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THE PHILLIPSONIAN ENLIGHTENMENT

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A founding editor of *Modern Intellectual History* (*MIH*), an acclaimed biographer of Adam Smith and a prolific essayist on all aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment, from its origins to its aftermath, Nicholas Phillipson needs little introduction to the readers of this journal. However, Phillipson's recent retirement from his editorial duties on *MIH* provides a suitable moment to celebrate one of the pioneers in our field. When the current editors set out to commission a historiographical overview of Phillipson's *oeuvre* and career, I was honoured to be asked and delighted to accept.

Phillipson did not coin the term "Scottish Enlightenment", nor was he involved in its controverted recoinage in the 1960s; nevertheless nobody did more to give it a wider currency, both in Europe and in North America. The term's original begetter in 1900 was the Scottish economist and historian W. R. Scott,[1] but at this stage it failed to catch on. It was rescued from oblivion—independently, it seems—by two antagonistic scholars, Duncan Forbes of Cambridge,[2] who ran an influential special subject at that university on "Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment", and by Hugh Trevor-Roper of Oxford, who gave a paper entitled "The Scottish Enlightenment" to the International Congress of the Enlightenment in 1967.[3] Yet it was Phillipson—educated largely at Cambridge, where he took Forbes's special subject,[4] but closer, perhaps, to Trevor-Roper in cavalier *esprit*—who, in a series of innovative and richly erudite pieces, not only popularized the Scottish Enlightenment as a fashionable field of academic study,

1 W. R. Scott, *Francis Hutcheson* (Cambridge, 1900).

2 D. Forbes, "Scientific Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar", *Cambridge Journal*, 7 (1954), 643–70.

3 H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 58 (1967), 1635–58.

4 J. Robertson, "The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment", in P. Wood, ed., *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester, NY, 2000), 37–62, 37. Phillipson took Forbes's special subject in a cohort of students which included Quentin Skinner and John Dunn.

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but also mapped its parameters and established its central preoccupations, lines of interpretation and matters of debate.

Before Phillipson, Scottish intellectual history was a desert of comparative academic neglect, whose emptiness was relieved only by a few unconnected oases of attention and activity. There was, of course, an academic cult of Adam Smith, not least among the economists in Smith's alma mater, the University of Glasgow, where he had also held the chair of moral philosophy. W. R. Scott had been part of this tradition, which was continued by the likes of A. L. Macfie and Andrew Skinner.[5] H. W. Meikle had written a short pamphlet on the intellectual culture of late seventeenth-century Scotland.[6] Naturally, David Hume attracted the notice of philosophers,[7] and there was some interest from scholars concerned with the eighteenth-century Scottish provenance of the modern social sciences.[8] In addition, Marxists were understandably intrigued by what appeared to be materialist understandings of history which pre-dated Marx himself.[9] However, biography dominated, along with narrowly conceived—and characteristically Whiggish—searches within various disciplines for their academic origins.

There were, nevertheless, some stimulating exceptions to these trends; imaginative essays and striking monographs whose insights were to inspire, tantalize and provoke the young Phillipson. The literary scholar David Daiches had explored eighteenth-century Scotland's curiously bifurcated response to the linguistic challenges thrown up by Union and Anglicization in *The Paradox of Scottish Culture*. The tension between native tradition and metropolitan politeness—detached from Daiches's overriding concern with language—would resurface as a significant theme in Phillipson's work. Davis McElroy had also completed a comprehensive study of the various clubs and societies of the Scottish Enlightenment.[10] These clubs were to play a central role in Phillipson's

5 A. L. Macfie, *The Individual in Society: Papers on Adam Smith* (London, 1967); A. Skinner, "Economics and History: The Scottish Enlightenment", *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 12 (1965), 1–22; Skinner, "Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith", *Political Studies*, 14 (1967), 32–48.

6 H. W. Meikle, *Some Aspects of Later Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Glasgow, 1947).

7 E. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford, 1970).

8 G. Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, 1945); W. C. Lehmann, *Adam Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Sociology* (New York, 1930); Lehmann, *John Millar of Glasgow, 1735–1801: His Life and Thought and His Contribution to Sociological Analysis* (Cambridge, 1960).

9 R. Pascal, "Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century", *Modern Quarterly*, 1 (1938), 167–79; R. Meek, "The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology", in J. Saville, ed., *Democracy and the Labour movement* (London, 1954), 84–102.

10 David Daiches, *The Paradox of Scottish Culture* (London, 1964). D. McElroy, *Scotland's Age of Improvement* (Pullman, WA, 1969).

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interpretation of eighteenth-century Scottish history. In the aftermath of the Union and the loss of Scotland's parliament, contended Phillipson, clubs devoted to agrarian improvement and, later, intellectual discussion were to fulfil a kind of "para-political" or "para-parliamentary" function, as surrogates for a lost legislature.[11]

From the mid-1950s, moreover, came the first stirrings of a more integrated history of the wider social and political facets of intellectual life, with the appearance in the *William and Mary Quarterly* of "England's cultural provinces: Scotland and America", by John Clive and Bernard Bailyn.[12] Clive and Bailyn traced the creativity of eighteenth-century Scotland and Britain's North American colonies to a common source, namely the tensions generated within these self-consciously provincial cultures between native tradition and cosmopolitan sophistication. Ironically, however, "a sense of inferiority pervaded the culture of the two regions". Stigma—ultimately—was a spur to achievement. Phillipson eagerly adopted the central thrust of this argument, but elaborated it more fully and subtly recast certain elements in Bailyn and Clive's notion of provincialism. For Phillipson, provincialism was not a pejorative term, the eighteenth-century province being, indeed, the very antithesis of a backwater. Provincialism on the Phillipson model was founded to a lesser degree on the anxious and reactive phenomenon of star-struck provinciality confronted with metropolitan standards; rather Phillipsonian provincialism was a more proactive ethos than that described by Bailyn and Clive, a matter of self-confident agency as much as startled encounter.[13] Local elites, as Phillipson understood them, acted as "the legitimate guardians of provincial liberties and as agents of improvement who would modernize their province by means of energetic, intelligent and public-spirited leadership".[14] "Assimilation" to the advanced standards of modernity served as a "stimulus" rather than a "threat", with "English civilization", in the case

[11] Phillipson , "James Beattie and the Defence of Common Sense", in B. Fabian, ed., *Festschrift für Rainer Gruenter* (Heidelberg, 1978), 145–54, 146; Phillipson , "Hume as Moralist: A Social Historian's Perspective", in S. C. Brown, ed., *Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (Brighton, 1979), 140–61, 144; Phillipson , "The Scottish Enlightenment", in R. Porter and M. Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, 1981), 19–40, 38; Phillipson, "Adam Smith as Civic Moralist", in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), 179–202, 201.

[12] J. Clive and B. Bailyn, "England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America", *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 11 (1954), 200–13.

[13] Phillipson, "Culture and Society in the Eighteenth-Century Province: The Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment", in L. Stone, ed., *The University in Society*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1975), 2: 407–48, 410 n.

[14] Phillipson, "Towards a Definition of the Scottish Enlightenment", in P. Fritz and D. Williams, eds., *City and Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Toronto, 1973), 125–47, 127.

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of North Britain, providing "new and exciting categories in which to think about the problems of progress".[15] Indeed, far from Scotland and the American colonies being exceptional in their ambiguous relationships with England, provincialism was, according to Phillipson, one of the Enlightenment's "most characteristic manifestations".[16] Edinburgh belonged not only with Boston and Philadelphia as a crucible of Enlightenment, but with similar provincial centres such as Bordeaux, Nancy, Dijon, Dublin and Naples. In the age of Enlightenment, Phillipson contended, provincial cities constituted the cutting-edge scene of creativity, not only entrepôts for the exchange of ideas, but also sites where metropolitan fashion and staid local traditions might come into fruitful juxtaposition. Core–periphery relationships were not simply a matter of clashing identities, where the expected deference to the metropolis produced a localist reaction. Rather, the interaction of core and periphery, especially in the civic cores of peripheries, such as Edinburgh, a local capital which mediated between London and the profound depths of rural Scotland, generated refreshing insights into the study of society and an especially keen perception of the relationship between continuity and innovation. The provincial capital—unlike the centre of imperial government itself—had one foot on the ladder of modernity, the other in the rut of rural custom. Paradoxically, perhaps, the capacity to navigate between novelty and tradition and, in turn, to theorize the processes of social change, was acquired more easily by the citizen of the Janus-faced provincial city than by his counterparts at the very epicentre of innovation.[17]

Nevertheless, it was one particular aspect of Scottish provinciality which provided Phillipson's point of departure as a historian: the ongoing existence of a separate Scots legal system within the British union-state created in 1707. Indeed, it is worth noting that Phillipson's doctoral research did not directly confront the Scottish Enlightenment as a central historical problem, but engaged only with some of its wider effects. Phillipson's thesis, "The Scottish Whigs and the Reform of the Court of Session, 1785–1830" (Cambridge PhD, 1967),[18] was notionally supervised—telescopically as it were—from lofty faux-patrician heights by Professor J. H. Plumb. Nevertheless, Phillipson did inherit from Plumb's finest work, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675–1725* (London, 1967), a

[15] N. Phillipson, "Scottish Public Opinion and the Union in the age of the Association", in R. Phillipson and R. Mitchison, eds., *Scotland in the Age of Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1970), 125–47, 142–3.

[16] Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 407.

[17] Cf. Phillipson, "Smith as Civic Moralist".

[18] This pioneering thesis was eventually published—unrevised—under the auspices of Scotland's learned society in the field of legal history: Phillipson, *The Scottish Whigs and the Reform of the Court of Session 1785–1830*, Stair Society 37 (Edinburgh, 1990).

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concern with the mechanics by which the hostile partisanship of Whigs and Tories that had so disfigured later Stuart politics was transmuted into the self-interested, consolidated oligarchy of moderate Old Corps Whiggery.[19] Was a similarly miraculous alchemy at work in eighteenth-century Scotland? Although Scotland's partisan divisions—compounded by ecclesiastical differences between Episcopalians and Presbyterians, and by the persistence of armed Jacobitism until 1746—were even more pronounced than those in England, and the chronology of partisan detumescence more protracted, there were nevertheless significant parallels to be explored. However indirectly or unconsciously, Plumb's functionalist analysis of early eighteenth-century England helped to prompt Phillipson's turn towards a historical sociology of eighteenth-century Scottish culture. In addition, the focus of his doctoral work on the jurists of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland seems—certainly from the evidence of some of his early essays[20]—to have directed Phillipson's attention towards the importance of corporate and professional interests, and ultimately led him to a novel kind of intellectual history which eschewed the individual in preference for the collective.

However, it was Phillipson's move in 1965 to the University of Edinburgh which seems most decisively to have formed the historian of the Scottish Enlightenment.[21] Significantly, Phillipson took up a lectureship in the Department of History, not in the then separate Department of Scottish

[19] Cf. Phillipson, "Propriety, Property and Prudence: David Hume and the Defence of the Revolution", in Phillipson and Q. R. D. Skinner, eds., *Political Discourse in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1993), 302–20.

[20] Phillipson, "Lawyers, Landowners and the Civic Leadership of Post-Union Scotland", *Juridical Review*, New Series, 21 (1976), 97–120; Phillipson, "The Social Structure of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland, 1661–1840", in A. Harding, ed., *Law-Making and Law-Makers in British History* (London, Royal Historical Society, 1980), 145–56.

[21] There were, of course, other influences, not least the social fact of being simultaneously welcome insider and keenly observant outsider in Scottish life. Although English by background, Phillipson had been largely educated in Aberdeen, at Aberdeen Grammar School and then Aberdeen University, before going to Cambridge. Phillipson's father, Andrew Phillipson (1910–77), an eminent veterinary physiologist and leading authority on ruminants, had been appointed from Cambridge to head the Department of Physiology at the Rowett Research Institute at Aberdeen. For the ODNB article on Andrew Phillipson, see www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31545. Phillipson's first undergraduate degree at Aberdeen (1954–8) was in history and politics; here he came under the influence of a pioneering figure in the study of political and legal thought, the late J. H. "Jimmy" Burns (1921–2012). Phillipson also had a further period as an undergraduate at St Catharine's College, Cambridge (1958–60), and undertook National Service in the Royal Air Force (1960–62) flying Chipmunks—akin, perhaps, to Gibbon's time in the Hampshire militia—before embarking on doctoral research.

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History, which was an Adullamite cave of cantankerous reaction, home—oddly enough—not only to a farouche and rebarbative nationalism but also to a prickly Celtophobe patriotism rooted in ecclesiastical prejudice. Phillipson's Edinburgh was very different, and suggested an alternative approach to the Scottish past which allowed the young historian to venture beyond the entrenched canonical narratives of romantic nationhood and denominational grudge. Indeed, Phillipson was exposed both within the university and in the city at large to ongoing tensions in Edinburgh life between the cosmopolitan aspirations of what had once been a capital of Enlightenment and the blinkered solipsism of its parochial subcultures. Moreover, Phillipson perceived that it was still possible—notwithstanding Edinburgh's long retreat into provincialism—to live the civic life of an Athenian of the North. The lawyers—both the Faculty of Advocates and the Society of Writers to the Signet—remained a glue of the higher sociability, and the concentration of civil servants, curators, librarians and academics within such a compact city gave life in the cultural institutions of Edinburgh a diverse richness as well as an easy intimacy. The Edinburgh Festival further reinforced these tendencies; though an annual event at the close of the summer which brought the beau monde of the arts scene to the city, the festival was underpinned by year-round administration and planning. Phillipson was both a devotee of the arts and a good citizen, active in its causes and committees. It is not the intention here to belittle in any way the historical imagination and subtle ingenuity of Phillipson's research on the Scottish Enlightenment, but it seems far from irrelevant to note that insight was underpinned by lived experience. Life in present-day Edinburgh opened a window onto the past. It highlighted the importance of conversation in the history of ideas—not simply the metaphorical conversations of philosophers across the centuries, but the literal chatter of the salon, the tea table and the assembly room. It also brought the young lecturer into contact with the social whirl of professional, political and cultural elites, worlds that other junior academics seldom encounter. Indeed, Phillipson stands out among the ranks of major intellectual historians for his keen sensitivity to the subtly shifting patterns in the *ronde* of elites.

City life, and especially the amplitude of life in eighteenth-century Edinburgh, became a recurring—and sometimes controversial—leitmotif in Phillipson's work. His fascination with the creative ambivalence of the eighteenth-century provincial capital, and his acquired feel for the thick textures of Edinburgh life, provide some explanation for Phillipson's most controversial statement, that "there is an important sense in which the history of the Scottish Enlightenment *is* the history of Edinburgh".[22] Certainly in late twentieth-century

[22] Phillipson, "Definition", 125.

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Scotland neither Glasgow nor Aberdeen provided anything like the rich, inter-professional connections of Edinburgh "society". Would eighteenth-century Aberdeen or Glasgow really have been any different from their modern versions, notwithstanding the claims—advanced in response to Phillipson's provocation—by historians who insisted, reasonably enough, on the distinctive intellectual configurations of an Aberdonian Enlightenment and a Glasgow Enlightenment?[23] In spite of the cavils of his critics, Phillipson was never blind to the significance of Glasgow and Aberdeen in the unfolding of the Scottish Enlightenment. He recognized the central importance of Glasgow in the first stages of the Scottish Enlightenment. Early eighteenth-century Glasgow—the University of Francis Hutcheson—had, in a "disastrous" and deeply flawed "experiment", nurtured a new and dangerous strain of moral philosophy. In the long run, it was Glaswegian ethics which—by way of an emerging concern with utility and propriety—"opened the door to the devastating scepticism of Hume and the equally disturbing materialism of Adam Smith."[24] Moreover, that door was then to be shut later in the century, as Phillipson noted, by the proponents of the Common Sense school of philosophy, which took its rise in Aberdeen. The philosophy of Common Sense constituted the insurgency of an unfashionable periphery, its proponents hard-headed *frondeurs* in revolt against the faddish delusions which had beset the provincial capital.[25] The Aberdonian philosophy was in due course transplanted to Glasgow and Edinburgh, a case of the periphery colonizing the centre. Phillipson's notorious epigram notwithstanding, Scotland's other university cities played significant roles in his interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Indeed, even to talk of "the Scottish Enlightenment" as a single phenomenon or cultural movement is also, in certain respects, to misrepresent Phillipson, for he has been a staunch enemy of such reification. In recent decades, alas, the very concept of the "Scottish Enlightenment" has become a stale historiographical commonplace, and as much an obstacle as an aid to historical investigation. Too often historical clichés—though a sure sign of their success within the academy—tend to operate as a substitute for analysis, the convenient shorthand and the established paradigm conspiring to blunt the critical faculties. While Phillipson might be *misread* in this fashion, his version of the Scottish Enlightenment was

[23] J. Carter and J. Pittock, eds., *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment* (Aberdeen, 1987); A. Hook and R. Sher, eds., *The Glasgow Enlightenment* (East Linton, 1995).

[24] Phillipson, "The Pursuit of Virtue in Scottish University Education: Dugald Stewart and Scottish Moral Philosophy in the Enlightenment", in Phillipson, ed., *Universities, Society and the Future* (Edinburgh, 1983), 82–101, 92.

[25] Phillipson, "Definition", 145.

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always a problematized and unstable category, never a comfortable refuge from the nakedness of cold historical judgement.

In an influential series of articles Phillipson parsed the Scottish Enlightenment as a series of subtly but very significantly different phases in the intellectual and cultural history of eighteenth-century Scotland. Phillipson begins his account of the rise of the Scottish Enlightenment with the 1690s, "one of the grimmest decades in modern Scottish history".[26] Notwithstanding the Revolution of 1689–90—itself bloodier and less "glorious" in Scotland than south of the border—the 1690s witnessed high political turbulence, devastating famine and the unmitigated failure of the Scottish colonial project at Darien in Panama. Failure on this scale produced among Scotland's pamphleteers both visionary intimations of possible panaceas and an illusionless perspicacity on matters of—what would become—political economy. Phillipson was keenly alert to the significance of the 1690s as a vital turning point in Scottish history, a moment of intense trauma from which the Union of 1707 ensued as a consequence, rather than the Union being—as is so often and complacently assumed—the turning point itself. After all, for contemporaries the larger issue was not the Union per se, but the crisis of Scotland's economy, which if it remained unresolved threatened Scots' notional "independence", regardless of Union. As Phillipson noted, "both the supporters and the opponents of the proposed incorporating union agreed in their diagnosis of Scotland's present condition."[27] Scotland's elite had become particularly self-conscious of its custodial role in Scottish society during the troubled century of absentee monarchy in London which followed the Union of the Crowns in 1603.

The first phase of the Scottish Enlightenment proper focused on the virtuous improvement of a quondam-kingdom-turned-province. Despite the amalgamation of the Scottish Estates into the Westminster Parliament, the Scottish elite, though deprived of its formal constitutional duties, became more obsessed than ever with its wider responsibility to Scottish society. Henceforth, Scotland returned only sixteen representative peers to the British House of Lords and forty-five MPs to the Commons, thirty of whom represented the shires. Thus only a portion of the traditional landed elite had a clear political role, while other factors also contributed to the fragmentation of Scotland's former ruling oligarchy. Notwithstanding the lure of the imperial capital, a substantial "rump"[28] remained in Edinburgh, for much of the Scottish elite was, frankly, too poor to lead its social life in London. As a result, Edinburgh became, in Phillipson's words, "a city of para-parliamentary clubs and societies of patriotically-minded men devoted to the regeneration of the manners of a fallen nation and improving

[26] Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 416.

[27] Ibid., 417.

[28] Ibid., 437.

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the virtue of its citizens."[29] Agrarian improvement provided a new arena for a less politicized kind of social leadership. The Honorable Society of Improvers, established in 1723, which Phillipson describes as "a modern-minded elite whose duty it was to regenerate a backward society",[30] was patronized by the aristocracy and became a national forum for the inculcation of good practice and the encouragement of innovation. Moreover, just as other provinces in the eighteenth-century British world tried to emulate the sophistication of Addison and Steele's *Spectator*, whether by way of imitative magazines or re-creations of the Spectator Club, so too, according to Phillipson, the Scots, from Allan Ramsay's Easy Club of 1712 and the *Tatler of the North* by the pseudonymous "Donald McStaff", to Hume's resort in the 1740s to the Spectatorial essay as the vehicle for the dissemination of "civic morality",[31] participated enthusiastically in the cult of "Addisonian politeness",[32] which, as Phillipson showed, was also to play such an important role in the eighteenth-century British refurbishment of the Revolution principles of 1688–9.[33] This first phase of Enlightenment also saw the introduction of Hutchesonian ethics at Glasgow and the reception in Scotland—particularly by the philosophers of the Rankenian club—of Berkeley's disturbing metaphysics.

The second phase of the Scottish Enlightenment introduced a subtle twist into what had been up to now a straightforward saga of provincial "virtue". The Society of Improvers did not survive the Jacobite rebellion of 1745–6 and fell into abeyance. Significantly, there was no attempt to reconstitute it as a national body, though various local agricultural societies flourished in different parts of Scotland. Instead, the aristocracy, in a decidedly curious arrangement, patronized and became "parasite"[34] upon the Select Society, an Edinburgh discussion group founded by the leading literati of the city in 1754. Remarkably for a pre-democratic age, even in a notionally Calvinist (or, increasingly, post-Calvinist) society, the aristocracy, its younger members most especially, appeared to defer to the leadership of the intelligentsia. North Britain had become—to a remarkable extent—as Phillipson notes, a genuine "republic of letters".[35]

29 Phillipson, "Hume as Moralist", 144.

30 Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 437.

31 Phillipson, "Hume as Moralist", 140.

32 Phillipson, "Politics, Politeness and the Anglicisation of Early Eighteenth-Century Scottish Culture", in R. A. Mason, ed., *Scotland and England 1286–1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 226–46.

33 Phillipson, "Propriety"; Phillipson, "Politeness and Politics in the Reigns of Anne and the Early Hanoverians", in J. G. A. Pocock (ed), *The Varieties of Political Thought 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1993), 211–45.

34 Phillipson, "Definition", 138; Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 447.

35 Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 448.

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The old landed elite appeared to have abdicated its leadership role within this substantially depoliticized province to an emergent philosophical caste recruited from the ranks not only of the professoriate and men of letters, but also from the Kirk, the Bar and the judiciary. Bizarrely, Scotland's acreless literati had become "the custodians of the values of a pre-Union oligarchy".[36] By the mid-eighteenth century, in Phillipson's account, "the collective will to understand [had become] a substitute for the sort of political action from which an earlier generation had derived its identity."[37]

Appropriately, the dominant philosophy of the second phase of the Scottish Enlightenment provided an apologia for aristocratic languor. The active voice of the first phase of the Scottish Enlightenment underwent a significant grammatical shift. The individual was seen now as "a more or less passive creature, dependent upon a changing world for his knowledge".[38] The new ideology which emerged in the middle of the century was subversive of "purposive"[39] action—of the very programme which the Society of Improvers had launched in the 1720s. However, the 1750s and 1760s saw the beginnings of an aristocratic "drift away"[40] from Edinburgh to London, and by the 1770s and 1780s the landed elite—considerably wealthier than in the earlier part of the century—had given up on Edinburgh, except as a staging post between Highland estates and the London season. The new social philosophy of Hume, Smith, Kames and Robertson provided a convenient exeat for members of this itchy-footed Scottish landed elite: "The moral scepticism of Edinburgh could allay their anxieties that they were betraying their country by reassuring them that its welfare depended less on their collective and individual efforts than they had supposed".[41] Henceforth, it seemed to members of a London-oriented landed elite, "the liberties and future welfare of their country lay not in their care but in that of the Invisible Hand".[42] If the individual was merely "a bundle of perceptions, made coherent by a process of association and habit over which his reason and will had little or no control", and if the very forms of society and the very direction and pace of social progress were "determined by mechanisms of which we have little knowledge and over which we have little control", then did not these insights undermine the very rationale of polite improvement, "with its optimistic faith in the improveability

[36] Ibid., 442.
[37] Ibid., 448.
[38] Ibid., 432.
[39] Phillipson, "Beattie", 147.
[40] Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 443.
[41] Phillipson, "Beattie", 148.
[42] Phillipson, "Defintion", 142.

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of man and his environment"?[43] Determinism of this sort displaced the activism of the first half of the eighteenth century.

Nevertheless, the achievements of the golden age of the Scottish Enlightenment appeared to many contemporaries to be financed by a kind of fool's gold. The silver age of the Scottish Enlightenment emerged in reaction to these hollow successes, and with its strikingly different idioms and arguments, was to prove—as it turned out—a far more enduring affair. In particular, as Phillipson argues, Edinburgh's professional bourgeoisie was less languid than Scotland's semi-detached aristocracy. Scepticism and social determinism were

> potentially offensive to the ministers, lawyers, professors and public men whose lives were spent working in distinctively Scottish professions, whose expectations continued to be bound by Scottish horizons and who, quite reasonably, regarded themselves as the new leaders of a society that had lost its traditional, aristocratic elite.[44]

The rise of Common Sense philosophy signalled the final phase of the Scottish Enlightenment and another novel intellectual departure. This involved an enforced detour away from scepticism, materialism and—almost as bad—a determinism which threatened to sap the will and usher in a placid fatalism. Phillipson reconstructed the anxieties felt by the embattled champions of a normative moral philosophy: "The sceptics and materialists had annexed the study of morality to the study of society. They had turned the study of virtue into a study of human adaptability."[45] In reaction to Hume, Dugald Stewart transformed the insights of Common Sense into "a teachable system of philosophy",[46] which was successfully exported to North America and became the dominant force in the anglophone academy throughout the nineteenth century.[47]

The Phillipsonian Enlightenment, it should be obvious by now, was polyphonic rather than plainsung, best explained not in terms of a single dominant melody, but rather as a set of contrapuntal relationships. How far was "civic virtue"—in the cruder misinterpretation of the Phillipson thesis—a perennial element in the ideology of the Scottish Enlightenment, and how far subverted by an emphasis upon propriety? To what extent, indeed, was the supposedly characteristic philosophy of Hume and Smith perceived by the most successful popularizers of the Scottish Enlightenment as a kind of fifth column within the Scottish intellectual tradition? There were fine pickings here for the

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43 Ibid., 136.

44 Phillipson, "Beattie", 148.

45 Phillipson, "Pursuit of Virtue", 97.

46 Ibid., 99.

47 See esp. Phillipson, "The Export of Enlightenment", *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 July 1976, 823–4.

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connoisseur of synecdoche. Which was whole, and which the rotten portion? Alternatively, what was most characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment, its cutting edge or its hidebound epigones? Should the historian of ideas, indeed, listen more attentively to the chorus than to the aria? Surprisingly, too, one wonders why Phillipson privileged the sociological significance of Humean scepticism and the Common Sense reaction it provoked in lieu of their theological implications. Indeed, early in his career, Phillipson remarked on "the infertile condition"[48] of mid-eighteenth-century Scots Presbyterianism, which now seems to understate the achievements of the Moderates in the Kirk. At the time he was if anything hypersensitive to the predicament of the Kirk, torn as it was between latitudinarian and evangelical factions, ill at ease with the Episcopalian tendencies of many landed gentry, and "haunted by not unreasonable fears of the supposedly Erastian designs of a largely English parliament".[49] Nevertheless, the later portion of Phillipson's *oeuvre* exhibits a compelling theological turn, in studies of the ecclesiastical buffetings of early eighteenth-century Revolution culture, and the ingenious role of providentialism in the historical sociology pioneered in Scotland's Moderate Enlightenment.[50]

It is much to Phillipson's credit that, notwithstanding his patient researches on the social context of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hume and Smith are never reduced to mere embodiments of the distinctive culture of eighteenth-century North Britain, their ideas to mere emanations of the spirit of the age and place. Rather, Phillipson—operating against the apparent, but somewhat deceptive, grain of his work—highlights the extraordinary individuality of both Hume and Smith, figures whose strikingly innovative ideas, however deeply rooted in social convention and observation, lie, ultimately, beyond the reach of the mode of explanation generally proffered by the social historian. Nor will off-the-peg psychologizing suffice. In the early stages of his career Phillipson was strongly influenced—not least in his deployment of the concept of "identity"—by the then-fashionable insights of psychohistory pioneered by Erik Erikson,[51] whose claims now seem somewhat forlorn and certainly marginal to academic history.[52] However, not only as a historian, but also in the subtle psychology he brings to his studies of Hume and Smith, Phillipson has long outgrown

[48] Phillpson, "Definition", 147.

[49] Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 424.

[50] Phillipson, "Politeness and Politics"; Phillipson, "Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson", in S. J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), 55–73.

[51] See also Phillipson, "Scott as Story-Teller: An Essay in Psychobiography", in A. S. Bell, ed., *Scott Bicentenary Essays* (Edinburgh and London, 1973), 87–100.

[52] Erikson and his theories are now themselves being contextualized; see L. Friedman, *Identity's Architect: A Biography of Erik H. Erikson* (London, 1999).

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Erikson.[53] While Hume's thought experiments and early mental breakdown provide a compelling foundation for Phillipson's attempt to integrate Hume's philosophical and historical projects,[54] his remarkable biography of Smith[55] presents a figure almost unrecognizable to Smithian hagiography: prim and unadventurous, disorganized and unambitious, but a genius notwithstanding his fallibilities and quaintly attractive diffidence. Phillipson shows that many of the problems which have afflicted the interpretation of Smith's work have their beginnings—ultimately—in Smith's undermotivated, poorly navigated career. Reductive misunderstandings of his two-book *oeuvre* stem ultimately from Smith's inability, or, more precisely, lethargic reluctance, to bring to completion his more broadly conceived science of man.[56] Rarely do intellectual historians manage to resurrect as figures of flesh and blood and charm and idiosyncrasy the authors of the ideas on which they tend to concentrate. However, Phillipson's lively biography of Smith is an exception to the general trend—a particular triumph in the light of the unexpectedly scanty materials available and the narrow, circumscribed existence Smith chose to lead.[57]

In the course of Phillipson's career the Scottish Enlightenment has become a focus of international academic attention. However, this has had its costs. Many of the scholars from outside Scotland who work on the Scottish Enlightenment immerse themselves only in the eighteenth century, and thus have little appreciation of the historiographical prelude to the more recent study of the Scottish Enlightenment or are sometimes taken aback when they encounter the negative—or at best ambiguous—profile of the Scottish Enlightenment in some quarters of the modern Scots intelligentsia.[58] What does a scholar really know of the Scottish Enlightenment who only the Scottish Enlightenment knows? None of this applies to Phillipson. Indeed, nobody has done more to map—albeit in scattered review articles—the remote hinterland of the field as it is understood today. Phillipson is master of a meta-historiography of which many of his peers are largely oblivious. Nonetheless, Phillipson's interventions have been important in the wider fields of Scottish history and literature, which he perceived to be infected with a couthy small-nation sentimentality that, however reassuring to Scots,

53 See also the acute pen portraits in his account of Boswell's relationships with his wife and father: Phillipson, "Boswell at Forty", *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 May 1978, 490–91.

54 Phillipson, *Hume* (London, 1989).

55 Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London, 2010).

56 Cf. Phillipson, "Language, Sociability and History: Some Reflections on the Foundations of Adam Smith's Science of Man", in S. Collini, R. Whatmore and B. Young, eds., *Economy, Polity and Society: British Intellectual History 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), 70–84.

57 For a fuller review see C. Kidd, "Maiden Aunt', *London Review of Books*, 7 Oct. 2010.

58 Cf. Phillipson, "Politics, Politeness and Anglicisation", 226.

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impaired critical and historical judgement. Unconstrained by local pieties—secular or spiritual—Phillipson did not stay his hand when the sacred cows of Scottish studies crossed his path. For instance, he tracked the philosopher G. E. Davie's notion of an anglicizing "crisis" of Scotland's philosophical generalism and democratic intellect[59] back to the cosmic self-importance of the nineteenth-century Scots Presbyterian intellectual James McCosh, who ended up at Princeton (by way of Belfast). McCosh's *The Scottish Philosophy* (1875) lay behind the celebrated—or notorious—Davie thesis which had done so much to shape—and distort—modern Scottish cultural studies. McCosh's influence, Phillipson noted, was all too apparent in that "mishmash of sentimental invocations of national and religious characteristics tinged by an inchoate distaste for the polite, bourgeois values of commercial society."[60] Similarly, Phillipson attempted to unravel the curious early misreadings of eighteenth-century Scottish philosophical culture advanced by the pioneering nineteenth-century English sociologist H. T. Buckle.[61] Why had Buckle so curiously misdescribed eighteenth-century Scottish inductivists as deductivists, and why had he attributed a national tradition of Scots deductivism to the enduring—and pernicious—influence of its Calvinist Reformation? In part, Buckle had simply refused to accept that any theory rooted in psychology might be inductive. However, the puzzle also had a fascinating back story. The young Phillipson, still in psychohistorical mode, detected the roots of this curiously unsympathetic estrangement in the maltreatment Buckle's mother had experienced at the hands of Calvinists in London. A mummy fixation—plausibly enough, perhaps, in this case—lay at the bottom of a major fallacy in the early historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment.[62]

Phillipson, it should be apparent by now, is fearless. Unlike so many other historians of his generation in Scotland, he does not strike combative poses, but he is willing to advance controversial and unwelcome opinions. In particular, he has participated over the course of the last forty years or so in some of the major controversies over Scottish nationhood and identity. He has explored the range of meanings—well beyond stock assumptions about national freedom—which "independence" had for eighteenth-century Scots,[63] and he has also described the sham antiquarian and cultural posturing of the nineteenth-century

59 G. E. Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1981; first published 1961).

60 Phillipson, "The Evangelist of Common Sense", *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 Oct. 1981, 1245–6.

61 H. T. Buckle, *On Scotland and the Scotch Intellect*, ed. H. J. Hanham (Chicago, 1970).

62 Phillipson, "Henry Thomas Buckle on Scottish History and the Scottish Mind", *History of Education Quarterly*, 14 (1974), 407–17.

63 Phillipson, "Definition", 128; Phillipson, "Culture and Society", 417–18, 432.

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Scottish nationalism as all too expressive of an "ideology of noisy inaction".[64] This sort of thing is liable to irritate chippy Scots sensitivities, yet Phillipson's instinctive bonhomie and generous capacity for friendship have prevented his outspokenness denting his popularity as an active and virtuous citizen of the northern Athens. Outside the bubble of Edinburgh life, Phillipson has also been, over the past forty years, the historian of Scotland best known in the wider world, and deservedly so. In the graceful elegance of his prose, his cosmopolitan sophistication, the unrelenting drive of his arguments, his demanding search for compelling answers simultaneously synoptic and multi-stranded, and his cheerful scepticism, Phillipson is a striking modern embodiment of the era he loves.

APPENDIX: A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF NICHOLAS PHILLIPSON'S WRITINGS IN THE FIELD, INCLUDING MAJOR REVIEW ARTICLES

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