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DAVID HUME
AND THE DUTIES OF A PROFESSOR

Mikko Tolonen

I believe Scotland qualifies as a country of Northern Europe. Yet, it might strike first counter-intuitive to discuss Hume's relationship to his place of origin in a collection of essays on "David Hume and Northern Europe". However, I think that the case is quite the opposite and Hume and his relationship to Scotland and Scottish Enlightenment needs to be discussed at the same time as his reception in other Northern European countries.

We need to distance Hume quite considerably from Scotland in order to understand the context of his thinking as well as his relationship to the Scottish Enlightenment. The context in which Hume's thinking is perhaps best understood is the general European context. This means that talking about him and the eighteenth-century French, Dutch, German and even Russian contexts is just as important as the Scottish. If we only focus on the Scottish context we run the risk of reaching the conclusion that all of Hume's thinking came out of nowhere.

Now, to set Hume in the proper European context is an undertaking that would require many different perspectives, most importantly perhaps political economy. This is not my objective here. My paper will concentrate on one important historical question

that illuminates Hume's position in eighteenth-century Scotland: why he was not first accepted by the moderate literati and why he never got a professorship, even when he applied for it, not once but twice.[1]

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300 years since David Hume's birth; more or less two hundred years from Dugald Stewart's main writings; 111 years ago William Robert Scott introduced the term Scottish Enlightenment; and about half a century since Hugh-Trevor Roper, Duncan Forbes, J.G.A. Pocock and others made their mark at the beginning of the exponential growth of writings on David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment.[2] David Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment sounds like an exhausted topic.

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[1] This paper is part of a project to write a longer chapter together with James A. Harris on Hume in the Scottish context. Particularly for historical facts, I am indebted to earlier accounts of the professorship episodes, especially to M.A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the infidel*, Lancaster University Publications Office, 1995; Roger Emerson, 'The "affair" at Edinburgh and the "project" at Glasgow', in *Hume and Hume's connexions*, M.A. Steward and J.P. Wright (eds.), Edinburgh University Press, 1994, pp. 1–22 and Richard Sher, 'Professors of virtue', in *Studies in the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, M.A. Stewart (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 87–126. As a preliminary remark, it should also be noted that my understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment in general has been shaped most by reading John Robertson's works.

[2] About the development of the concept of the Scottish Enlightenment, see John Robertson, *The case for the enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 1–28 and the works cited there; Robertson, 'The Scottish contribution to the Enlightenment', in *The Scottish Enlightenment: essays in reinterpretation*, Paul Wood (ed.), University of Rochester Press, 2000, pp. 37–62; Colin Kidd, 'Lord Dacre and the Politics of the Scottish Enlightenment', *Scottish Historical Review* 84, 2005, pp. 202–220 and Robertson, 'Hugh Trevor-Roper, Intellectual History and 'The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment", *English Historical Review*, 124, 2009, pp. 1–33.

Yet, I do not think that we have a balanced account of Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment, at least for three connected reasons. First, there exists a trend to overemphasise the role of religion and Hume's supposed atheism and the relevance of atheism in the eighteenth century in general. Second, the question of religion has been given too much emphasis when discussing the question of Hume and professorships, which is an important issue regarding Scottish Enlightenment, but at the same time has been blown out of proportion. Meanwhile, a crucial context, I will suggest, that can provide a logical explanation of this episode that ended in Hume not getting a chair as a professor either in Edinburgh or Glasgow has been underestimated.

Let's begin by defining Scottish Enlightenment. I think that to understand the movement that can be called Scottish Enlightenment, we are best off following, in a traditional way, William Scott and others, who put an emphasis on the not-so-Scottish Francis Hutcheson and particularly what he represented (Whig, liberal-minded, moderate Presbyterian, staunch moralist and particularly inspired by Shaftesbury's Stoicism). I believe we benefit if we accept as a description of Scottish Enlightenment, at least in part, Richard Sher's definition that it concerns 'the culture of the literati of eighteenth-century Scotland'.[3]

Now, this kind of definition is obviously a contested issue. Not all scholars, Paul Wood leading the way, see Scottish Enlightenment captured in the idea of Hutchesonian style of moral preaching at the University or that it is only Glasgow and Edinburgh that matter.[4] We should also emphasise that natural sciences played an important role in moral philosophy in Aberdeen as well. I do not see these as mutually exclusive ideas. At the same time, I believe

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[3] Richard Sher, in *Church and university in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press, 1985.
[4] Cf. Paul Wood, 'Natural history of man in the Scottish Enlightenment', *History of Science*, 1989, 27, pp. 89–123.

that in order to understand the actual movement in eighteenth-century Scotland, we gain much by keeping certain Hutchesonian ideals in our focus.

As I see Scottish Enlightenment, the heart of it concerns progress, but not just any progress, but the progress of humanity. I take it that we may use Hutcheson as a mediator of this line of thought, especially when we see this influence widely, crossing the borders of authors who did not agree whether moral approbation is founded on reason or sense, meaning that Turnbull of Aberdeen and Hutcheson of Glasgow are on the same page about progress of humanity but disagree about the role of reason. This progress of humanity is a particularly Scottish feature, exemplified in Adams Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It grows out of Shaftesbury, it has the particular flavour of going against old Calvinist views but it is not irreligious and it has a practical dimension. In this sense, I see people like David Dalrymple at the centre of Scottish Enlightenment with their concrete improvement schemes in highlands (to which Hume never engaged). Although not necessarily as irreligious as some claim, Hume does not really fit in the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment in this sense whereas Adam Smith does.

Stoic "Warmth in the cause of virtue"

What I find as a defining feature of the culture of the moderate literati (as some others before me) is a tendency towards Stoic principles that have a Shaftesburyan origin. This Shaftesburyan origin needs to be emphasised because it explains how characters like George Turnbull and others are part of the movement and we do not have to underline Hutcheson's originality, but can use him as an epitome and influential catalyst.

If we look at the crucial idea of "Warmth in the cause of virtue", this has been said to be a foundational difference between

Hutcheson and Hume. I agree, but we should not so much under-
stand this in terms of the analogy between an anatomist and painter
as Hume suggests, but as a direct reference in Hutcheson's part to
a system of Stoic fellow-feeling framed as opposite to the so-
called selfish school. "Warmth in the cause of virtue" is an expres-
sion used in early eighteenth-century texts directly in this sense,
quoting from ancient authors and Stoics in particular. There might
seem to be a great gap between Turnbull and Hutcheson because
Turnbull wants to ground virtue in reason instead of a sentimental-
ist approach and Turnbull has a more elaborate "Humean" project
in mind. But in their Stoic aspirations they are battling for a com-
mon cause, warmth and virtue.

Against this background, if we compare Turnbull to Hume,
judging by method it would seem that they would be on the same
side, but this question has little relevance to the question of
Hume's relationship to Scottish Enlightenment — unlike the ques-
tion of "Warmth in the cause of virtue". We need to keep in mind
that the anatomist and painter analogy is Hume's own solution to a
problem in his philosophy detected by Hutcheson. To put this
problem in terms of metaphysical inquiry following an experimen-
tal method is to talk about a different thing, dodging the bullet.

As I see it, although many authors have acknowledged and writ-
ten about the foundational strife between Hume and Hutcheson,
the actual problem between them has not been clearly articulated.
Things like Hutcheson's apparent turning against Hume remain a
great paradox, if we believe what scholars like David Fate Norton
and many others still maintain about their relationship. I believe
that Hutcheson's opposition to Hume regarding the Edinburgh
chair is the logical outcome of their personal history. There is sim-
ply no way of clarifying the dispute by explaining how Hume
might have fitted in Hutcheson's scheme with a reference to the
philosophical method or claiming that Hume's position should be
understood in terms of philosophical communication towards a

larger public and not just moral preaching from the pulpit. To put it bluntly, I think that James Moore has been correct all along emphasizing the unbridgeable gap between Hutcheson and Hume.[5]

Calvinist orthodoxy, atheism and Mandeville

It is nowadays understood that Scottish Enlightenment was not irreligious and sought to reconcile, for example, sceptical tendencies in philosophy with natural religion.[6] However, and quite bizarrely, when assessing David Hume's position and relationship with the culture of the moderate literati in recent literature, the theological controversy has become *the* issue. What I want to say is that even if Hume had for a time espoused deism that had attained local notoriety in the Borders in the 1730s through the activity of William Dudgeon or someone else, we should not perhaps make too much of this.[7]

If we take the famous case of Thomas Aikenshead and his regrettable execution in 1696, what we need to remember is that he participated in dangerous biblical exegetics of proving for example that main parts of the words of Moses were in fact of much later date, fables scribed by a man named Ezra. Now this kind of biblical exegetics was precisely what the famous seventeenth-century sceptics Hobbes and Spinoza were practising as part of their projects to advance the cause of science. Because of this meddling with history of the book and the origin of Bible, it is not surprising

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[5] James Moore, 'Hume and Hutcheson', in *Hume and Hume's connexions*, M.A. Stewart and John P. Wright (eds.), Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, pp. 23–57.

[6] Cf. James A. Harris, 'Answering Bayle's question: religious belief in the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment', in *Oxford Studies in early modern philosophy*, Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler (eds.), 2003, pp. 229–254.

[7] The one making the contrasting standout-case for Hume's atheism is Paul Russell in his *The riddle of Hume's Treatise. Skepticism, naturalism, and irreligion.* Oxford University Press, 2008.

that it became also customary to start calling anyone who took a more sceptical perspective on moral subjects an atheist for what could be detected as Hobbesian or Spinozist tenets.

Compared to Hobbes and Spinoza, a contrasted eighteenth-century case is Bernard Mandeville. When Mandeville's provocative *Fable of the bees* became notorious with the second edition of 1723, it immediately started attracting wide accusations of atheism just like Spinoza and Hobbes. But this supposed atheism is not that evident, at least not from Mandeville's sceptical perspective on moral subjects. In fact, later when some more enlightened authors criticised certain aspects of Mandeville's thinking, they at the same time pointed out that there is nothing against religion as such in Mandeville, only against clerics. Whether there is some kind of "hidden" deism or atheism looming somewhere deep down is not the issue. It is important that Mandeville did not practice biblical exegetics in the sense of Spinoza and Hobbes. And when we take everything into consideration, it is not all that evident that he stands very far from the deistic position on religious issues adopted by Shaftesbury, for example.

What is often misunderstood about Mandeville is also that he is not a simple-minded egotist as people who have not read him claim. For example, Mandeville is most certainly one of those who put sentiments before reason (in a way quite unlike Hobbes), and it is no surprise that in the introduction to his *Treatise* Hume names Mandeville as his forerunner right along Hutcheson and Butler. Mandeville and Hutcheson might be two opposites, but they are opposites within the same school; the school that grounds morals on sentiments and not reason (in their own ways of course). It is Mandeville's proximity to (instead of distance from) Hutcheson, I believe, that upset Hutcheson so that, if the words of a student are to be trusted, Hutcheson could never begin to preach from his pulpit without first having a go at Mandeville.

Hume and Mandeville

In the *Treatise* there is no exercise of biblical exegetics or even an essay on miracles, but there is a commitment to Bernard Mandeville's later works, one inappropriately titled *Part II* of the *Fable* and another called *Enquiry into the origin of honour* published respectively in 1728 and 1732, a vital period for Hume's intellectual development.

A crucial feature of Hume's commitment is that Hume adopted Mandeville's theory of politeness that stood in square opposition to the idea of politeness preached by Shaftesbury, Addison, Hutcheson and others. Now, it is an old thesis that politeness was an important part of Scottish Enlightenment, but I think it is a valid one and explains something about the nature of the movement.[8] This kind of Shaftesburyan politeness was the aspiration of the moderate literati to soften manners, battle orthodox Calvinism and still keep with the tradition of virtue and even classical republicanism. Politeness that did not cross the boundaries of effeminacy, and enthusiasm was part of even the Presbyterian clergy's program of Enlightenment.

Hume stood on the opposite corner because his politeness was the Mandevillean politeness that was partially outlined as an attack on Shaftesbury and had nothing to do with republican ideas. Politeness for Hume was an external custom, a device that directed behaviour but did not flow from within. For Hume the purpose of politeness, just as justice, was to enable civil society to function. Hume adopting Mandeville's principles and arguing against the Shaftesburyan position also mark a point when a young man turns

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[8] Cf. Nicholas Phillipson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment', in *The enlightenment in national context*, Roy Porter and Michael Teich (eds.), Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 19–40 and Phillipson, *Hume*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989. Although my view of Hume is in contrast with Phillipson's interpretation, yet, the relevance of Addisonian politeness in the Scottish Enlightenment is a point that he makes brilliantly.

against the idol of his youth. At the same time, we need to remember that Hume's understanding of politeness as a moral institution was shaped by Europe-wide ideal of court civility.[9] The important part is that if we follow the formation of Hume's thinking it is really quite striking how well it fits into this interpretive model.[10]

When publishing the book 3 of the *Treatise*, Hume stepped into the middle of a long standing conflict that was larger than just Hutcheson and Mandeville. Hutcheson was not only battling against selfish school, psychological egoism or plain atheism. Something more important was at stake. Mandeville had challenged the whole Stoic foundation of the ideology of moderate literati from a perspective that arose from within this tradition in one sense. He had ridiculed the Shaftesburyan ideals and their foundational elements. Hume committed himself to this same scheme. Of course, Hume did what he thinks would smooth his way by denying Mandeville's most outrageous paradoxes. Yet, the commitment is there and it is plain to see if we read the third book of his *Treatise* and his essays. Also visible are for example his later critical comments on Shaftesbury. Hume's struggle with the Edinburgh post should be seen with his earlier commitment to Mandeville in mind.

I believe that the relevance of religion in the Edinburgh affair has been overstated and especially Hume's atheistic leanings. It was not so much that Hume was an actual infidel from the start. But he was a general sceptic on moral and metaphysical subjects whose particular arguments and whole science of man stood in almost direct contrast with the ideology and intellectual basis of moderate literati of eighteenth-century Scotland. His anticlerical remarks are just one part of this general tendency.

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[9] About early-modern court civility, see Markku Peltonen, *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
[10] For a book-length account of this see Mikko Tolonen, *Self-love and self-liking in the moral and political philosophy of Bernard Mandeville and David Hume*, University of Helsinki, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2010.

Hutcheson and Hume

We know that Hutcheson condemned Hume's book 3 in a letter that is now lost. We also know that he probably accused Hume of lacking warmth in the cause of virtue. Hume's own anatomist explanation in his reply was a poor attempt to reconcile. It is important that this antagonism was established within the sentimentalist tradition of morals. And it was not the first time that Hutcheson was getting into this kind of controversy because he had just finished his public row with Mandeville. After reading Book 3 of the *Treatise*, I believe it was not difficult for Hutcheson to detect that what he had in his hands was a disciple of Mandeville.

One thing that Hutcheson learned from publically disputing Mandeville was that an open confrontation is a heavy burden. After attacking Mandeville in print, Mandeville had fought back, ridiculing for example Hutcheson's moral calculations. In Hume's case a change of strategy was in order and Hume was simply shut out by Hutcheson with a stern hand and as little confrontation as possible and minimal public noise.

When we turn to the affair in Edinburgh, I think it is obvious why Hume was not on Hutcheson's list of people that he prefers. Hutcheson provided the names of seven candidates, none of them called David Hume, which to me seems quite telling.[11] Also, I don't think that there were clear theological reasons why Hume could not have been seen to stand against Calvinist orthodoxy and in this way advancing the interests of moderate literati. I agree that one consistent claim that Hume made against the Hutchesonian party was that natural religion cannot be based upon design argument, but I think too much has been made of this point.

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[11] Although William Wishart as a principal at Edinburgh obviously played an important role in the Edinburgh affair, Hutcheson's influence was great, cf. Stewart, *Kirk and the infidel*.

Hume's whole science of man and its more practical conclusions stood in almost direct contrast with the ideals of the Enlightenment movement in Edinburgh. Politically he might be labelled even a Hannoverian Whig because he defended the (or any) establishment, but that was how far the political agreement went. Hume had constructed from his science of man a sceptical system based on hierarchy, restrictions and external politeness. His system had remarkably little room for benevolent sympathy as the more evident exponents of the Scottish Enlightenment emphasised. To me it seems that once Hutcheson got involved, Hume was never going to get the post in Edinburgh, and most likely there was no change in Hutcheson's attitude towards Hume (from friendship to enmity), even when Hume in one of his often quoted letters puts it this way.

After the Edinburgh affair, Hume reacted in his *Philosophical essays* against this Stoic view and also engaged more clearly in theological disputes.[12] These professorship affairs fall in a period when Hume's friends (Kames in particular) were pushing him towards some proper job. Also the question of different tutorships, his military expeditions and the post that Hume finally got for a very short period at Advocate's Library should be considered together with his aspirations for a university career. Hume's life plan was to write and to hold a proper job and the duties of a professor was not his first priority. At least at the time of the Glasgow chair, I really think that Hume most likely did not care whether he got the post to instruct very young boys or not. His heart was not set for this duty and the end result was that he did not get a professorship, which did not seem to bother him too much. He was about to follow his leading passion and become famous with his *History of England.*

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[12] M.A. Stewart, 'Two species of philosophy: The historical significance of the first *Enquiry*', in *Reading Hume on human understanding*, Peter Millican (ed.), Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 67–95.

Conclusion

The question of professorships is one crucial historical episode in Hume's life that tells us quite a bit about his relationship to the Scottish Enlightenment. To analyse this connection properly we would also need to consider the further development: Hume's conception of the progress of civil society and perhaps also whether his emphasis on fellow-feeling in the second *Enquiry* means that he was trying to attach his philosophy more clearly within the main tenet of the Scottish Enlightenment. We would also need to compare Hume's understanding of the progress of civil society in his *History* to other history-writing of the Scottish Enlightenment. But most of all, we would need to engage with the crucial question of political economy. This will be a topic for another time.

In order to conclude, let me remark that it certainly seems that Hume was not particularly Scottish (in contrast to more distanced European perspective) at any point of his career, although he naturally had Scottish friends and was engaged with them as people normally tend to do. The Scottish context was one intellectual context for Hume but not a defining one.