

The Scottish Enlightenment and Its Influence on the American Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT

It is often said that Witherspoon brought Scottish Enlightenment to America, and diffused Reid's Common Sense Philosophy in the continent. At the time he arrived in the former British colony, however, the Americans had already read Scottish books, such as those written by Hutcheson, Hume, Kames, Montesquieu, Locke, Cato, and others. Hutcheson's *Introduction* had been used as a text book in Harvard and elsewhere. America's struggle for independence had appealed to the right of resistance against the mother country, as suggested by Locke or Hutcheson.

Communication, trades, and travels flourished in the eighteenth century. Benjamin Franklin was acquainted with Scottish philosophers—Kames, Hume, Smith, etc.—and helped the next generation of Americans study in Britain. Many Scottish intellectuals, governors, clergymen, doctors, merchants, and laborers migrated to America. Similarly, many American medical students went to Edinburgh.

Madison wrote the plan for a Federal Republic upon the suggestion of Hume. Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* introduced the thesis of “commerce and liberty.” The Scottish Enlightenment supported its American counterpart, American independence (1776), the making of the US Constitution (1787), and the forging of the American Nation. This paper examines the correspondence between the two enlightenments.

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1 Background: Connections between Scotland and America

In 1762, David Hume wrote to Benjamin Franklin, who was about to return to the American colonies, saying: “America has sent us many good things, gold, silver, sugar, tobacco, indigo, etc.; but you are the first philosopher, and indeed the first great man of letters, for whom we are beholden to her.”¹ Although

¹Hume, *Letters*, Vol. I, Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 357.

some Americans, including Franklin, could indeed have intellectually influenced the Scottish, the reverse flow was much greater. As Schneider suggested,² the American enlightenment received many different influences from parallel developments elsewhere, but the Scottish Enlightenment had the strongest impact.

Douglass Adair, more than John Locke, initiated the new tradition of evaluating the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on America.³ He emphasized that Thomas Jefferson acquired the legacy from Scotsman William Small, and James Madison, from John Witherspoon, a Scot who became president of New Jersey College (later Princeton University).⁴

There were various connections between Scotland and America in the seventeenth century. Sir Alexander Dick tried to establish a colony in Nova Scotia in 1620s, and the British government under Charles I sent Scottish criminals to America. Scots who aspired for liberty and good living sailed to Carolina or Jersey in 1680s. The Scottish colony of New Jersey was the first successful settlement.⁵

The Scottish intellectuals who visited America were more interested in plant hunting than in the failed Darien expedition, whose aim was to expand Scottish foreign trade and liberate the country from its traditional poverty. America's rare plants fascinated the Scots. Sir Robert Sibbald, M.D., and James Sutherland were the two most famous plant hunters. Associating with members of the Royal Society in London and American botanists, they gathered plants and information about them. Sutherland taught many young physicians, who went on to become army surgeons or sailed to colonies and came back with plants and seeds. Archibald Stewart, who went to Darien as a surgeon, had a similar interest in plant hunting.⁶

Roger Emerson tells of John Reid, a gardener who came to New Jersey as a surveyor in 1683. American plants—maple, tobacco, and strawberries—appeared to have had an impact on Reid. In *The Scots Gard'ner*, he wrote, "Poor men such as myself may live better here than in Scotland if they will but work," and America only wanted "good Tradesmen, and good Husbandmen and Labourers" to become a garden state. People lived more freely in a more tolerant world, and without "Satanic Indians" to plague gardeners and surveyors. There was no hint about a degenerated nature, which was well known as the opinion of Buffon (Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon). America

²Schneider, H. (1946) *A History of American Philosophy*. Columbia University Press.

³Adair, D.G. (2000) *The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy*, Lexington Books.

⁴Adair, *ibid.*, pp. 24–26.

⁵Landsman, N.C. (1985) *Scotland and Its First American Colony, 1683–1765*, Princeton University Press.

⁶Emerson, R. (2001) "The Scottish Literati and America, 1680–1800," in Ned C. Landsman, (ed.) *Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and Americas, 1600–1800*, Lewisburg and London, pp. 183–184, 187–188.

promised abundance, pleasure, and satisfaction to industrious people. True enough, when Reid died 40 years later, he owned thousands of acres of land.⁷

In the eighteenth century, America and Scotland became more intimately connected by commerce and learning. The number of Scottish immigrants to the new world continued to swell. By the end of the eighteenth century, America laid the foundation for the modern enlightened commercial civilization, to which both English and Scottish immigrants contributed. Though lesser than the immigrants from Northern Ireland, and late comers to America,⁸ Scots took on important roles in colonial life. Glasgow merchants' tobacco trade with the American colonies flourished, underpinning the economic development of Virginia and Maryland. Every commercial town in the American Province had a Scottish commercial society, which involved itself in trade, politics, education, and ecclesiastical activities.⁹ The Scottish immigrants comprised criminals and the Covenanters, who vigorously opposed the religious oppression of Charles II. As such, therefore, the history of Scottish immigration was quite complicated in itself.¹⁰

In the seventeenth century and even after Scotland's Union with England in 1707, there were few Scottish immigrants to North America. Although several hundreds had sailed to the new Scottish colonies in America from 1629 to 1632, tens of thousands had gone to Ireland, Scandinavia, and Poland instead. From 1680 to 1690, more than a thousand Scots went to Eastern Jersey and Carolina. However, during the famine in 1690s, few went to the new world, while tens of thousands went to Ireland.¹¹

The Union with England introduced free trade to Scotland. Before America's independence, Scottish immigrants its southern colonies were composed of political criminals, convicts, and apprentices. This changed after the Independence, though, as apprentices were displaced by immigrants of free laborers and also by slaves from Africa.¹²

After the Jacobite Rebellion in 1715, 700 Preston prisoners were sold to some West Indian merchants and sent to South Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia as

⁷Emerson, *ibid.*, p. 189.

⁸Landsman, N.C. (1999) "Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600–1800," *The American Historical Review*, 102(2): pp. 463–475.

⁹Brock, W.R. (1982) *Scotus Americanus*, Edinburgh University Press, p. 1.

¹⁰Graham, I.C.C. (1956) *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America, 1707–1783*, Cornell University Press; Brock, W.R. (1982) *Scotus Americanus*, Edinburgh University Press; Adams, I. and Sommerville, M. (1993) *Cargoes of Despair and Hope*, John Donald,; and Landsman, N. (ed.) (2001) *Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and Americas, 1600–1800*, Associated University Press.

¹¹Landsman, N.C. (1999) "Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire," *The American Historical Review*, 104(2), p. 469.

¹²Blumsted, J.M. in Ned C. Landsman, N.C. (ed.) *The Scottish Diaspora: Emigration to British North America, 1763–1815*, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

slaves.¹³ The British government managed to suppress the Jacobite Rising in 1745, completely destroying the old Highland societies and forcing many Highlanders to flee to America. Over half of the immigrants from Scotland at that time were Highlanders. In the colonies, they were sometimes given the privilege of free land-rent for some years, and they could become independent farmers in due course.

Even after its development in the 1730s and 1740s, Scotland could not sustain a large population. Tens of thousands of Highlanders emigrated to America from 1763 to 1775. Samuel Johnson, who was visiting Scotland at that time, witnessed the exodus from the Highlands and the Islands. The great migration made both the patriots and the government gloomy and anxious.¹⁴

Although Scots made up just a small portion of the whole body of immigrants in America, they were industrious and active in agriculture, trade, politics, and learning. Because of their accomplishments, they could become leaders in the American colonies. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge in Scotland, originally intended to civilize the Gaelic Highlanders, journeyed to America to teach English and Christianity to the indigenous people.¹⁵

The Seven Years War (French and Indian War) in America was a major conflict;¹⁶ much money was invested and many soldiers were mobilized. The Scots who fought in this war were few, but their contribution to the British victory in South Carolina and other places was substantial.¹⁷ The Seven Years War forged the unification of Great Britain, which integrated Scotland, especially the Highlands, into the British Empire.¹⁸

John Smith, Witherspoon, and James Wilson, intellectuals who had formed their thought in the Scottish Enlightenment, emigrated to America. Their educational and political contribution towards nation building was tremendous. Some enlightened governors migrated from Scotland as well. John Kennedy, for instance, assisted Franklin in drafting the Albany Plan of Union in 1754 and worked for *Salus Populi*.

From America's standpoint, Scotland was a country of advanced learning. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the tradition of Scottish rhetoric

¹³ Adams, I. and Sommerville, M. (1993) *Cargoes of Despair and Hope: Scottish Emigration to North America 1603–1803*, John Donald, p. 19.

¹⁴ Whitfield, J.B. Jr. (1954) "Scottish Emigration to America: A Letter of Dr. Charles Nisbet to Dr. John Witherspoon, 1784," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 11(2): p. 276.

¹⁵ Szasz, M.C. (2007) *Scottish Highlanders and Native Americans: Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, University of Oklahoma Press.

¹⁶ Fred, A. (2000) *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America*, Vintage Books, pp. 1754–1766.

¹⁷ Marshall, P.J. (1995) "A Nation defined by Empire, 1755–1776," in Grant, A. and Stringer, K.J. (eds.) *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, Routledge, pp. 209–210.

¹⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, Yale University Press, 1992.

and moral philosophy had a strong influence on the humanities in North America.¹⁹ Harvard University used Francis Hutcheson's book as a textbook in 1725, as well as David Fordyce's *Elements of Moral Philosophy*, since its publication in 1748.²⁰ Andrew Hook pointed out that in the late eighteenth century, Hugh Blair's *Rhetoric* and Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* became very popular textbooks in many American Colleges and Universities.²¹ Scottish moral philosophy and rhetoric helped form the American mind and the idea of civic virtue—a legacy for the common citizen.

As early as the beginning of the 1750s, Jonathan Edwards had already read some works of Hume and Kames.²² Hook noted that in Edwards's letter to John Erskine (popular party clergyman), dated 11 December 1755, he said he had received Kames's *Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) and had read Hume's *Principles of Morals* (1751).²³ Although Edwards was critical of the two authors, this is the first evidence showing that he had read them. However, neither book could be widely circulated in America because of their skeptical slant.

Starting in 1745, the Scottish Enlightenment burst out and produced so many great works. America took notice and looked at Scotland as a land of learning.

2 Franklin and Kames

In the eighteenth century, many colonial Americans went to Scotland for various practical reasons. Usually, the visitors had some connection with Benjamin Franklin, who was the key “go-between” in Scottish and American relations. While Franklin was in America, he had already corresponded with many Scottish, English and French intellectuals and politicians; his Scottish friends included William Strahan, the famous printer, and Lord Kames (Henry Home), a judge and man of letters. Franklin was sent to England in 1757 as the agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly. He returned to Philadelphia in 1762, was sent back in 1764 (again as agent of the Assembly), and stayed there until 1775. During his intermittent stay in London, Franklin encountered many Scottish intellectuals and English radicals. At the “British Coffee House” (favorite resort of the Scottish intellectuals in London, owned by a Scottish lady named Anderson), he

¹⁹ Court, F. (2001) *The Scottish Connection: The Rise of English Literary Study in Early America*, Syracuse University Press. p. 2.

²⁰ Miller, T. (1990) “Introduction,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, Southern Illinois University Press, p. 18.

²¹ Hook, A. (1975) *Scotland and America 1750–1835*, Blackie. Glasgow and London, pp. 88–89.

²² Hook, *ibid.*, p. 38.

²³ Hook, *ibid.*, p. 28.

met William Robertson, Alexander Carlyle, David Hume, John Home, Alexander Wedderburn, Sir John Pringle, Tobias Smollett, Andrew and William Hunter, and James Boswell.²⁴ Franklin paid two visits to Scotland, in 1759 and 1771, during which he associated with the leading Scottish intellectuals. He became especially intimate with Lord Kames, who was a little older than him.

Franklin called on Lord Kames at Berwickshire, where they extensively discussed many issues and their common interests. Kames was very interested in Franklin's pamphlets, *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper-Currency* (1729) and *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751). Franklin sent a copy of the latter to Kames after returning to London in 1760. It was during the Seven Years' War (1757–1763) between Great Britain and France that Franklin wrote to Kames about his idea of keeping Canada in British hands after the war. "If the French remain in Canada, they will continually harass our Colonies by the Indians, impede if not prevent their Growth."²⁵

As Ian Ross pointed out, Kames later wrote in his *Sketches of the history of man*, 1774 (Vol. 1, Book II, Sketch 4) the following argument:²⁶

Our North American colonies are in a prosperous condition, increasing rapidly in population, and in opulence. The colonists have the spirit of a free people, and are enflamed with patriotism. Their population will equal that of Britain and Ireland in less than a century; and they will then be a match for the mother-country, if they chuse to be independent: every advantage will be on their side, as the attack must be by sea from a very great distance. Being thus delivered from a foreign yoke, their first care will be the choice of a proper government; and it is not difficult to foresee what government will be chosen. A people animated with the new blessings of liberty and independence, will not incline to a kingly government ... each colony will chuse for itself a republican government.²⁷

In 1774, Kames clearly had in mind the possibility of American Independence. On the other hand, in 1767, Franklin expected Kames to endeavor to accomplish the union of Britain and America because

I have lived so great a Part of my Life in Britain, and have formed so many Friendships in it, that I love it and wish its Prosperity, and therefore wish to see that Union on which I think it can be secur'd and establish'd.²⁸

²⁴ Hook, *ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁵ Morgan (2003) *Benjamin Franklin*, Yale University Press, p. 123.

²⁶ Ross (1972) *Lord Kames and Scotland of His Day*, Oxford University Press, p. 341.

²⁷ Kames, Henry Home, Lord, *Sketches of the History of Man*, 1813, Vol. 2, pp. 94–95.

²⁸ Franklin (2004) *The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston, Cambridge University Press, p. 284.

However, Franklin knew that the said Union was advantageous only to Great Britain, not the colonies; America could manage well on its own without the Union. In this circumstance, America was quite different from Ireland or Scotland.

America, an Immense Territory, favour'd by Nature with all Advantages of Climate, Soil, great navigable Rivers and Lakes, etc must become a great Country, populous and mighty; and will in a less time than is generally conceiv'd be able to shake off any Shackles that maybe impos'd on her, and perhaps place them on the Imposers. In the mean time, every Act of Oppression will sour their Tempers, lessen greatly if not annihilate the Profits of your Commerce with them, and hasten their final Revolt. For the Seeds of Liberty are universally sown there, and nothing can eradicate them.²⁹

But among Americans, there remains much "Respect, Veneration, and Affection for Britain," and if Britain become prudent, and take care for their privileges and their sentiments, America might be governed for long without force and great expense by Britain.

This was the stance of Franklin, but the letter had been intercepted; Kames only got to read it several years later. However, even if this letter reached Kames at once, there was little hope that he would be able to change the British government's strong policy, although William Lehman saw the possibility to "alter the history of Britain and America and of the Western world!"³⁰

3 Francis Alison and Francis Hutcheson

William Brock and especially Douglas Sloan noted the importance of Hutcheson to Alison. Francis Alison was a leader of the Old Side, in opposition to the New Side in America. Born in Ulster in 1705, he studied in Edinburgh and perhaps in Glasgow.³¹ In this section, I will review the importance of Alison, relying mainly on Sloan's study.

Alison was greatly influenced by John Stevenson, a professor of logic and metaphysics at Edinburgh University, and by Hutcheson. Francis Hutcheson was read by many American intellectuals, including Franklin, Madison, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson etc. John Witherspoon and James Wilson, expatriates

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 284–285.

³⁰ William C. Lehmann, *Henry Home of Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment*, The Hague, 1971, p. 76.

³¹ According to Brock, W.R. (*Scotus Americanus*, Edinburgh University Press, 1982, p. 92), Alison attended the lecture of Hutcheson at Glasgow, and delivered lectures at Philadelphia "in words taken almost verbatim from the master."

from Scotland, were of course were familiar with Hutcheson's works: *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (usually called *Compend*), *A System of Moral Philosophy*, and others.

The moral sense philosophy of Hutcheson influenced on both the Old Side (Alison) and the New Side (Witherspoon) in America, just like in Scotland he was succeeded by both the liberal philosophy of the Hume-Smith line and Common Sense Philosophy (Reid, Kames, and Dugald Stewart). Stevenson introduced John Locke to teaching at the Scottish university. In his popular lectures on Rhetoric, Locke used as a textbook Aristotle's *Poetics* and Longinus's *On the Sublime* in comparison with modern writers. His lecture was applauded by Alexander Carlyle, William Robertson, Stewart, and John Erskine.³²

Alison became Vice-Provost and professor of logic and moral philosophy at the College of Philadelphia in the 1750s. While still in New London in 1746, he wrote Hutcheson, whom he knew very well, asking advice on the curricula and books to be used at his academy. Alison relied on the Scottish system when he lectured. Students started by learning English, Greek, and Latin grammar and composition, and also belles letters, and then proceeded to moral and natural philosophy. This wide scope of education attracted many excellent followers. One was Hugh Williamson, who became a professor of mathematics at Philadelphia for three years, from 1761, then went to Edinburgh and Utrecht to study medicine. He continued the study of natural science as a physician, contributed to politics, and wrote *History of North Carolina*.³³

Two other distinguished students of Alison were John Ewing, professor of natural philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, and Charles Thompson, who became the Secretary of the Continental Congress. Thompson helped Jefferson compose his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785).³⁴

Patriotism and Fund-raising

In his sermon "Love of Country" in 1758, Alison called for the promotion of "industry, agriculture, and home manufacturers." This was true patriotism. He asked for assistance from Scotland for the widows of ministers and the education of their children. His Scotch Plan with library became an important fund to help not only in the livelihood and learning of the poor but also in the training of schoolmasters.

He believed that the education of ministers and public leaders was necessary for the American people. "Farmers' sons must furnish Ministers and

³² Douglas S. (1971) *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, pp. 75–76.

³³ Sloan, *ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

³⁴ Sloan, *ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

Magistrates for all our frontier inhabitants, or they must sink into Ignorance, Licentiousness, and all their hurtful consequences.” Religion and Science could tame and civilize the temper of wide multitudes. The three new colleges in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia were too few, removed, and expensive for farmers to send their children. Alison, together with Ewing and Williamson, also promoted the foundation of the Newark Academy.³⁵

Philadelphia college

Franklin’s *Proposals for the Education of Youth* (1749) recommended a new educational idea that would replace the traditional classical curriculum; it had its intellectual origins in the thought of Hutcheson, Fordyce, and Turnbull. His plan was realized in the establishment of Philadelphia College, where Francis Alison and William Smith from Scotland were invited as teachers. In his *Thoughts on Education* (1752), Smith maintained that liberal education was excellent for public life, citing from Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.³⁶

Franklin respected Alison’s scholarship. William Smith, an Anglican, pushed to make Alison a member of the Academy in Philadelphia, even if Alison was a Presbyterian. Smith studied at Kings College of Aberdeen for four years, starting in 1743. He and Alison contributed to the founding of Philadelphia College, where Smith taught moral philosophy at first, and was succeeded by Alison soon after. Alison lectured on other subjects, such as logic, the classics, metaphysics, and geography, in Philadelphia College until his death.³⁷

Why was Smith, an Anglican, invited to the College? The reason was Franklin took notice of his educational plan, *A General Idea of the College of Mirania* (1753), which had many concepts in common with those of Alison, and wanted to make them the foundations of the curriculum. Smith held two classes. One was for professionals to learn theology, law, natural science, agriculture, and major offices of the state; the other was for mechanical occupations and all other people. The school for mechanical arts taught English and some practical subjects for future occupations—very similar to the English school in Philadelphia envisioned by Franklin.

Smith was also interested in the education for young gentlemen, and he believed that the ideal course for them was one that included both the liberal arts based on classical languages and the new humanities grounded on natural sciences. The course, which originated from the curriculum reform of Marischal College and Kings College in Aberdeen in 1753, carried a three-year

³⁵ Sloan, pp. 80–81.

³⁶ Miller, T. (1990) “Introduction,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, Southern Illinois University Press, p. 19.

³⁷ Sloan, p. 83.

curriculum. The classics, rhetoric, literary criticism, and composition were taught every year, while logic and metaphysics were taught in the first year. William Duncan's *Logic* was used as the textbook for logic.

The next two years of the course included mathematics, natural philosophy, natural history, astronomy, and chemistry; mathematics was particularly good. The reading list included the works of the great Scottish natural philosophers, such as David Gregory, Colin Maclaurin, John Keil, and Robert Simson. Smith eliminated the system of regents and introduced the professorial system of Marischal College.³⁸

Alison and Smith were opposed in religious matters, but in education, their cooperation was tight. They shared the same ideal, and were educated in common Scottish Universities. Moreover, Smith's natural philosophy and Alison's moral philosophy complemented each other. Both men introduced the tradition of Scottish Universities into Philadelphia, and by instituting the medical school in 1765, they added another important Scottish influence.³⁹

The sway of Alison was enormous, and through New England leader Erza Stiles, Harvard and Yale paid more attention to the Scottish Universities. They looked at Edinburgh University as the best and Glasgow as the next-best. Edinburgh gave Stiles an Honourable Degree, and John Erskine sent many books to Stiles.⁴⁰

Hutcheson's Ideas as the Foundation of American College Teaching

Alison introduced Hutcheson's moral philosophy into America, which influenced both the Old Side and the New Side. Hutcheson seems to have been the largest contributor to the American Enlightenment. Alison taught the "Inner Senses" of Hutcheson—the Sense of Beauty, "Common Sense or Social Bent, by which we interest ourselves in all the joys and sufferings of mankind," the Sense of Honor, the Sense of Ridicule, and the Moral Sense. He derived from Hutcheson the idea that the true foundation of morality was benevolence guided by moral sense. Under three major headings, "The Elements of Ethics," "The Elements of Law of Nature," and "The Principles of Economic and Politics," Alison lectured about natural rights, religious duties, property, contracts, oaths, family, the origins of society and government, politics, and civil and international law. Hutcheson played an important role in this early stage of the American College.⁴¹

Alison was influenced by the political thought of Hutcheson as the Real Whig. Caroline Robbins defined Hutcheson as the Real Commonwealthman, and

³⁸ Sloan, pp. 83–84.

³⁹ Sloan, p. 86.

⁴⁰ Sloan, pp. 86–88. Hook, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

⁴¹ Sloan, pp. 90–91.

Douglas Sloan called him the typical Political Calvinist. Calvinists transmitted a system of ideas composed of natural right, government through contract and consent, popular sovereignty, and resistance. Scotland contributed especially to the argument for the right of resistance. John Knox, forefather of Witherspoon, fought against Queen Mary; and Andrew Melville, against James IV. Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (1644) was well known. The Calvinist or Protestant tradition, on the other hand, was developed by Hugo Grotius and Samuel von Pufendorf in the Continent into the modern natural law theory. This was adopted and refined by the commonwealth tradition in Britain from Sidney and Locke by the seventeenth to eighteenth century Whigs and Republicans. Hutcheson was to be considered as the great inheritor of these traditions and synthesizer of both.

Hutcheson emphasized the importance of the right of resistance and a balanced constitution, and Alison lectured on these topics to the pre-revolutionary Americans. Alison talked about the rights of the supreme power:

While the Publick interests are tolerably secured and consulted it is unjustifiable in any people to have recourse to civil wars & force for lighter causes: but when the publick liberty & safety cannot be otherwise secured it is lawful and honourable to make strong efforts for a change of Government."⁴²

Fearing the rising power of the Anglican Church in America, Alison convinced the Presbyterians to hinder the Anglican clergymen; with Erza Stiles, he strove to forge cooperation between Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the middle colonies. Alison based his attitude against the Anglicans on Hutcheson's balanced constitution.

The opposition to the Anglicans and the colonies' antagonism to the mother country were, for Alison, two facets of the same conflict. He opposed the Stamp Act, and though he never took an active part in the revolution because of his advanced age, his followers did so in his behalf. Charles Thomson became the Secretary of the Continental Congress, and both George Read and Thomas McKean signed the Declaration of Independence. Hugh Williamson became a representative of North Carolina in the Federal Assembly in drafting the US Constitution. For Alison, the enlargement of the "Christian Kingdom" and the progress "Liberty, Virtue, and Learning" was part of the same effort.

Natural Right Theory and Republicanism

For some time, there was no question as to whether the idea of the Declaration of Independence was a Lockean natural right theory or some other theories. From Carl Becker to Louis Hart, it was regarded as a clear and self-evident

⁴² Cited in Sloan, p. 93.

application of the English natural right idea and the Lockean idea of resistance described in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690). However, through the vast progress of the contextual study of the political and economic thoughts of England and Scotland in the eighteenth century, both the liberal tradition of Locke and the republican country tradition drew considerable attention. In particular, Gordon Wood and Bernard Bailyn emphasized the impact of the English Country tradition on American intellectuals. They found the roots of the idea of American Independence not directly in the Lockean natural right theory, but in country republicanism, which roundly condemned the self-interested and corrupted politics of the British Court Party and the government.⁴³

Moreover, the contextual study of the Scottish Enlightenment was extensively developed along with the study of the American Enlightenment. In his thesis, Garry Wills cited the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on Jefferson: The main author of the Declaration of Independence relied not on Locke but on Hutcheson.⁴⁴ Ronald Hamowy lost no time in criticizing this interpretation,⁴⁵ while Howell stated that Jefferson owed much to William Duncan and William Small.⁴⁶ In the ensuing controversy, the older thesis of Locke on the importance of the American Revolution may have been reestablished, and it now coexisted with the republican synthesis.

Indeed, it was possible for the current generation at that time to apply Hutcheson's theory of resistance. His political philosophy, which was partially derived from Lockean political philosophy, was widely known in America, as was his argument for the right of independence of the colonies against the oppression of the mother country. For instance, Caroline Robbins taught that the independence of America was performed by the right of resistance against the oppressive mother country.⁴⁷ She had pointed out earlier that "*Massachusetts Spy*" in No. 50 (13 February 1772) printed the argument of Hutcheson propounding the right of resistance; that is, the majority of the text of "The Rights of Governors," Book 3, chap. 7 of *The System of Moral Philosophy* (1755). The influence of Hutcheson is evident in the Declaration of Independence. Also, since Locke spoke the language of resistance but not of the colony's independence, it may be safe to say that the Declaration of Independence

⁴³ Bailyn, B. (1967) *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass.

⁴⁴ Wills, G. (1978) *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, New York.

⁴⁵ Hamowy, R., "Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Critique of Garry Wills's *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1979, pp. 503–523.

⁴⁶ Howell, W.S. (1961) "The Declaration of Independence and Eighteenth-Century Logic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 18, pp. 463–484.

⁴⁷ Robbins, C. (1982) "When It Is That Colonies May Turn Independent": An Analysis of the Environment and Politics of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), in *Absolute Liberty*, ed. Barbara Taft, Archon Books.

is a synthesis of Locke and Hutcheson—the natural right theory and the republican political theory.

4 Witherspoon and His Followers

Although John Witherspoon could not become a major in Scotland, he was a great scholar. He emigrated to America upon an earnest invitation from Pennsylvania. At the College of New Jersey, he taught political theory and other subjects, tapping his abundant knowledge; his outstanding students included James Madison, Hugh Henry Breckenridge, John Taylor, and Philip Freneau. Witherspoon was the only clergyman who signed the Declaration of Independence and committed himself to the American Revolution with firm confidence. He inherited the theory of resistance from Hutcheson and authorized the rebellion of the colonies to their mother country.⁴⁸ He believed that when the mother country degenerated and became violent and barbarous, assisting the new country's noble great cause was the natural justice.

Witherspoon lectured about moral philosophy, which was based on Hutcheson and natural jurisprudence. At the end of the lecture, he wrote "Recapitulation."⁴⁹ Having gone through the three divisions of ethics, politics, and jurisprudence, he summarized his discussion and made a list of writers in this branch of science.

1. We can understand how extensive and important moral philosophy is. It teaches personal duties and relates the whole business of active life.
2. The opinions of writers upon the principles of morals seem more varied than those in the field of natural philosophy. But in the future, the same that was done by Newton and his successors will be done in moral philosophy. It is safer to make reasoning from facts than to infer from metaphysical principles. Recently, James Beattie in his *Essay on Truth* attempts to make certain impressions of common sense as the first principles, or axioms, of our reasoning on moral subjects.
3. The differences of the nature of virtue among the philosophers are not as great as they appear.
4. The different foundations of virtue, such as benevolence and self-love etc., are not opposite to each other, but parts of one great plan. "The authority of God, the dictates of conscience, public happiness, and private interest all coincide."
5. In moral philosophy, there is nothing certain or valuable but what is perfectly coincident with Scripture.

⁴⁸ Sloan, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–139.

⁴⁹ Miller, T. (ed.) (1990) *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, ed. Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 229–230.

Since the dawn of philosophy, people have discussed virtue. Ancients asked, “What is the *summum bonum*?” Virtue and happiness were the same. Stoics took virtue as the *summum bonum*: Pleasure was not good, and pain was not evil. Epicureans thought of *summum bonum* as pleasure: Pleasure was virtue. Academics and Platonists regarded virtue as a middle way. As to the modern controversy concerning the foundation of virtue, Witherspoon lists some of the most worthy authors—an interesting list. He comments that many important contributions were made by the British.

Leibniz – *Theodicee* and his letters
 Clark – *Demonstration* and his letters
 Hutcheson – *Inquiries into the Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, and his *System*
 Woolaston – *Religion of Nature Delineated*
 Collins – *On Human Liberty*
 Nettleton – *On Virtue and Happiness*
 David Hume – *Essay*
 Lord Kames – *Essays*
 Smith – *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
 Reid – *Inquiry*
 Balfour – *Delineation of Morality*
 Butler – *Analogy* and his sermons
 Balguy – His tracts
 The theory of agreeable sensations from the French
 Beattie – *On Truth, Essay on Virtue and Harmony*

Witherspoon adds deists and their critics, and calls Leland’s *View of the Deistical Writers* as reference. He enumerates some of the chief writers on government and politics: Grotius, Pufendorf, Barbeyrac, Cumberland, Selden, Burlamaqui, Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli, Harrington, Locke, and Sidney.

Montesquieu’s *Spirits of laws*, Ferguson’s *History of Civil Society*, Lord Kames’s *Political Essays*, *Grandeur and Decay of the Roman empire*, Montague’s rise and fall of ancient republics, and Goguet’s rise and progress of laws, arts, and sciences comprised the era’s fundamental literature in the fields of natural law, republicanism, and history of civil society. Some excellent writers (Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Rousseau) and books (*Political Economy*) were missing from the list, although he mentioned Mandeville in the lecture. Nevertheless, the list was comprehensive and balanced enough.

Witherspoon recommended the works of Lord Kames, David Hume, and Adam Smith even if they were his antagonists. The difference in their positions did not prevent him from appreciating their value, but a reference to Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* was conspicuously missing.

Witherspoon delivered his lecture in New Jersey College. He was not only a learned professor but an impartial intellectual as well, at least in education. It would seem that his students had a hard time coping with the voluminous

reading materials he listed, though they probably did their best to do so. Among them, James Madison and Samuel Stanhope Smith, became active leaders of the next generation. As a republican unionist and federalist, Madison became an eminent statesman who contributed to state building. Samuel Stanhope Smith's lectures on moral and political philosophy in New Jersey College were later published in two volumes (1812).⁵⁰

The Edinburgh Philosophical Society, which was founded in 1737 (and lasted until 1783), soon established communications with American Physicians and Natural Scientists. The members of the Society had many connections with America and Americans. Lord Kames, who was the Society president from 1768 to 1782, said of the native Indians in his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774): "As there was no description about them in Scripture, human beings didn't have a single origin but had multiple generations."⁵¹ Kames's unorthodox opinion about the multiple origins of human beings would be criticized by Samuel Stanhope Smith later. Smith's lecture to the American Philosophical Society in 1787 refuted Kames's theory; and it was published as *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*.⁵² The following year, the Edinburgh edition was published, assisted by Benjamin Smith Barton, an Edinburgh gentleman and American medical student.

5 Arthur Lee and Benjamin Rush

One of the most famous American students who went to Scotland was Arthur Lee (1740–1792) from Virginia. In those days, the practice of going to British schools was declining among the American elite, but a few of them, such as Lee, still did so. After being taught the classic languages at home in his early years by a Mr. Craig (a Scot), he enrolled at Eton. Nineteen Virginian students went to the British schools from 1750 to 1760; and 30 students had entered Eton by 1776.⁵³

Arthur Lee learned the Greek and Latin classics by heart. The classics were regarded as adequate for cultivating or fostering manhood, patriotism, and love of liberty among the young students. He learned the history of the Roman Republic from 1 century BC to the 2nd century AD. The decline and fall of the

⁵⁰ Rev. Stanhope, S.S. (1812) *The Lectures, corrected and improved, which have been delivered for a series of years, in the College of New Jersey; on the Subjects of Moral and Political Philosophy*. 2 Vols., Trenton, 1812.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁵² Stanhope, S.S. (1787) *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species, To Which Are Added Strictures on Lord Kame's Discourses, on the Original Diversity of Mankind*, (Philadelphia).

⁵³ Potts, L.W. (1981) *Arthur Lee: A Virtuous Revolutionary*, Louisiana State University Press, p. 16.

Roman Republic was the focus of his study of history. Like other Americans, Lee was fond of Plutarch, Livy, Cicero, Tacitus, and Sallust. That particular heroic age in Roman history teemed with virtue, simplicity, patriotism, integrity, justice, and liberty. Lee was especially fond of Sallust's Histories, which repeated the theme that power, ambition, and avarice had brought about the collapse of the Roman Republic. His experience seemed to validate these themes. Private virtue was the cornerstone of the republican society. Virtue became his ideal, the principle of his behavior.⁵⁴ Thus, a republican was born.

Arthur had a brother, Richard Henry Lee, who was nine years his senior. Richard Henry, known as "Cicero" in the Virginia House of Burgesses, had financed Arthur's schooling and advised him to read Locke, Montesquieu (Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu), and Pufendorf.⁵⁵ Arthur wanted to study medicine in Cambridge, but went to Edinburgh instead, as recommended by Samuel Johnson. He studied very hard in Edinburgh, and became friends with Lord Buchan (David Erskine) who was once saved the life in Saint Andrews by Franklin.⁵⁶

In 1761, Arthur Lee went to Glasgow to discuss agriculture with Adam Smith. At first, Lee thought Smith an agreeable companion; Scottish husbandry, promising; and Glasgow, preferable to Edinburgh. His optimism soon turned into disappointment, though, as he could not observe the highly productive drill plowing, and the Scottish came across to him as unsociable and circumspect. However, his conversations with Smith and travels in Britain would enlighten his political views. Lee published an anonymous pamphlet in 1764 as a counterattack on Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a critical analysis of slavery.⁵⁷

Lee went back to Williamsburg once, after completing his study in Edinburgh, but quickly returned to London for the great cause of American liberty, and became an enthusiastic supporter of Wilkes. As a militant activist, Lee played an active role in the "Wilkes and Liberty" movement for the good of America. He wrote a number of articles in some newspapers under the pseudonym Junius Americanus, and later integrated them into a book, *Political Detection: Or the Treachery and Tyranny of Administration Both at Home and Abroad*. He wrote other articles in 1770s.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Potts, *Arthur Lee*, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Potts, *Arthur Lee*, pp. 18–19.

⁵⁶ J. Bennett N.J. (1956) *Benjamin Franklin in Scotland and Ireland 1759 and 1771*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, pp. 101–102.

⁵⁷ Arthur, L. (1764) *An Essay in Vindication of the Continental Colonies of America, from a Censure of Mr Adam Smith, in his Theory of Moral Sentiments. With Some Reflections on Slavery in General. By an American*, London.

⁵⁸ Bonwick, C (1977) *English Radicalism and the American Revolution*, The University of North Carolina Press, p. 40.

Rush and the Scottish Enlightenment

Benjamin Rush studied earnestly in Edinburgh and enjoyed associating with other students in societies and clubs, the most important of which was the Royal College of Physicians. Edinburgh received the American warmly. Rush met David Hume at a dinner in the house of Sir Alexander Dick, and William Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University, in the house of Medical Professor Dr. Gregory. At that time, Rush thought Hume a generous and perfect man.⁵⁹

After returning to Pennsylvania, Rush started his active career as physician, professor, and politician. He based his educational plan on the Scottish system. To him, Scottish thinkers and systems were the prime sources for the formation of his ideal of learning and education. Scottish professors applied their scientific discoveries to the development of the Scottish industry, which impressed Rush deeply. He did learn from the accomplishments of the English and French civilizations, but for him, the best stimuli came from Scotland. He also found the model of his republican education in the Scottish university.

At 22, Rush read Hume's *History of England* and admired his style, but preferred James Beattie nevertheless. He condemned Hume as an infidel; in his pamphlet on slavery,⁶⁰ Rush implicitly criticized Hume's infamous idea that the blacks were racially inferior. Beattie was known for his abolitionism. Rush wrote to Aberdeen Professor James Kidd, "Reverberate over and over my love to Dr. Beattie. I cannot think of him without fancying that I see Mr. Hume prostrate at his feet. He was the David who slew that giant of infidelity."⁶¹ Rush and Franklin nominated Beattie as a member of the American Philosophical Society,⁶² but they never nominated Hume.

In fact, Hume never approved of slavery. He praised the modern commercial civilization based on industry as better for humanity than the ancient military one based on slavery. However, he was less popular in America than in Britain; his philosophical works were scarcely read in America, although his *History* and *Political Discourses* were read often enough. Neither was Jean-Jacques Rousseau was popular in America. Adams did read Rousseau, but he was likely the exception. Hume and Rousseau, both original philosophers of the eighteenth century, were never appreciated as great intellectuals in America, which was one of the distinct characteristics of the American Enlightenment.

Adam Smith was not read widely either. Arthur Lee and Benjamin Rush read him, but they happened to be in Britain when *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*

⁵⁹ Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, p. 575.

⁶⁰ Benjamin R. (1773) *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia, 1773, p. 51.

⁶¹ Rush, *Letters*, 2, p. 748.

⁶² Rush, *Letters*, 1, p. 394.

was published and attracted many intellectuals. In the American Enlightenment, Locke, Hutcheson, Witherspoon, and Beattie were regarded as great thinkers.

The judgment of time is fickle, though. Who considers Beattie greater than Hume or Smith now? Beattie condemned Hume's skeptical philosophy as too dangerous, and he and Rush had reason to criticize it in those days. However, although Beattie may have influenced the Romantics of later generations, he is almost forgotten now. In the still dominant Christian climate in America, we can understand such an attitude. Rapid secularization and civilization in America could progress despite the puritan's piety.

6 Federalists, David Hume, and Adam Smith

In 1789, George Washington became the first President of the United States of America, and he nominated Alexander Hamilton as the first Secretary of the Treasury. Thomas Jefferson was named Secretary of State and John Jay, President of the Supreme Court. Hamilton endeavored to make the centralized republic of states more complete, and promoted the famous economic policy known as the Hamilton System.

Hamilton was a Machiavellian,⁶³ and many scholars point out that Hume had influenced his way of thinking as well.⁶⁴ Hume said that a statesman or legislator must make policy or law as if man would always become wicked for pursuing his self-interests. This is also one of the basic principles that Machiavelli encouraged statesmen (prince) to adopt, and was the starting point for Hamilton, too. Hamilton did not depend on the classical republican idea of civic virtue. Like Hume, he understood that virtue was easily corrupted and lost, but he was by far nearer to the Court Party in England than Madison or Jefferson, who had a political and social theory that was anchored on civic virtue.

Douglass Adair found the roots of the Jeffersonian farmers' commonwealth in the Aristotelian idea of Republic, or *Politeia*, as a community of the virtuous free people, and the independent gentleman farmer. He argued that Madison and Jefferson rejected the idea of Montesquieu connecting the republic with a small country. Instead, he employed Hume's idea that the republic is suitable to a large country and applied it to America.⁶⁵ Hume's *Treatises of Human Nature*

⁶³ Lamberton, J.H. (2004) *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁴ Stourzh, G. (1970) *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*, Stanford U.P., pp. 70–75. Banning, L. *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*, Ithaca: New York, pp. 133–136. McCoy, D.R. (1980) *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*, The University of North Carolina Press, pp. 133, 146.

⁶⁵ Adair, D. (1975) “‘That Politics May Be Reduced to Science,’ David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth Federalist,” *Huntington Quarterly*, XX, pp. 344–360, later in his *Fame and the Founding Fathers*, Liberty Fund, 1998, pp. 132–151.

(1739–1740) was too skeptical, and the American Enlightenment kept its distance from it. In general, skeptical philosophy was rejected in America, while the sacred dimension continued. “Faith,” “Providence,” “Apocalypse,” and “Millennium” held sway in the minds of many in the American Protestant Colonies. It was the background used by the evangelists Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield to appeal the peoples’ conversion. But Hume’s *Political Discourses* and *History of England* (1756–1763) were widely read. His essay on the Perfect Republic in *Political Discourses*⁶⁶ gave federalists a theoretical basis for their attempt to make a great republic. David Ramsay wrote *The History of the American Revolution* (1789), and other Histories, with Hume’s *History* and others in mind.

Adams rejected both the unicameral parliament of Franklin and Turgot, and the Complete Republic of Hume. He respected the traditional mixed government, or balanced constitution, which was composed of one, few, and many.⁶⁷

Adams received Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) very well. In his *Discourses on Davilla* (1790), he cited “The Origin of Ambition, and of the Distinction of Ranks,” Pt I, Section 3, Chap. 2—the famous paragraphs concerning the unintended result of establishing the social order through the corrupted praise and admiration of the lower social classes for the wealthy and the powerful. He remarked that in America or other places, wherein equality was the basis, it was the passion for excellence that drove people to action. The citation is six pages long.⁶⁸

How, then, was Adam Smith received in America? Did Americans find the seeds of their state formation in his book *The Wealth of Nations* (complete title: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*)?

That Franklin read it is most likely true, but there is a division of opinions as to whether or not he indeed commended Smith at the end of each chapter. Which Jacob Viner and Ian Ross thought it true, but Nolan thought it impossible. All told, how Franklin regarded *The Wealth of Nations* is not clear, but he probably approved of it, considering that he and Smith agreed on the labor theory of value, free trade, and the idea of the Union of Great Britain and America.

However, in 1776, when *The Wealth of Nations* was first published, Franklin was a very busy man; he was probably unable to devote much time reading it. The period 1774–1776 saw Franklin change his stand from Union to American Independence, at about the same time that Smith also turned his emphasis from Union (Book IV) to the American Independence (Book V). Their reasons

⁶⁶David, H. (1994) “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth,” in *Political Discourses*, 1752. in Hume, *Political Essays*, Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁷Adams, J. (1787) *A Defence of the Constitution of Government of the United States of America, against the Attack of M. Turgot in His Letter to Dr. Price, dated the March, 22, 1778*, Philadelphia.

⁶⁸Adams, J. (1851) *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States ...* Boston, 6, pp. 257–262.

differed, though. Adam Smith decided to support the independence of the Northern American Colonies mainly due to the financial crisis of Great Britain.

Benjamin Franklin traveled a separate route. On 29 January 1774, he was accused by Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn in the Cockpit of the Parliamentary House in Westminster of making an unlawful disclosure of former governor Thomas Hutchinson's secret letters. Franklin was found guilty and removed from his position as the Deputy of the Post Office. Apparently embittered by the accusation and condemnation, he switched to the resistance and trained his sights on the independence of America. Four months after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, America declared its independence, proof that Smith had indeed struck a powerful blow for the act.⁶⁹ Wedderburn, a friend of Smith's in their days at the *Edinburgh Review* (1755–1756), asked him in 1778 for advice as to the desirable policy of Great Britain for America.

Drew McCoy maintained that at the time of the Declaration of Independence, there were many in colonies that earnestly defended and demanded free trade. He sought the sources in the combination of physiocracy and the primitive idea of free trade shared by Noah Webster and Franklin.⁷⁰ According to Peter McNamara, Webster was active in political journalism at that time. When, in "*The Continentalist* No. 5" (April 1782), Hamilton criticized free trade and advocated trade restrictions, he might have had in his mind Webster's "Essay on Free Trade and Finance." In the third essay (January 1780), Webster urged that America immediately eliminate every trade restriction, and said, "Trade, if let alone, will ever make its own way best, and, like an irresistible river, will ever run fastest, do least mischief and most good, when suffered to run without obstruction in its own natural channel." McNamara points out that although Webster's argument in favor of natural liberty is very like that of Adam Smith, there is no evidence that he had read the latter's *The Wealth of Nations*.⁷¹

Jefferson remarked, "In Political Economy I think Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* the best book extant."⁷² On the other hand, he found the book too tedious, and thought that J.B. Say's *Political Economy* had the advantage of being compact and lucid.⁷³

How about Hamilton? Some believe that though Hamilton espoused restrictions on trade and protectionism, he changed his opinion about free trade after reading Smith, as reflected in his *Report on the Manufactures*. Did he really read *The Wealth of Nations*? The answer has not yet been determined.

⁶⁹ Ross, I. (1995) *The Life of Adam Smith*, p. 256.

⁷⁰ McCoy, D. (1980) *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, pp. 79–80, 84–85.

⁷¹ Peter McNamara, *Political Economy and Statesmanship: Smith, Hamilton, and the Foundation of the Commercial Republic*, Northern Illinois University Press, 1998, p. 101.

⁷² Joyce Appleby (ed.) *Jefferson: Political Writings*, Cambridge U.P., 1999, p. 261.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 274, 196.

The Wealth of Nations was published in Philadelphia in 1789 and in Hertford, in 1804, 1811, and 1818. This chronology may indicate that the book was not read that often in America, which had its hands full mounting the revolution and founding the new republic. Although Americans could have acquired some benefits from the new science of political economy, they had scarce time to spare reading and arguing about Smith's lengthy magnum opus.

7 The American Problem in the Scottish Philosophers

In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith pressed for free trade and was against the mercantilism and colonial policy of the British government, which implied that he supported the American colonies and their independence. Naturally, it was well received in America; some intellectuals read it with satisfaction. Perhaps Franklin, Jefferson, Hamilton, Witherspoon, and John Adams had read it by the end of the eighteenth century, but it seems that there was not any more.⁷⁴ Much later on, America became a typical country where many social philosophers or scientists made much of the political economy and applied it in discussing politics, society, and civilization.

Adam Smith was a synthetic and comprehensive philosopher. His analysis was deep, multifactual, and sometimes complex. In *The Wealth of Nations*, the American problem occupied a place of prominence. Among his peers in Scotland, there were other intellectuals who were very much interested in the American problem. For example, William Robertson wrote *The History of America* (1777), but its coverage was limited to American history in the Spanish Empire because he believed that the American problem in Great Britain was too controversial to deal with adequately.⁷⁵

Sir James Steuart, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson were also interested in the American problem. Since there are studies about the attitudes of Hume and Ferguson, their causes are as well known as that of Smith.

Sir James Steuart, the celebrated author of *The Principles of Political Economy* (1767), wrote nine concrete letters concerning the American problem.⁷⁶ As is well known, he wrote *Principles* during his exile from the European Continent. Before becoming a political economist, he had joined the Jacobite army; why he became a Jacobite is not so clear, though. How did this unique career enable him to grasp the American problem?

⁷⁴ John E. Hill, *Revolutionary Values for a New Millennium: John Adams, Adam Smith and Social Virtue*, Lexington Books, 2000, pp. 140, 161.

⁷⁵ Phillipson, N. (1997) "Providence and Progress," in *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Cambridge University Press, p. 62.

⁷⁶ Raynor, D. and Skinner, A. (1994) "Sir James Steuart: Nine Letters on the American Conflict, 1775–1778," in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 51, No. 4, pp. 755–776. Cited as Nine Letters.

Sir James Steuart on the American Problem

Sir James was interested in the American War from the beginning. From his home in Coltness near Glasgow, he wrote nine letters from 1775 to 1778 to his countryman Archibald Hamilton Esquire concerning this problem. It is said that he may have written more letters. As a patriot, Steuart sought the best strategy for the mother country in winning over the colonies. David Raynor and Andrew Skinner, who discovered the letters, point out that in all of them, Steuart constantly talked of the impossibility of subjugating the colonies by force. The British army would encounter difficulty against the American guerrilla warfare, which was modeled after that of Corsica. Therefore, it would be better to employ a naval blockade on the colonies. If the colonies surrendered, Britain should admit America into free trade. Steuart expected this strategy to be transmitted to “war minister” George Germain, First Lord of Trade, 1775–1779, Secretary of State for the American Department, 1775–1782.⁷⁷

8 James Wilson and the Scottish Enlightenment

James Wilson (1742–1798) is known as one of signers of the Declaration of Independence and one of the federalists who contributed to the US Constitution. Younger than John Millar and older than James Madison, he was the first president of the Supreme Court of the United States. Wilson emigrated from Scotland to Pennsylvania, and studied as hard as John Adams. He was trained for law by John Dickinson, who was rather moderate and conservative of principle.

Wilson seems to have been overlooked as an intellectual, and there are only a few studies about him. However, his contribution to the US Constitution cannot simply be dismissed. He endeavored to persuade the opposing parties—the liberal federalists and republican anti-federalists—to come to a compromise and create the Constitution.

He was elected as professor of law at Philadelphia College in 1790, and up to 1791, he lectured on the subject. In April 1792, his college was integrated into Pennsylvania University, where he also became professor of law. However, he could no longer lecture owing to his many other activities. His works were published in 1804 by his son, Bird Wilson.⁷⁸

Lectures on Law

The contents of Wilson’s *Lectures on Law* are founded upon the natural jurisprudence of the Scottish Enlightenment, but he sometimes mentions the originality

⁷⁷ Steuart, Nine Letters, No. 1, pp. 758–760.

⁷⁸ *The Works of the Honourable James Wilson, L.L.D.* 3 vols., Philadelphia, 1804. (Reprint Law Book Exchange, 2005).

of the Constitution of the United States. Therefore, we can say that his lecture was constructed as a system whose object was to situate America properly in terms of comparison.

After Part I, Chap. 7, “Of man, as a member of a society,” Wilson lectures “Of man, as a member of a confederation” (Chap. 8), and argues about “Comparison of the constitution of the United States with that of Great Britain” (Chap. 11). In Part II, he speaks at great length “Of the constitutions of the United States and of Pennsylvania.” The manner of argument reminds us of the lectures of Jurisprudence by Adam Smith in Glasgow University in the 1760s. It is also interesting to note that Wilson sometimes referred to John Millar’s *Historical View of the English Government* (1787), as well as many other works.

In 1785, Wilson wrote a small book, *Considerations on the Bank of North America*,⁷⁹ wherein he argued that the bank could contribute to the Constitution, so that establishing it would be an excellent public policy. Wilson started his argument by reviewing the history of the American Constitution, and how the North American Bank was projected and authorized. His argument reminds us of one rendered in a court of law. After demonstrating how the bank was established by just procedures, he proceeds to consider some of the most substantial profits coming from the bank.

The first advantage of a bank, Wilson said, is that it increases circulation and makes industry vigorous. He cited a long paragraph from Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*:

It is not by augmenting the capital of the country, but by rendering a greater part of that capital active and productive than would otherwise be so, that the most judicious operations of banking can increase the industry of the country.

Wilson also cited a paragraph from the same book that tells of the advantage of paper money. Further, he quoted Sir James Steuart, who called banking “the great engine, by which domestick circulations carried on”:

To have a free; easy and equable instrument of circulation is of much importance in all countries: it is of peculiar importance in young and flourishing countries, in which the demands for credit, and the rewards of industry, are greater than in any other.

“To the banks of Scotland,” says Sir James Steuart, “the improvement of that country is entirely owing...”⁸⁰

Smith and Steuart were masters, who taught Wilson the great utility of banking, and he never questioned the vast difference between the two.

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Works*, 3, pp. 395–427.

⁸⁰ Wilson, *Works*, 3, pp. 418–419.

Secondly, Wilson said, the influence of a bank on credit is no less salutary than its influence on circulation.⁸¹ This condition proceeded from the first one.

Thirdly, trade, as well as circulation and credit, derives great support from a bank. Here also Wilson argues on the foundations laid by Smith and Steuart:

Dr. Smith says, that he has heard it asserted, that the trade of the City of Glasgow doubled in about fifteen years after the first erection of the banks there; and that the trade of Scotland has more than quadrupled since the first erection of the two publick banks at Edinburgh, of which one was established in 1695, and the other in 1727. Whether the increase has been in so great a proportion, the author pretends not to know. But that the trade of Scotland has increased very considerably during this period, and that the banks have contributed a good deal to this increase, cannot, he says, be doubted.⁸²

Wilson cited the famous Steuart's bank proposal:

"Banking," in the age we live, is that branch of credit which best deserves the attention of a statesman. Upon the right establishment of banks depends the prosperity of trade, and the equable course of circulation. By them, solid property may be melted down. By the means of banks, money may be constantly kept at a due proportion to alienation. If alienation increases, more property may be melted down. If it diminishes, the quantity of money stagnating will be absorbed by the bank, and part of the property formerly melted down in the securities granted to them will be, as it were, consolidated anew. These must pay, for the country, the balance of their trade with foreign nations: these keep the mints at work: and it is by these means, principally, that private, mercantile, and publick credit is supported.⁸³

Fourthly and lastly, the establishment of an "undepreciating paper currency" throughout the United States is to be expected.⁸⁴

Wilson stressed that a national bank was not only highly advantageous in times of peace, but is essentially necessary for United States in times of war. His argument supporting the power of Continental Assembly to grant the bank was significant. He anticipated the "implicit power" which would be used by John Marshall as Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, and at the same time, enumerated almost all the arguments of Alexander Hamilton, who later defended the national bank.

⁸¹ Wilson, *Works*, 3, p. 420.

⁸² Wilson, *Works*, 3, p. 421. Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 1, p. 442.

⁸³ Wilson, *Works*, 3, pp. 421–422. Cf. Sir Steuart, J. (1767) *Political Economy*.

⁸⁴ Wilson, *Works*, 3, p. 424.