories with other fellow creatures.

These different perceptions of Rhetoric and language imply also different philosophies of life. These distinct views were clearly distinguishable at the very moment in which Rhetoric began to be

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<sup>8</sup>Hume (1964b), Treatise: II: II: VI: 152.

<sup>9</sup>Dwyer (1998).

considered an experimental science, precisely the period of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup> Scottish Enlightenment Rhetoric is usually linked to the beginning of Phenomenalism, to bundle theory, empiricism and logical positivism. This implies a tradition in an array of authors such as Hobbes, Berkeley, Locke and Hume, who would after bring about the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804). But phenomenism is a radical form of empiricism based on subjective idealism. Hume's linguistic theory was influenced by phenomenism and Hume subsequently influenced analytical philosophy. According to Kant, space and time, which are the priori forms and preconditions of all sensory experience, refer to objects only to the extent that these are considered as phenomena, but do not represent the things in themselves. This does not exclude the existence of objects (noumena), but Kant never proved it.<sup>11</sup>

During the Scottish Enlightenment, however, there was a heated debate on philosophical subjects, especially on Rhetoric and the construction of language. Philosophers were resisting the definition of perception by external impressions presented by Hobbes and Berkeley. They were rebutting the concept of the self as a bundle of sensations. In this sense, Adam Smith provided a quite original philosophy of perception and language against the theory of David Hume. However, these philosophical essays have not been studied much. This neglect is quite unfortunate as Smith's first classes were on Rhetoric. These public lectures on Rhetoric were delivered in Edinburgh between 1748 and 1751 and in January 1751, Smith was offered a position at his alma mater, Glasgow University, where he held the Chair of Logic. Then, Francis Hutcheson's successor as Chair of Moral Philosophy, Thomas Craigie, was forced to step down because of ill health and Smith occupied the Chair of Moral Philosophy for nearly twelve years, from April 1752 to January 1764. Smith published his moral theory in 1759 (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, TMS), his economics is from 1776 (*The Wealth of Nations*, WN), and some philosophical writings of his were published in 1795. The latter is a posthumous publication using unprepared

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<sup>10</sup>McKenna (2016).

<sup>11</sup>Kant (1998).

material from Smith's papers. Finally, his theory on law was published as class lessons (Lectures on Jurisprudence, LJ) partly in 1896 by Edwin Cannan and partly in 1976 in the Glasgow Edition of his works and correspondence. However, his lessons on Rhetoric were not discovered until 1958.

We endeavour to give credit here to Smith's contributions to Rhetoric. But the philosophical description of language is linked to a wider social area. Actually, Smith was trying to defend realism against phenomenism. According to Vivenza, Smith deliberately used the terms appearance and phenomenon interchangeably.<sup>12</sup> For Smith, phenomenon is only the image left by reality in our minds, which can sometimes be misleading. But there is a common-to-all world that deserves our attention and care. Distance between image and reality may lead us to self-deception.

By the same token, words change their meaning depending on the moment and the audience.<sup>13</sup> And, as Givone claims, with language life opens onto itself.<sup>14</sup> Smith demonstrates the importance of the spectator in language, the same as he did in the areas of ethics, justice and economics. However, as Darwall points out, according to Smith, the perspective of moral judgement, is not strictly a *spectator's* standpoint, as the concept of the impartial spectator implies moral reality and propriety beyond the fleeing sensations.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.4 Concepts of Time

Wilcox argues that modern historians generally operate under the assumption of a continuous time line,<sup>16</sup> although in the twentieth century, discontinuity has increasingly preoccupied theorists.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup>Vivenza (2001, 13).

<sup>13</sup>Putnam (1975).

<sup>14</sup>Givone (1990, 11–12).

<sup>15</sup>Darwall (1999).

<sup>16</sup>Wilcox (1987, 4).

<sup>17</sup>Eisenstein (1967, 36, 48).

post-modern concept of time is characterized by non-linearity, discontinuity and fragmentation.<sup>18</sup> But in the Scottish Enlightenment period, there was a continuous perception of time. Through the “experimental method”, the proper structure of inherited social institutions was studied to see the factors that stop or encourage their advancement—e.g., in terms of better conditions of justice and economic equity, but also of religious tolerance and political stability. The dilemma of taking social reality as given led in the Scottish Enlightenment to a “conservative” modality. But there was also a “progressive” mode—the future of human perfectibility, which was “solved” by some of the Scottish authors by accepting a more complex than usual notion of “progress”. It was based on “the theory of intended or unintended consequences”. Besides conservative and progressive sides, a break from utopias, a detachment from the past and the future, was also defended. Differences, not similarities, must be emphasized in the debates of the Scottish Enlightenment period, and we may consider time perception as the basis for these differences.<sup>19</sup> Hume and Smith coincide in criticizing the idea of human perfectibility and utopias but they differ in their own perception of time.

On the one hand, Hume’s conception of time is similar to what has been called “Greco-Latin or Dionysian conception”.<sup>20</sup> In 1872, Nietzsche distinguished previous concepts of time between Apollonian and Dionysian or Bacchic.<sup>21</sup> The Bacchic mentality is catastrophist and emphasizes how man is always returning to the same point, to the starting point, always looking for the same pleasures, committing, in its wake, identical mistakes. By continually reemerging from the oblivion of the past, men can repeat habit without awareness of mistakes. We enjoy “over stubble of the dead” and, after that joy, there is a residue of melancholy and unreason. Time has a circular shape.

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<sup>18</sup>See Miller (2001, 2), in special with regard to Marx’s discontinuism. See also Adam (1990) and Kellner (1975).

<sup>19</sup>Trincado (2006).

<sup>20</sup>See Trincado (2013).

<sup>21</sup>Nietzsche (1993).



So, human beings are chased by a *spectre*, a distrust of “the causes from which his existence derives” and the “condition to which he will return after death”.<sup>22</sup> That shadow is so close to the skin, that man clings to the security of what was alive. We admire the past because its very capacity to exist makes it virtuous. We fear the future because we dread our own death and the possible disappearance of everything known. In addition, we are not apt to imagine that our posterity will exceed us, or equal our ancestors.<sup>23</sup> The distance in time, which does not discourage our imagination altogether, inspires greatness. By gathering forces to overcome the opposition produced by distance, we strengthen the mind. In this way, our respect for the past increases when it is farther away, and our fear of the future when it is more distant. Hume, therefore, explicitly rejects the “Judeo-Christian conception” of society, focused on the future. Actually, he displays a conservative idea of time.

Hume did not believe that progress is inevitable. In *History of England*, he states that he will reveal “the great mixture of accident, which commonly concurs with a small ingredient of wisdom and foresight”<sup>24</sup> in the emergence of civilized society. However, as in the *Political Discourses*, Hume firmly defends the superiority of the modern world. He was against the idea of a fall from ancient glory. For him, most of English history had been a story of disorder, oppression, poverty and dependence. The uncultivated nations are inferior in Government, civil, military and ecclesiastical, but also in Morals. *History of England* was highly regarded and in his writings Hume was trying to develop as previously noted a science of human nature using “the experimental method”. As it is impossible to run controlled laboratory experiments on every aspect of human nature, Hume noted the recourse is to “glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life and take them as they appear in the common course of the world”.<sup>25</sup> As Hume writes, history enables us to see the entire

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<sup>22</sup>Hume (1964b), Treatise: 1: IV: VII: 548, ed Green and Grose.

<sup>23</sup>Hume (1964b), Treatise: II: III: VIII: 213.

<sup>24</sup>Hume (1778, 489).

<sup>25</sup>Hume (1975), THN Intro 10, 6.

“human race, from the beginning of time, which passes, as it were, in review before us”.<sup>26</sup> Hume did not refrain from passing judgement on the actions and beliefs of historical figures. He was a master at sympathizing with great historical actors and unveiling their motivations and he presented the strongest arguments on both sides of the question at hand.

Adam Smith’s theory, though, can be labelled as a present theory. Smith shows that the search for what has been useful in the past or is supposed to be useful in the future is not the grounds for human action. The first movement of a human being is not due to a past or a future image, but to the instinctive desire to move that does not depend on past experiences.<sup>27</sup> Smith concluded that, through an understanding of the value of “Time, the great and universal comforter”,<sup>28</sup> self-command could dominate passion, enjoying beforehand that tranquillity which we foresee the course of time will restore to us in the end. Self-command allows sentiment to emerge, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within. Besides, for Smith, perception is not only large and wide, but it is also “depth” perception that requires the passage of time and a detachment of the self from volume and time.<sup>29</sup> Then, the art that most represents the observer of the present is sculpture, voluminous reality. Finally, Time is also related to economics. As Foucault says:

From Smith onward, the time of economics was no longer to be the cyclical time of alternating impoverishment and wealth; nor the linear increase achieved by astute policies, constantly introducing slight increases in the amount of circulating specie so that they accelerated production at a faster rate than they raised prices; it was to be the interior time of an organic structure which grows in accordance with its own necessity and develops in accordance with autochthonous laws – the time of capital and production.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Hume (1964a), EMPL 566.

<sup>27</sup>Smith (1980), External Senses 133–168.

<sup>28</sup>Smith (1976), TMS III.iii.32, 151.

<sup>29</sup>Smith (1980), External Senses 50–52, 150–152.

<sup>30</sup>Foucault (1970, 245).

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