

Roger L. Emerson

Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

1. *Enlightenment?*

I thank the conference organizers for the opportunity to reflect on part of my scholarly life and to consider again some of the concerns I have tried to address in a career now coming to an end. My first article was an attack on Peter Gay's view of the Enlightenment and a defence of Carl Becker. It was written in 1962-1964 and was published by the "Journal of the History of Ideas" in 1967. In that somewhat confused piece, I tried to show that Gay was wrong to see so little Christianity in The Enlightenment and that he underestimated the amount of *a priori* thinking indulged in even by men like Voltaire. As Dumarsais said, Reason was indeed to the philosophers what grace was to the Christian; the intellectual structures of thought remained more intact among the enlightened than Peter Gay allows. Gay saw the movement as very French which seemed to me, even then, a somewhat one-sided view of it. My essay appeared partly through Gay's generosity and forbearance and made me in my own mind an "enlightenment historian" but not one dedicated to a particular country or to a particular set of problems. I have studied the Scots for what they show about a wider world. In forty-eight years I have learned something; that essay would be rather different today. It did show me how slippery a notion *enlightenment* is.

Perhaps we should give up the notions of *enlightenment* and *enlightenments* since there is, and is likely to be, no agreement about what *enlightenment* denotes and hence no clear delineation of periods such as the *European* or the *Scottish Enlightenment*. That is likely to be a counsel of perfection, not an achievable goal. So, even though I think the concepts misleading, I, like the rest of the world, will continue to talk about *enlightenments* while I try to give the terms more meaning.

When I look at what relates the largest number of things in the years c. 1680-1800, years which embrace most *enlightenments*, I end up with

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

improvement and the sense that it should be made across all fields using something like a scientific method. Over time, natural history, natural philosophy, and philosophical thought of one kind or another seem to me to have offered the keys to doing that. The dialectical processes of change were ones in which scepticism and scientific methods were essential. I am comforted that something like this was Hume's view as well. Hume did not write about *enlightenment* but he did write about *improvement*. Neither *enlightenment* nor *enlightened* find instances in the Past Masters Hume disk and *enlightened* finds only 6 instances. One is clearly religious; others couple it to ages. "Some innovations" in good times will be given by "the enlightened genius of the age [...] a direction to the side of reason, liberty, and justice". "Enlightened ages" are ones which are not superstitious but tolerant, reasonable and polished and perhaps, above all, free¹.

Hume's preferred term in describing such ages is *improved*. *Improve* yields 35 hits on the disk suggesting that improvement is gradual, depends on "[t]ime and experience"², requires free, reasonable discussions, practice and the emulation of others. It is historical but not necessarily bound to come or be lasting. *Improvement* itself produces 153 hits (almost all of them his and not the editor's) and is more central to his concerns as it should be to ours. It is basic to his concerns as a philosopher and historian:

The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas; morals and criticism regard our tastes and sentiments; and politics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other. In these four sciences of Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics, is comprehended almost every thing which it can anyway import us to be acquainted with, or which can tend either to the improvement or ornament of the human mind.³

Improvement leading to good ages requires security of life and property, freedom, the development of the sciences and commerce and the end of superstition and, perhaps, even bad metaphysics. All that leads to civility, polish, gallantry, luxury, and the happiness of people in what we would generally call enlightened ages. The consequence of this is that I find it hard to find the key texts of enlightenments in works dealing principally with religion, morals and politics, or to define its "reason" in ways which minimize the sciences and their application. If we are to pay attention to discourse, as John

¹ D. HUME, *Of the Original Contract*, in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. by E.F. Miller, Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1987², p. 477; *Of Miracles*, in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by T. Beauchamp, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 177.

² D. HUME, *Commerce*, in *Essays*, p. 256.

³ D. HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by D.F. and M.J. Norton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 4.

Pocock and Nicholas Phillipson have long told us to do, we should look at the words used to define “enlightened ages” by those who lived in them. If we are to periodise, perhaps we should centre this period on the idea of improvement. That shifts the enlightenment away from what was merely thought to what was thought and done – away from ideology and concepts to the achievements of the improvers. If we do that, we will not write books like Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) which dealt with what was thought but hardly touched on what was done.

Were one to divide *enlightenments* most generally, they would probably split along lines which veer on one hand to processes and on the other to conceptions, ideologies and sets of particular ideas. I first came upon that distinction in the late 1960s reading essays by Herbert Dieckmann whose great example of the enlightenment of process was Cassirer’s *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* in which the dialectical changes all lead to Kant who opened the way to a new dialectic which would define nineteenth century thought. Dieckmann saw in Paul Hazard’s volumes on the eighteenth century an example of a study centred around particular ideas and clusters of beliefs which promoted an agenda of change⁴. Most recent works manage to combine aspects of both accounts but they do not agree any better. Indeed, the varieties of *enlightenment* are almost endless as can be seen in a quick look at some old and recent studies.

In 1985 John Lough, not much of a believer in the usefulness of the term *enlightenment* or *The Enlightenment*, pointed out that in Kant’s day it was a term usually applied to a religious condition and was so uncommon that Kant and others who addressed the question “What is Enlightenment” (*Aufklärung*) had to stipulate and defend their answers⁵. According to Lough, from the 1780s until the 1920s, the terms usually denoted “a period of German literature, very roughly from 1720 to 1785” although by 1922 it had been used to refer to a rationalist period in European thought stretching from c. 1720 to Kant’s death in 1804⁶. In English its use was mainly the religious one until about 1865 when it began to denote the outlook and beliefs of the French *philosophes*. By the 1890s that usage had made its way into the *Oxford*

⁴ H. DIECKMANN, *An Interpretation of the Eighteenth Century*, “Modern Language Quarterly”, 15, 1954, pp. 295-311 (this reviewed the English translation of Cassirer’s great study of the enlightenment) and *Themes and Structure of the Enlightenment*, in *Essays on Comparative Literature*, St. Louis, 1961, pp. 41-72; P. HAZARD, *La Crise de la Conscience*, Paris, Boivin, 1935 and *La Pensée Européenne au XVIII^{ème} Siècle*, Paris, Boivin, 1946; J. LOUGH, *Reflections on Enlightenment and Lumièrs*, “British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies”, 8, 1985, pp. 1-15. Much of this essay is a negative review of *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. by R. Porter, M. Teich, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

⁵ J. LOUGH, *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. by J. Schmidt, Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996.

⁶ LOUGH, *Reflections*, p. 1.

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

*English Dictionary*⁷. Not until the 1950s did the term come into common use among scholars. *The Enlightenment* displaced earlier names such as The Age of Reason, a term with Paine-ite origins. The boom in *enlightenment studies*⁸ began in the 1950s and owed much to Theodore Besterman. His heroic efforts as an editor and promoter of national societies for the study of *The Enlightenment* resulted in great activity but not agreement on what was *enlightened* or when *The Enlightenment* began or ended. That is as true of the Scottish Enlightenment as any other⁹. How disparate interpretations have become can be shown by reference to recent books.

Jonathan Israel finds enlightenment coming in two varieties: moderate and radical forms¹⁰. The radical enlightenment begins with the philosophy of Spinoza in the 1670s and rooted in monist metaphysics. The dynamic driving the radicals was the logic of metaphysical unity in a single substance. Being all of one substance, meant to the radicals that we should be social and political equals, tolerant and free to think critically. That demand entailed sweeping programmes of religious, social, political and other kinds of reform. The radicals would truly have remade the social and intellectual world as some of the French Revolutionaries tried to do, symbolizing that with a new calendar beginning with the Year I. There was no radical Scottish enlightenment although many worried that there might be. The worries about atheism from Thomas Aikenhead in the 1690s to Hume in the 1770s shows that¹¹.

Israel's moderates looked to Lockean empiricism and Newtonian science and to the liberal Protestants such as the Remonstrants in Holland or the equally reasonable and tolerant Latitudinarians who ran the Anglican Church after 1689 and the Scottish Kirk after c. 1730¹². In a way those men were pro-

⁷ That story is told by J. SCHMIDT, *Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians and the Oxford English Dictionary*, "Journal of the History of Ideas", 64, 2003, pp. 421-443.

⁸ There is an entry on that topic by L. HUNT and M. JACOB in the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 4 vols, ed. by A.C. Kors et al., Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, vol. II, pp. 418-430.

⁹ Contrary to what some believe, the term *Scottish Enlightenment* was not invented by Lord Dacre [Professor Trevor Roper] in 1967 but had an earlier though ephemeral life. The earliest use of the term seems to be that of W.R. Scott in his life of Francis Hutcheson (1900). See: R.B. SHER, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 4 and P.B. WOOD, *Introduction: Dugald Stewart and the Invention of "the Scottish Enlightenment"*, in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essay in Reinterpretation*, ed. by P.B. Wood, Rochester (N.Y.), Rochester University Press, 2000, pp. 1-35.

¹⁰ J. ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; *Enlightenment Contested*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2006. See also Harvey Chisick's discussion of those works: *Looking for Enlightenment*, "History of European Ideas", 34, 2008, pp. 570-582; *Interpreting the Enlightenment*, "The European Legacy", 13, 2008, pp. 35-57.

¹¹ M. GRAHAM, *The Blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead: Boundaries of Belief on the Eve of the Enlightenment*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008.

¹² As Paul Wood has pointed out to me this is mildly ironic since Locke was a political refugee and in many ways not all that moderate in religion or politics and could be so in metaphysics only at the

longing Humanist, Reformation, and moral and natural philosophical debates which ran through the seventeenth century. Moderates created new foundations for thought which were more empiricist but they shied away from monism. Recommending a wide range of improvements, they were not ready to tamper radically with most institutions or many social, moral or religious beliefs. If the moderate enlightenment is real, Scots were part of it.

Another recent study dealing with France, sees the French Enlightenment as dependent on science and the contentious nature of Anglo-Dutch styles of discussion after 1688¹³. The science of Newton and the epistemology, metaphysics and politics of Locke, set out polemically by a host of men but notably by Voltaire, resulted in the French Enlightenment, seen as normative of others. The author dates his period from the appearance of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophique* (1734) and ends it c. 1789. This differs from older theories about the place of science since it adds a stylistic dimension which made debates acerbic and the demands for changes more urgent and sweeping. Older accounts looked for an earlier impact of science on French thought as have those who find in academies and learned societies sites in which new attitudes to knowledge and its pursuit were allowed to flourish and develop¹⁴.

John Robertson, a distinguished historian of the Cambridge school (who has taught history of science as a special subject), has found the European Enlightenment to consist principally in novel theories of social and political-economic reform and the metaphysics which lay behind them. For him it originates in particular political and social crises which most Old Regime societies experienced in one way or another although at differing times. In Naples and Scotland crises produced new analyses of societies – mostly secular analyses oriented to politics, economics and sociability. In both countries, the crisis was full blown by 1700 but enlightened responses date from about 1740. By then ideas long available had come together to produce novel social theories. Robertson's enlightenments run until the French Revolution when reforms became suspect and philosophy shifted once again¹⁵. A great virtue of Robertson's study is that it treats Scots as part of a European development and does not see the Scottish Enlightenment in

expense of inconsistencies. Scottish divinity professors by 1730 were assigning Latitudinarian works to their students some of whom became the Moderates in 1752.

¹³ J.B. SHANK, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment*, Chicago-London, University of Chicago Press, 2008. This has been damningly reviewed by M. FEINGOLD, "Isis", 101, 2010, pp. 175-186. They had a further exchange in "Isis", 102, 2011, pp. 134-136.

¹⁴ An example of an older account is P. SMITH, *History of Modern Culture*, 4 vols., New York, Holt, 1930-1932; an example of the second kind of work is provided by J.E. McCLELLAN III, *Science Reorganized: Scientific Societies in the Eighteenth Century*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985.

¹⁵ J. ROBERTSON, *The Case For The Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

isolation. But, such accounts, focussed so narrowly on social theories and political policies, leave out too much.

Other thinkers find enlightenments dividing along national lines¹⁶. Societies and rulers seeking to secure more power and promote what gave them more money, rationalized their states and favoured ideas which aided in those efforts. Picking what was useful made them encourage the empiricism of natural philosophers and scientists, anti-clerical policies and moderate changes or improvements which left their authority untouched. In Sweden this meant the promotion of science and industry but restrictions on criticism of the state church or social and political arrangements. In Denmark, trying to guide reform of the country, as Ludvig Holberg did, was all right so long as limits were respected¹⁷. Doing more and doing it faster cost a minister his head in 1772¹⁸. A few years later such efforts provoked uprisings in the Hapsburg domains ruled by Joseph II. Joseph II and Dr. J.F. Struensee, the Danish minister, had tried to force the pace of change by issuing more than a decree a day – too much for reluctant subjects to accept. None of those places had an enlightenment like those in France or Scotland where new ideas (or old ones newly stated and circulating rather generally in Europe by the 1670s-1680s) were differently related to pre-existing ideas, institutions and political and religious arrangements.

Some historians find The Enlightenment's essence to be anti-Christian and its critical methods more rationalistic than empiricist. But, most of the enlightened were themselves in some sense Christian – Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican or deistical. If empiricism is the test, then we have to wonder where Bayle, Leibnitz, Richard Price or Kant, fit into such schemes.

Since 1970 scholars have often seen The Enlightenment as involving a “project” of some sort. This might be increasing knowledge to ensure progress and changing institutions so that we will all live more virtuous and happier lives. Or, it might, involve repressions and controls leading to dystopian states which force men to be free¹⁹. Unfortunately, there is no one coherent enlight-

¹⁶ *The Enlightenment in National Context; The Scientific Revolution in National Context*, ed. by R. Porter, M. Teich, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992; *Peripheries of the Enlightenment*, ed. by R. Butterwick, S. Davies, G. Sánchez Espinosa, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2008.

¹⁷ Holberg wrote Spectatorial essays on polite subjects and satirized manners in poems and plays but he also wrote history, surveys of the resources of the country and philosophical books. His was a general program of improvement.

¹⁸ R.L. EMERSON, *Johann Friedrich Struensee (1737-1772)*, in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, vol. IV, pp. 131-132; for a short bibliography of studies on enlightened despotism see Hamish Scott's entry for that in that *Encyclopedia*, vol. I, pp. 415-418.

¹⁹ That was the outlook of the Frankfurt School. One of the best expositions of this position is J.L. TALMON, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, New York-London, Secker and Warburg, 1960² (1951¹). This work has little to say about matters which do not impinge on politics. Others who saw the

enment program or “project” traceable across Europe. One might for example ask what the Banat of Temisvar as ruled by Prince Eugene of Savoy had in common with the Naples studied by John Robertson or Streunsee’s proposals for Denmark with the ideals of the radical thinkers studied by Jonathan Israel. The various answers may well come to “not much”. The Americas too provide similar problems, even when one allows for time differences. Henry May’s impressive *The Enlightenment in America* (New York, 1976) needed four rather distinct enlightenments overlapping one another in order to describe what he took to be the situation in North America²⁰. In Spanish and French America there were some colonial stirrings and a movement for political liberation but for all the vaunted Atlanticism of these days, little of it deals with *enlightenment* beyond the sciences and some economic improving projects²¹.

There has been no agreement with respect to human nature, on the foundation of morals or on what proper public policies should be with respect to social issues, politics or the place of religion. Depending on what those are taken to be, *enlightenment* may start in the 1670s or as late as the 1740s and end in 1776²² or the 1830s as the Balkan enlightenment and Latin American enlightenments are said to have done²³. So why bother? There I think the answer is probably ultimately a personal one.

“enlightenment project” as he did have to explain why men intent on increasing freedom made it less. Their projects may have had unintended consequences but was the project projected?

²⁰ One might find in Scotland equivalents in the *enlightenments* of the Moderates, of David Hume, the Paineite radicals of the 1790s and the academic publishers studied by R. SHER in *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth Century Britain, Ireland and America*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006. Sher’s study has a fine introductory essay which discusses the relation of the Scottish Enlightenment to others, pp. 1-24.

²¹ Much of that literature is cited in I.K. STEELE, *Bernard Bailyn’s American Atlantic*, “History and Theory”, 46, 2007, pp. 48-58. It deals mostly with economics, politics and religion. Other items can be found in J.E. MCCLELLAN III, *Colonialism and Science Saint Domingue in the Old Regime*, Baltimore-London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992 and in a handful of sources noted in books such as the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (see entries for Latin America and Spain).

²² SMITH, *History of Modern Culture*, vol. II, *The Enlightenment 1687-1776* or H.S. COMMAGER, *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment*, Garden City (N.Y.), Anchor Press, 1977. Smith’s distinguished work sees the enlightenment as resting on the methods of science and a faith in the transformative power of “Reason” when applied critically to *all* things. Commager sees the formation of the USA as beginning a new order of things not only in America but in thought and action generally.

²³ E.g., G.N. VLAHKIS, *The Greek Enlightenment in Science*, “British Journal for the History of Science”, 37, 1999, pp. 319-345. This is mostly about the diffusion of western science and the promotion of free discussion 1810-1821. See also A. DUȚU, *National and European Consciousness in the Romanian Enlightenment*, “Studies on Voltaire and the eighteenth century”, 55, 1967, pp. 463-479. There is much bearing on this question in F. VENTURI, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768-1789*, 2 vols., trans. by R. Burr Litchfield, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991 (original ed. Turin, Einaudi, 1984).

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

2. *Periodizing*

If we are fascinated by certain kinds of events or attitudes, we class them, limit and define them and pursue them as best we can. By the time I went to college in 1952, I had come to the conclusion that Sir James Fraser had not drawn the right conclusions in *The Golden Bough*. Christianity, if not history, was “bunk” and as primitive and strange as the religions that great Anglican had studied. I wanted arguments and reasons to believe that and found them where I could. Those called enlightened thinkers were among those who seemed to offer them. Voltaire and Hume both gave me reasons to shed a Christian heritage which seemed, when I was in college, irrational, repellant and socially destructive – and, Voltaire was fun to read and Hume was so deceptively easy. The period and culture in which they flourished seemed important and not too problematic.

As an undergraduate I took several courses with the philosopher Maurice Mandelbaum, a fine scholar and an unbeliever. One of the things which interested him and on which he wrote was periodization²⁴. Mandelbaum thought periods were names applied to collections of events that seemed related to the most important things happening during the years concerned. Periods have as much reality as we find when we look at the events which seem to us important in defining them. Those things were the ones which interested the periodiser but which may not have touched all that was going on. Periods relate to our sense of what was causal in particular areas of activity. Mandelbaum was not here a holist. The scope of those causal events, and over how long a time they remained determinative of events, might vary but much would be excluded. The events which we use to periodise art or science will likely define spirits, styles and ideas which do not apply to all that happened in those years and may not touch many institutions, some artists and scientists or even politics and economics. Mandelbaum was an intellectual historian and his important things were those concepts which changed ideas and world views. His view was not the popular one in the 1950s.

When I was an undergraduate (1952-1956) the most important things defining periods for many, even in my conservative college, were the modes and means of production and the social relations they produced. I never believed that because it seemed to me to unduly restrict what made people act and think as they did²⁵. Modes and means are important: steam engines

²⁴ M. MANDELBAUM, *The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, pp. 22-23, 164-167.

²⁵ I seem to have thought this a long time. Recently while throwing out old papers I found that I had written an essay at some point in the 1950s – probably at Dartmouth College and not at Brandeis University (1957-1962) arguing that the important changes are more driven by science and religion than by anything else.

and atom bombs change things but so did Mohammed and Luther, the plague, or the now rising seas. Class did not seem so important as the Marxists made it.

I also have long thought that the most important things happening in any society were related to and conditioned by a host of other things and that it makes no sense to see anything in isolation. My teaching aided that effort since it was varied but did not preclude specialization. Most of it dealt with modern Europe 1500-1945 with better than a third of it dealing with the eighteenth century but paying little attention to Scotland. Doing that year after year makes one aware that many things Scots did had foreign counterparts and that the patterns of thought and change in the West were everywhere differing variations on similar themes. My teaching at Western enriched my perspective on enlightenment and enlightenments. I have wanted my periods to be as broadly based as possible.

We should not, I think, produce histories of ideas like Cassirer's but only social histories of ideas. Consequently, I have tried to learn as much as I could about a lot of things in the time and place I worked on. Scots interested me but I ended up studying Scotland for accidental reasons²⁶.

3. *Constructing the Scottish Enlightenment*

So how does one construct a *Scottish Enlightenment*? I see it as beginning with efforts of a handful of men to improve most things, a movement which rooted partly in natural philosophy or science and partly in other things like religion and economic distress. Science remained, I believe, the most important key to improvement but science could not and did not stand alone. Eighteenth-century people were educated to see things as related in ways set out in academic curricula [rhetoric, logic and metaphysics, morals including politics, natural philosophy, mathematics, languages, and some history], in many dictionaries and encyclopaedias and in other reference works or systems. The Great Chain of Being still clanked in the world which Diderot and d'Alembert thought might be intellectually comprehended in the categories of their "Detailed System of Human Knowledge" and made symbolically delightful in an allegorical frontispiece showing the unveiling of Truth by Reason while Theology sits at her feet. Their system had counterparts provid-

²⁶ The library at the University of Western Ontario in 1964 had about 300,000 volumes and could only support work on the eighteenth century dealing with the French Revolution, English literature, American history or the Scots. Many Scots had settled in the area and some had given their books to the university. I was not interested in the Revolution, Americans or English literature so the Scots became the subjects of my studies. The library now has about 2,500,000 volumes and much more available in micro- and e-media.

ed by men from Bacon to Comte. Those generally show us a unified intellectual world in which everything shifts if one large section is changed or improved. Scots read Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* devoted to the arts and sciences at the beginning of the eighteenth century and some more read Diderot's which was possessed by numerous libraries in Scotland. By c. 1770 they had one of their own, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which appeared in a third edition in 1797-1801.

In the first edition of that work (1768-1771), the arts, religion and much else got short shrift but not science, medicine, philosophy and their uses. Its editor and main compiler, William Smellie, gave no tree of knowledge but did give his readers broad topics to which many separately treated subjects were related. Notes led from one to the other, from specialized topics and sub-divisions to related articles and broader topics. His *Encyclopaedia Britannica* announced to its readers that it was to give them scientific knowledge to be used, or, as its editor wrote in the work's opening sentences:

Utility ought to be the principal intention of every publication. Wherever this intention does not plainly appear, neither the books nor their authors have the smallest claim to the approbation of mankind [...] To diffuse knowledge of Science is the professed design of the following work.²⁷

The 3rd edition had a remarkable frontispiece and continued the utilitarian bent of the 1st edition²⁸. That attitude had a history.

Notions about the systematic nature of knowledge were ancient but the idea that knowledge could be increased and should serve as the basis of improving action was modern but not new in 1700. It went back to at least

²⁷ *Encyclopaedia Britannica or, a Dictionary of Arts and Sciences ... By a Society of Gentlemen in Scotland*, 3 vols., ed. by W. Smellie, Edinburgh, Bell, 1771, Preface, pp. v-vi. This message had not changed in the 3rd edition: see *The Early Britannica (1768-1803): The Growth of an Outstanding Encyclopaedia*, ed. by F. Kafker, J. Loveland, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century", 935, 2009.

²⁸ The frontispiece to the 3rd edition of the *Britannica* goes back to Sebastian Le Clerc's 1698 engraving *L'Académie des sciences et des beaux-arts*. That engraving was the basis for the slightly truncated and reversed version which served as the frontispiece for E. CHAMBERS, *Cyclopaedia or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, London, Knapton, 1728. The 3rd edition of the *Britannica*, edited by Colin MacFarquhar (vols 1-12) and George Gleig (vols 13-18), deleted the collenaded middle section of the earlier prints and substituted for them a background showing the pyramids, Moses and the Tablets of the Law and what looks like Adam and Eve naming the animals. It is puzzling that the remote background does not include some clear reference to the Christian God since this work was orthodox in ways the first two editions were not. For guides to this literature see *Notable Encyclopedias of the Late Eighteenth Century: Eleven Successors of the Encyclopédie*, ed. by F.A. Kafker, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century", 315, 1994; *Encyclopaedia Britannica, or a Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (Early Sources in Reference), Introd. by F.A. Kafker, London-Bristol, Thoemmes, 1997; R. YEO, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; S. SEBASTIANI, *Conjectural history vs. The Bible: Eighteenth-Century Scottish Historians and the Idea of History in the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Lumen", 21, 2002, pp. 213-231. The *Britannica* had no 'tree of knowledge' and no frontispiece until the 3rd edition; *The Early Britannica*, pp. 3, 168-69.

the late fifteenth century. Both Humanists and Reformers had wanted to renew, restore and improve things by returning to better, but ancient, conditions. Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/69-1536) might be taken as an example of the first although many other Humanists might also do. Erasmus wanted a world made better by men who were truly Christian and therefore more moral and peaceful. He was also in favour of a cleaner and better ordered world. Less interested in technological innovations, he nevertheless looked forward to the publication of Agricola's [Georg Bauer's] *De re metallica* which was announced in Erasmus's lifetime but published only nineteen years after his death (1536), in 1555²⁹. Erasmus hoped to realize his vision with a *return* to what he took to be better standards and conditions of the ancient world. He and others sought a better understanding of Greek, Latin and Hebrew and of the worlds in which those languages had been used by better men. His methods were primarily philological, historical and literary but we should also remember that he praised reason:

All living things strive to develop according to their proper nature. What is the proper nature of man? Surely it is to live the life of reason, for reason is the peculiar prerogative of man [...] Surely it is Folly which is life without reason.³⁰

His programme of reform was not basically secular but it was not wholly religious either; it touched every aspect of life. Churches and doctrines could be reformed or restored through better translations of the Bible and the works of the early Fathers of the Church. Secular life could at least equal ancient standards by the recovery of ancient knowledge. Urging men to work toward those ends, Erasmus was not averse to satirizing those who impeded reform such as Julius II³¹. Erasmus's influence continued through the brilliance of his writings and through his textbooks, especially the *Adages* and *Colloquies*. He was a force in European culture until Latin and Greek ceased to be studied by all who claimed to be educated. Erasmus was primarily a theologian but not all were like him since he tended to see men as determining their history and not being mere pawns in an Augustinian world.

If one picks any of the early Reformers, one finds that they too had an all embracing agenda in which the most important part was the revival of

²⁹ AGRICOLA [GEORG BAUER], *De re metallica*, ed. by H. and L.H. Hoover, New York, Dover Publications, 1950 (1st ed. 1912).

³⁰ DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Concerning the Aim and Method of Education*, ed. and commentary by W.H. Woodward, Cambridge, University Press, 1904, p. 192. Partially cited from W. BOUWSMA, *The Two Faces of Humanism*, in *Itinerarium Italicum: The Profile of the Italian Renaissance in the Mirror of its European Transformations*, ed. by H. Oberman, T. Brady, Leiden, Brill, 1975, p. 98. As Richard Popkin pointed out, Erasmus can also be placed among the sceptics. R.H. POPKIN, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, rev. ed., Berkeley-Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1979, pp. 5-8.

³¹ I take *Julius Excluded from Heaven* to be his.

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

“true religion”. Since we are thinking about Scots, we should dwell for a moment on John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin too was a humanist who did an edition of a classical work, Seneca’s *De Clementia*. He was also a lawyer who had sought an academic career until his religious activism made him a refugee. His great works focussed on religion but *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536; final editions in Latin and French 1559-1560) was more than just a book on religion, church order and good morals. Its first edition had a political conclusion calling on Francis I to rule as a Christian magistrate. In other works he spelled out what he took to be the best forms of government. Erasmus had argued for a monarchical or an imperial order. Calvin was more interested in checking the powers of sinful rulers and was more of a theoretical republican and an admirer of the Spartan Ephors. He also praised astronomers and doctors for showing the wonderful design and order in the creation and for ameliorating the lot of men in this fallen world which we can never wholly know or restore but which we can improve³². Necessary for the attainment of those ends was the saving grace of God which allows men, even demanded them, to work for a more perfect order. By themselves men can do nothing; with grace they are called to do much. Religious, social and intellectual changes should all be made to raise holier cities in this fallen world. The very fact of sin makes its willed reduction an endless and possibly progressive process.

The Humanists, Reformers and those prelates and rulers whom they sought to change agreed on little save that reforms offered chances to remake the world and often to give themselves more power. By the end of the sixteenth century, conflicts, not peace, were the result. From the 1520s to 1648 and again from the 1660s to the 1720s, Europe saw more and worse wars than it had hitherto experienced. That was partly the result of new technologies and improved weapons – cannons, muskets, rifles, bombs, new styles of fortifications, new ships but also new ways of organizing and provisioning armies and navies. Controversies and strife led men like Montaigne³³ to advance sceptical notions and others, like Galileo and Bacon, to suggest new methods of observation and experiment as means of settling disputes and advancing knowledge. At the same time, wilder, all encompassing versions of such visions were set out by pansophists and Rosicrucians like Thomas Campella, Johannes Valentinus Andreae and by magi like John Dee in England. The need, as Francis Bacon saw it, was to produce a society which actively worked to advance the well being of all, a task to which there was no discernible end but the Millenium.

³² *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. by H. Beveridge, London, Clarke, 1962, vol. I, pp. 51-52.

³³ For the sceptics see various books by and edited by R. POPKIN including his *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Bacon's *Great Instauration* (1620-) announced the need to discover or improve all that we might have, know or be³⁴. The processes increasing knowledge were secular and sometimes experimental. Using the inductive knowledge gained, we could better "man's estate" including his religious practices. For Bacon and others, new methods were important and centred on critical reason, empirical enquiries, and mathematics. Their programs required new institutions in which they might be pursued³⁵.

Those ideas by the mid-and late seventeenth century had become the common property of *virtuosi* who tended to add to them interests in history (sacred, civil and natural). Literature and the arts were also seen as needing critiques and improvements (such as dictionaries and grammars) and cultivation according to new rules in new bodies such as art schools and academies. Those who advocated such things usually wanted a more polite Europe in which there was less brawling, drunkenness, and disgusting behaviour.

How the proponents of those views fared, and the progress their ideas could make, depended very much upon the kind of places in which they expressed their opinions and the patronage they could attract. The circumstances of every state were partly defined by its economic prospects and the political pressures which it felt from its neighbours or people within it. Since most thinking occurred in urban areas, the mix of intellectuals within a city mattered to intellectual life. Capitals had all sorts of men; mere trading centres fewer important clerics, soldiers and administrators³⁶. Secure states, limited monarchies, or those which had to tolerate religious diversity allowed more freedoms of expression. Republics, like the United Netherlands, where trade opened the society to many cultural cross-currents, were more prosperous and freer. In insecure monarchies, rulers and magistrates tended to pick and choose ideas and values which propped up their power and strengthened their states. They would accept science and the ideas which supported it but they were not eager to allow the relatively free discussion of religion and politics which the Dutch and British knew. Jonathan Israel's beliefs about the priority and centrality of enlightened Dutchmen have more to recom-

³⁴ F.E. and F. MANUEL, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 203-410.

³⁵ R.L. EMERSON, *The Organization of Science and Its Pursuit in Early Modern Europe*, in *Companion to the History of Modern Science*, ed. by R.C. Olby, G.N. Cantor, J.R.R. Christie, M.J.S. Hodge, London-New York, Routledge, 1990, pp. 960-979.

³⁶ R.L. EMERSON, *The Enlightenment and Social Structures*, in *City and Society in the 18th Century* (Publications of the McMaster University Association for 18th Century Studies), vol. III; Toronto, Hakkert, 1973, pp. 99-129. As Peter Clark has shown, club life flourished first in places where secure governments were not worried about open discussions of most matters: P. CLARK, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 27-74. This fine work found no need to refer to Jurgen Habermas.

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

mend them than his determination to make of central importance a radical enlightenment.

Central to the development of the ideas leading to enlightenment were considerations dealing with methods of enquiry and the institutionalization of those in new and mostly secular bodies. Ages of improvement or Enlightenment should, I think, be dated from the time institutions were created to embody, pursue and promote those ideas over a wide range of concerns. I would trace the development of the Scottish Enlightenment through the creation of institutions to realize that improving agenda which I think was fully stated by c. 1700. By that time Scots were improving their universities, trying to create a national academy and did found a musical club in Edinburgh (c. 1690-1701), and a library which became in time the National Library of Scotland. They tried to improve their economy through legislation affecting agriculture, banking and industry³⁷. *Virtuosi* who looked to Bacon for methodological guidance and to the Dutch for a model of a progressive society wanted improvements in many, many activities. They had begun to create the *Scottish enlightenment* before 1700. I would end it with the full-blown romanticism which shattered the beliefs in the primacy of critical thinking and the cosmopolitanism to which the enlightened adhered. My enlightenments everywhere run that course and are more guided by notions about improvement than by anything else.

Some of my friends see it differently. Richard Sher, the notable Scottish book historian, dates the Scottish Enlightenment from c. 1740 and relates it mostly to developments in the book trade in Edinburgh and London. By c. 1800 it was over because that trade had changed³⁸. Nicholas Phillipson, like John Robertson and others oriented toward the work of John Pocock and Cambridge thinkers, have found it to rest on civic humanist themes best, if not first, stated by Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun who gave Scotland its “Machiavellian moment”, one which came after Fletcher had died in 1716³⁹.

³⁷ The universities have recently been revisited in an article by E. MIJERS, *The Netherlands, William Carstares and the Reform of Edinburgh University, 1690-1715*, “University History”, forthcoming; see also: R.L. EMERSON, *Sir Robert Sibbald, Kt., The Royal Society of Scotland and the Origins of the Scottish Enlightenment*, “Annals of Science”, 45, 1988, pp. 41-72; D. JOHNSON, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, 1972, p. 33. Enclosure acts were passed in 1661, 1669, 1685 and 1695 while other new rules affected the use of land and grazing rights. The Bank of Scotland and the Darien Company were created in 1695 while many other schemes for development were discussed.

³⁸ SHER, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 598-609.

³⁹ Pocock himself supplements politics with religion to explain enlightenments but with not much else; see *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 476f. His great work on Gibbon, *Barbarism and Religion* (4 volumes so far, 1999-2008), makes enlightened whatever helped Gibbon to analyze societies in a secular manner. It has little place for natural philosophy in which Gibbon was no adept. Phillipson is the best known of the exponents of this view in Scotland. See: *Towards a definition of the Scottish Enlightenment*, in *City and Society in the Eighteenth*

For others, Francis Hutcheson, a Scots-Irishman who was educated and taught at Glasgow University is the man with whom we ought to begin it even though his most significant works were written in Ireland somewhat before his arrival in Glasgow in 1729 as a professor of moral philosophy. Others see Hume's *Treatise*, published 1739-1740 as a better beginning date with the end coming around 1800. Mostly written in France and published in London, Hume's *Treatise*, like Hutcheson's Irishness, and the sources and influences on both thinkers, raise questions about how insular, parochial and *Scottish* the Scottish Enlightenment really was. What seems to me undoubted was its masculinity⁴⁰, its relation to a classical past and its focus on improvements.

Having taken care of its dates and essence. Let me now try to locate more precisely its origins and show its periods.

4. *The Scottish Enlightenment: Phases*

Scotland by the 1680s had some *virtuosi*⁴¹. Edinburgh could point to men such as Sir George MacKenzie, Sir Robert Sibbald, Dr. Archibald Pitcairne and those associated with them in a variety of clubs and in the

Century, pp. 125-147; *Culture and Society in the Eighteenth-Century*, in *The University in Society*, 2 vols., ed. by L. Stone, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 407-448; *The 'Scottish Enlightenment'*, in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, pp. 19-40; and more recently, *Scottish Enlightenment*, in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, (trans. by G. Wells from *Dictionnaire européen des lumières*, Paris, 1997), pp. 1196-1200. An early critic of that view was A. CHITNIS, *Agricultural improvement, political management and civic virtue in enlightened Scotland: an historiographical critique*, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century", 245, 1986, pp. 475-488; a later and more subtle one has been Alexander Broadie who in a number of works has seen the Scottish Enlightenment as having less to do with civic virtue than with varied developments in Scotland's past. See his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* which is also edited by him (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 1-7) and my own contribution to that volume, *The contexts of the Scottish enlightenment* (pp. 9-30).

⁴⁰ I have been working on another conference paper dealing with about 100 notable Scottish women c. 1670-1830 so later I shall have more to say about all that.

⁴¹ There is no substantial work on the Scottish *virtuosi* but see I.G. BROWN, *The Hobby-Horsical Antiquary: A Scottish Character 1640-1830 and Precarious Preferment in Apollo's Favorite Residence: London as Focus for Sir John Clerk's Political and Cultural Ambition*, in *Scots in London in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by S. Nenadic, Lewisburg (Pa.), Bucknell University Press, 2010, pp. 49-72.; R.L. EMERSON, *Natural philosophy and the problem of the Scottish Enlightenment*, "Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century", 242, 1986, pp. 243-291; R.L. EMERSON, *Sir Robert Sibbald, Kt.*; for some in England with whom they dealt see: S.A.E. MENDYK, *Speculum Britanniae: Regional Study, Antiquarianism, and Science in Britain to 1700*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989; S. PIGGOTT, *Ruins in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1976; S. PIGGOTT, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1989; M. HUNTER, *The Occult Laboratory: Magic, Science and Second Sight in Late 17th-Century Scotland*, Woodbridge (Eng.), Boydell Press, 2001; J.M. LEVINE, *Dr. Woodward's Shield: History Science and Satire in Augustan England*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London, University of California Press, 1977 and *Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by K. Sloan, British Museum, London, 2003.

hoped for, but never realized, Royal Society of Scotland (c. 1702-1704). Those men were mostly Royalists as were others like them in Aberdeen and St Andrews – men connected with the universities in those towns and members of the Scougal, Gordon, Middleton, Gregory and Martine families. Many of the views of James Dalrymple, 1st Viscount of Stair; Bishop Gilbert Burnet and others who endured exile in the Netherlands and came back to Scotland with William III were not much different though their politics were. Even pious Glasgow had a few such men. George Sinclair and William Dunlop were active *virtuosi* in the 1690s but decidedly not Royalists⁴². Their plans were supported by William Carstares. He was related to Dunlop and had been tutored by a relative of Sinclair⁴³. Collectively those Scots set the agenda of the Scottish Enlightenment to which the Revolution of 1688 added English weight to the already (if weakly) voiced Scots' concerns for more toleration, limited kingship, and an Erastian Kirk⁴⁴. Because of the economic plight of Scots 1650-1707, economic reconstruction and what it presupposed was much on the minds of such men. They were ashamed of their backwardness and patriotically determined to remedy it. They tended to see their backwardness as general and found deficiencies in all aspects of life. The urge to improve and change rooted in those feelings. The *enlightenment* for Scots was a time of dealing with those problems by using what seemed the best available tools – empirically based philosophies, the imitation of the institutions of other countries and a more tolerant set of attitudes which were partly home-grown and partly imposed by the English. The Scottish Enlightenment, as I see it, runs back into the 1680s when those ideas were accepted by some and new institutions to support them began to be discussed and created⁴⁵. That early phase had run its course by the 1730s when institution building in Edinburgh, if not elsewhere, was more or less complete. The city by then had improved educational institutions, philosophical clubs, a musical society, a sometime theatre and men in bodies like the Board

⁴² Sinclair, a Glasgow regent, had been sacked in the 1660s for non-conformity and was restored only when it was clear James II was on his way out. Dunlop had led a dissident group to the Carolinas in the 1680s but returned after 1688. Both had improving and scientific interests and Dunlop was something of an historian. See MIJERS, *The Netherlands, William Carstares and the Reform of Edinburgh University*.

⁴³ Carstares sponsored Dunlop's appointment as Principal of Glasgow and the appointment at Edinburgh of Patrick Sinclair.

⁴⁴ C. JACKSON, *Revolution Principles, Ius Naturae and Ius Gentium in Early-Enlightenment Scotland: The Contribution of Sir Francis Grant, Lord Cullen (C. 1660-1726)*, in *Early Modern Natural Law Theories*, ed. by T.J. Hochstrasser, P. Schröder, Dordrecht-Boston-London, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, pp. 107-140 and C. JACKSON, *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690 Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2003.

⁴⁵ H. OUSTON, *Cultural life from the Restoration to the Union*, in *The History of Scottish Literature. Vol. 2 (1660-1800)*, ed. by A. Hook, Aberdeen, Aberdeen University Press, pp. 11-30.

of Trustees for Fisheries and Manufactures and the Honourable the Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture of Scotland (HIKAS) who were committed to the continued progress of things through the application of science and technology.

The most attractive figure of the early enlightenment in Scotland is that of John Clerk, 2nd Baronet of Penicuik (1676-1755). He returned from the continent in 1698 after several years studying law in Holland and making a grand tour to Rome, Venice, Vienna, and Paris. Clerk was an accomplished man who was involved with everything forward looking in Edinburgh from 1700 until his death in 1755⁴⁶. Increasingly he did not work alone⁴⁷.

His principal personal interests were in the arts. Clerk made sketches and some paintings, wrote music⁴⁸ and aided efforts to institutionalize musical performances and art teaching⁴⁹. In 1729, Sir John was among those who actively promoted the first Edinburgh art school and he was among the founders of the St Cecilia's Society in 1728⁵⁰. He also imported art works for the family collection which were studied by local painters⁵¹. He was an accomplished architect and wrote an important poem, *The Country Seat* (1727, revised 1736), which dealt both with gardening and architecture and was meant to improve the taste of his still "Gothic" compatriots⁵². He had other literary interests which can be traced in pamphlets on antiquarian matters and in his antiquarian survey of Scotland made with Alexander ("Singing Sandy") Gordon in the late 1720s⁵³. Clerk belonged to antiquarian clubs in England and was an assiduous digger in sites along the Antonine wall, part of which ran through his property⁵⁴. He composed, but did not publish, a

⁴⁶ Clerk needs a biography but see: *Memoirs of the life of Sir John Clerk. 1676-1755*, ed. by J.M. Gray "Scottish History Society", 1st series, 13, 1892 and various National Library of Scotland pamphlets and essays in *The Burlington Magazine* by Iain Gordon Brown.

⁴⁷ See the article on Clerk in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, vol. I, pp. 262-263; BROWN, *Precarious Preferment in Apollo's Favorite Residence*.

⁴⁸ Some of this has been recorded, e.g. *The Lion of Scotland, Cantatas by John Clerk of Penicuik*, Hyperion, 1994.

⁴⁹ See JOHNSON, *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland*.

⁵⁰ There is no study of this body but see J. ROCK, *The "A" Marked Porcelain: Further Evidence for the Scottish Option*, "Transactions English Ceramic Circle", 17, 1999, pp. 69-78. This has a good deal on Richard Cooper, its most persistent art teacher and a man who did much in the art world of Edinburgh.

⁵¹ There is a catalogue of his works of art at Penicuik House. See also: R.L. EMERSON, *Hume and Art: Reflections on What Hume Did Not See Hear or Think About*, "Rivista di Storia della Filosofia" [Special Issue on Hume] ed. by E. Mazza and E. Ronchetti, Milan, 2007, pp. 237-257, especially 246-252 which lists some of the works or art in Edinburgh at the mid-century.

⁵² This was edited in 2004 by W.T. Johnston in *Artists of Scotland*, Officina Compact Disks, 2003.

⁵³ *Itinerarium Septentrionale: or, A Journey Thro' most of the Counties of Scotland, and Those in the North of England*, London for the author, 1726.

⁵⁴ I.G. BROWN, *Critick in Antiquity: Sir John Clerk of Penicuik*, "Antiquity", 51, 1977, pp. 201-210 followed by the Sir John Medina portrait of Clerk done c. 1700.

long Latin history of the events leading to the union of England and Scotland in 1707⁵⁵.

Sir John had been a negotiator on economic matters affecting the Treaty of Union with England⁵⁶. He knew well the importance to the nation of a state which could protect Scottish trade, offer its industries a broader market and provide better credit facilities. He was not unmindful of the fact that England guaranteed to its subjects more freedoms under law and that most gentlemen in England had clearer notions about limited government than had comparable Scots. He was unhappy to see the union of his state with England but he realized that the Kingdom of Scotland could not protect its subjects, keep order in the country, or promote other ends which he thought were legitimate aims of states – the encouragement of trade and culture. He was a reluctant but firm unionist who saw gains to be made when Scots were included in a stronger state and in the expanding empire which it already possessed. His reward for his unionist activities was an appointment as Baron of the Scottish Exchequer. That post, he wrote, made it possible for him to spend his yearly salary on the development of his estates. As he saw it, that was in his own and the public's interest. He got new houses; his tenants were employed; his countrymen had models of good style which they might follow in ornamenting the landscape. Public money bought public benefits.

Sir John was a planter of trees and a recoverer of waste land. His own farms seems to have been early in introducing new crops and new techniques of husbandry. He encouraged such things by joining HIKAS in 1723. HIKAS promoted experiments in agriculture and saw Scottish agriculture in a context having increasing numbers of rural industries⁵⁷. They could develop together as John Law had pointed out a generation earlier⁵⁸. Clerk exploited his coal deposits and sold his coal in Edinburgh. He left among his papers a sketch map of the great coal field which stretched down into England and across the country into the West of Scotland in which part of his estate lay⁵⁹. By the 1730s and 1740s he was employing a first rate scientist in his mining

⁵⁵ An abridged version (216 pp.) of this exists: *History of the Union of Scotland and England* by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, ed. and trans. by D. Duncan, Scottish History Society, 5th series, 1993.

⁵⁶ BROWN, *Precarious Preferment in Apollo's Favorite Residence*, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁷ There is not much written on this club but see C.W.J. WITHERS, *William Cullen's Agricultural Lectures and Writing and the Development of Agricultural Science in Eighteenth Century Scotland*, "Agricultural History Review", 64, 1987, pp. 144-156. There are some surviving minutes the Library of the Royal Highland Society, Edinburgh.

⁵⁸ That was a message reiterated in J. LAW, *Money and Trade considered with a Proposal for supplying the Nation with Money*, Edinburgh, 1705.

⁵⁹ Clerk's mines are described in Baron F. DUCKHAM, *A History of the Scottish Coal Industry*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1970. The Clerk manuscripts are at the National Archives of Scotland (GD18).

activities – Colin Maclaurin, the most notable British Newtonian of the time and the Edinburgh University professor of mathematics⁶⁰.

Clerk and Maclaurin were the organizers of the Edinburgh Philosophical Society which began in 1737. Maclaurin became one of the two secretaries, Clerk one of the two vice-presidents. By then, Sir John possessed a telescope and other scientific toys. He observed comets and eclipses but probably had neither the skill nor learning to do anything significant in astronomy. However, it was owing to his efforts that the Society survived the crisis of the '45 and went on until 1783 when it was wound up and replaced by the Royal Society of Edinburgh⁶¹.

Clerk started life as an earnest Calvinist but he became less religious as he aged and in the end looks about as deistical as the next man although he still went to the Established Church of Scotland and sat yearly in its General Assembly. He was a tolerant man not given to zealotry. He got on well with his Episcopalian and Jacobite neighbour George Lockhart of Carnwath⁶² and with others in his social world.

Sir John Clerk by the 1730s could find in Scotland many more men like himself than had been the case when his career began. That was partly owing to the patronage practised by Scots entrusted with power by ministries in London. The ministries wanted order, peace, security and taxes but did not much care about interfering with Scots who, like most in rural and provincial England, were left to govern themselves in local matters. From c. 1714 until the end of the Enlightenment period in the early 1800s, Scotland had many politicians who worked at the agenda set by men in the 1680s⁶³. None of them was greater than the 3rd Duke of Argyll (1682-1761) but he was not alone⁶⁴. The patronage exercised by such men by the 1740s had reformed the universities, increased the dependence of the Kirk on the state and promoted

⁶⁰ Maclaurin taught a variety of useful things: surveying, fortification, how to point guns and step masts and how to estimate the capacities of irregularly shaped containers. Others too taught some of those things at Glasgow and Aberdeen.

⁶¹ The Society's career has been described by me in *The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh 1737-1748*, *The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh 1748-1768*, *The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh 1768-1783*, and *The Scottish Enlightenment and the End of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh*, "British Journal for the History of Science", 12, 1979, pp. 154-191; 14, 1981, pp. 133-176; 18, 1985, pp. 255-303; and 21, 1988, pp. 33-66. Another article by me also touches on its career, *The Edinburgh Society for the Importation of Foreign Seeds and Plants, 1764-1773*, "Eighteenth-Century Life" (Special Issue), 7, 1982, pp. 73-95.

⁶² They sued each other but that seems not to have created hard feelings.

⁶³ Sir Robert Sibbald's list of potential members of his projected Royal Society of Scotland included the 4th Dukes of Hamilton, the 1st Duke of Montrose and Roxburghe, the Marquises of Atholl and Tweeddale and several other noblemen with interests in science and improvements. It failed partly because it favoured only one political faction.

⁶⁴ See my forthcoming biography of him.

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

some economic developments, particularly in linen textiles and overseas trade. Men like the Duke aided Scottish scientists, found ways to subsidize the economy, and created new institutions which made a more modern Scotland. Argyll, the greatest of the improvers of his time, was as much the promoter of the Scottish Enlightenment as anyone⁶⁵.

In the middle part of the eighteenth-century the man most like Sir John Clerk was the lawyer, Henry Home, Lord Kames. He too was an agricultural improver who aided the linen trade and served the Royal Bank and the British Linen Co, which became a bank in 1765-1771. While he is not known to have composed music, he did play his oboe at the Musical Society and, like Clerk (a cellist and keyboard player), he wrote extensively on taste and the ways in which it could be displayed. Kames was a gardener, an agricultural improver, a prolific writer on morals, law, education, and agriculture; he even wrote some books primarily historical in nature. He was long a Vice-President or President of the Philosophical Society (c. 1750-1782) and an active patron of many notable men including David Hume, Adam Smith, John Millar, Thomas Reid and the young clerics who formed the Moderate Party in the Kirk⁶⁶. His own patron had been the 3rd Duke of Argyll and men in his faction.

Scots like Kames devoted a good deal of time to philosophy which included much of what we would call social science. By the middle of the eighteenth century the philosophy done in Scotland had changed since 1700 from something more or less scholastic to something empirical and experimental which derived from Locke, Boyle and Newton. David Hume was not a typical enlightened Scot except for his interests and his hopes that the world might be made better albeit slowly, perhaps only by fits and starts and not always⁶⁷. Hume's first efforts were to set out methods of analysis which would better ground our understanding of everything and provide better programmes of action. That resulted in statements about methods, their use in the sciences, in a radically secular moral and political philosophy and in a bet-

⁶⁵ Argyll was probably associated with the creation of several university chairs in medicine and science, with the more adequate funding of colleges and with the founding of the Board of Trustees for Fisheries and Manufactures (1726-1727), the Royal Bank of Scotland (1727), the British Linen Company (1743-1746; later the British Linen Bank), and for making the Annexed Estates Commission (1752-1755) less punitive and vengeful than Englishmen had hoped it might be. His university patronage is exhaustively traced in R.L. EMERSON, *Academic Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008. His influence in the Kirk still needs thorough investigation.

⁶⁶ The fullest biography of him is by I.S. ROSS, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of His Day*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972.

⁶⁷ See *Hume's Histories* in R.L. EMERSON, *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 127-154.

ter understanding of political economy. Hume also offered a radical critique of religious beliefs. His essays on many topics ranging from aesthetics to politics, from demography to history and the changing manners of peoples over time made him the best-read British man of letters of his day, one much read on the continent⁶⁸. Those with whom he partied and played whist shared his interests, often his ends but not generally his beliefs. The “high enlightenment”⁶⁹ (c. 1730-1776), which he saw as an age of improvement, might be said to cover his adult life⁷⁰. Those who believed in an age of improvement had to be sceptical of the claims of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who saw the arts and sciences as so problematic and the future of mankind as likely to be worsened not improved by men less moral, free and religious than they needed to be. Perhaps that was one reason he too was so much read in Scotland.

A bit younger than Hume and his generation, were the distinguished natural philosophers and doctors in Scotland – Joseph Black, John Robison, James Hutton, John Playfair, Sir John Leslie but few moral philosophers of note other than Dugald Stewart and Thomas Brown. As many of the hopes of the early enlightened were being realized, an age of specialization set in. Applied science had made important changes in industry; a more polite society now enjoyed the amenities of the New Town and other suburbs built c. 1760-1840s. The Scottish Enlightenment had matured and those making it became complacent as the country enjoyed greater prosperity. The old feeling of shame at their backwardness and the patriotic urge to catch up had been replaced by the confidence which came with knowing their universities were among the world’s best and that they had made astonishing economic progress. Glasgow in 1700 had about 12,000 people; a century later it had over 80,000 and the country was now highly urbanized. Progress seemed sure. A certain smugness settled into the New Town of Edinburgh and suburbs elsewhere. The old communities, never very stable, were upset by those changes and now faced new challenges ranging from sanitation to public order and the increasing alienation of those denied civil power. The intellectuals were also being transformed. They were no longer thinking as systematically as they once had. The last generation of enlightened Scots would be much different from the first⁷¹.

⁶⁸ The second best-read was Samuel Johnson who had far fewer European readers than did Hume.

⁶⁹ The phrase seems to have originated with Anand Chitnis who applied it to the period 1750-1780 (A. CHITNIS, *The Scottish Enlightenment. A Social History*, London-Totawa (N.J.), Helm, 1976, p. 13).

⁷⁰ There is no really adequate biography of Hume but see E.C. MOSSNER, *The Life of David Hume*, Edinburgh, Nelson, 1956, 1972 and the forthcoming biographies by James Harris, Peter Loptson and possibly David Raynor.

⁷¹ An observant reader will note all those in M. COSH, *Edinburgh: The Golden Age*, Edinburgh, John Donald Publisher, 2003.

Roger L. Emerson Enlightened ages, ages of improvement, and the Scottish Enlightenment

5. *The End of the Scottish Enlightenment*

As social, economic and political conditions and political patrons had helped to make the Scottish Enlightenment, the same forces and similar actors, both now quite different, acted to end it. Throughout Britain after the 1760s, increasing conservatism, initially generated by politics at home, was intensified by the American and French Revolutions. The aftermath of the latter (c. 1790-1840s) brought fears of social change along Paine-ite lines. Not only were the works of Tom Paine banned but, for a time, free discussion in Scotland was all but ended. Henry Dundas, Scotland's political manager from c. 1780-1805, from being a supporter of the enlightened became a supporter in the universities and outside of political conformists some of whom were incompetents. Only medicine and its allied sciences trove under his regime because they provided too much income to the university towns to allow their teachers to be harassed⁷². Increasingly, the ethos of the classes of Scots who had made the Enlightenment changed. Scots at the end of the century were less interested in metaphysics, science or natural philosophy. They were more pious and historical in outlook than had been the earlier generations of the enlightened⁷³.

The very success of the drive to become modern and polite created in the New Town in Edinburgh a social world disconnected from the needs of the poor who themselves remained in the Old Town. Separation of the classes was generally more common and the needs of all were of less concern to the "people above". Glasgow industrialized and became squalid. Aberdeen became a more insignificant place than it had been for a very long time. Sentimentalism, piety, and priggishness, so characteristic of the early nineteenth century, replaced the sceptical and cool rational attitudes which had marked men like Hume and Smith whose own theories of the role of sentiments in moral philosophy were partly responsible for the change. Scots who had wanted to be North Britons were becoming Britons. Integration became a reality rooted in economics, transport and opportunities. Many like Thomas Young, James Mill or the young Thomas Carlyle went south or into the expanding Empire seeking fame or advancement. Their grandfathers had been content with more local stages. Scotland was left to less energetic men. It is hard to find a typical figure for this phase of the Scottish Enlightenment. He – there were as yet no significant number of female thinkers and doers – would need to show uneasiness about the future, a somewhat elegaic respect

⁷² For the value of medical education to 18th century Scots see EMERSON, *Essays on David Hume*, pp. 178-182.

⁷³ This is borne out by many sections of Kafker and Loveland's book on the *Britannica* which catered somewhat to popular tastes.

for the past and uncertainty as to where lay one's intellectual and sentimental allegiances⁷⁴.

Sir Walter Scott and the Edinburgh Reviewers come as close as any. They resembled the improvers and thinkers of the high enlightenment but they were different. Scott, in some moods, was an improver who installed a gas works in his back yard to light his house. In other moods, he looked nostalgically backwards, as he did in novels which traced the progress of Scots. The Edinburgh Reviewers were more progressive in attitude but some were less Scottish, less philosophical, and, in Henry Cockburn's case, more fearful of the progress they lived long enough to see as destructive⁷⁵. The Reviewers often lived in London and were sometimes uneasy in the Scottish capital.

By c. 1815 the Scottish Enlightenment had ended⁷⁶. The desires to systematically improve everything all at once had changed into desires to do little for the poor⁷⁷ and to avoid social change but to feel more deeply and to be more like the English⁷⁸. The new popular science of the 1820s was hardly comparable to Joseph Black's chemistry, the physics of John Robison or James Hutton's geology; it was phrenology⁷⁹. The 1760s had admired dubious poets and playwrights but the romantic gush of Scott and his friends was different and not altogether to the liking of the Edinburgh Reviewers who gave bad reviews to the Lake Poets. The political attitudes of 1822 dwelt not only on how power could be used to benefit Scots, a perennial questions, but on how a now sentimental and mythical Jacobitism might be displayed to an aesthete King in a pageant staged by "the Great Unknown" about to be made a baronet. A world of politeness, sham, emotion, class tensions and harshness toward the lower orders was replacing the more honest and open, if often no more charitable or salubrious views of Hume and his friends.

By 1800 no one could possibly master all the fields of knowledge in a systematic manner. Even the story of the evolution of the arts and sciences given

⁷⁴ Cosh somewhat unwittingly traces a good deal of this. See also K. MILLER, *Cockburn's Millennium*, London, Duckworth, 1975 and *Lord Cockburn. A Bicentenary Commemoration*, ed. by A. Bell, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1979.

⁷⁵ Cockburn's *Memorials of his Own Time* (Edinburgh, Foulis, 1909) is full of accounts of those who left, of those who failed to be as good as their fathers or whose politics and social views left the city worse than they had found it. Cockburn's own dilemmas are well caught by A. BELL, *Reason and dreams. Cockburn's practical and nostalgic views of civic wellbeing*, in *Lord Cockburn A Bicentenary Commemoration*, pp. 27-67.

⁷⁶ Andrew Hook has expressed this very well in *The History of Scottish Literature*, pp. 308-310.

⁷⁷ R. MITCHISON, *The Poor Law*, in *People and Society in Scotland 1760-1990*, 3 vols., ed. by T.D. Devine et al., Edinburgh, Donald, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 252-267.

⁷⁸ After 1800 few Scots referred to themselves as North Britons; they were simply Britons.

⁷⁹ It must be said that David Wilson's recent and excellent book on Scottish natural philosophy does link the physics of John Robison and John Playfair to later work by Lord Kelvin and Clerk Maxwell: D. WILSON, *Seeking Nature's Logic. Natural Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, University Park (Pa), Penn State Press, 2009.

in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* had increasingly to be written by specialists of different sorts. The basic volumes themselves were supplemented by historical accounts of moral and natural philosophy and a third on chemistry, not logic and metaphysics, which tells us how specialized Scottish industry had become and how method was to be taught⁸⁰. Specialization was breaking up a characteristic way of conceiving of knowledge just as Romanticism concentrated minds on the imagination which did not, as with Hume, constitute causal relations and substances. The imaginative now found “echoes from beyond the grave” and saw “into the life of things”, “where one finds love, natural piety and God”. Many, guided by the Lake Poets, sought mystical intuitions and made of poetry “the spontaneous over flow of feeling”⁸¹. Differences among peoples produced national cultures which should be protected and fostered by their own states. The old, once universal, and rational human nature was now weakened if not gone. Scott and Byron in verse and Henry Mackenzie in prose expressed or feigned sensitivities seldom exhibited in everyday life which was hardly sublime, seldom touched by the supernatural or lived at such high tension. The quests for knowledge to be applied for the benefit of all might go on but it was not to be rooted solely in reason, fellow-feeling or perhaps even in the providence of Nature’s God. That progress would come was more often believed but the need to work at it *generally* had given way to an assumption that it was more to be looked for in science and economic life than in art, religion or morals now seen as rather unrelated to rational scientific developments.

Those changes were not peculiar to Scotland. Sir Isaiah Berlin once elegantly described the differences between the Enlightenment and the Romantic period. For him Western Civilization was predicated on the assumptions that there was a unique set of internally consistent answers to questions which could be found by pursuing proper methods of enquiry. For the enlightened, those methods were defined by various critical, rational and empirical methods. The men of the Enlightenment held those answers to be the only ones on which policies and actions should be based. What men did ought to be related to their rational understanding of things and the consequences of actions. Those beliefs should be their only guides to action. The Enlightenment ended when romantics denied those premises sometimes arguing for relativistic views of cultures and favouring methods which were more oriented toward intuition and faiths. New feelings, and a new impor-

⁸⁰ Those were written by Dugald Stewart, John Playfair and William Thomas Brande and appeared in 1817 in the 5th edition. For the details of this story see, Kafker, Loveland, *The Early Britannica*.

⁸¹ Wordsworth, ‘Yes, it was the mountain Echo’; ‘Tintern Abbey’; ‘Intimations of Immortality’; ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

tance assigned to them, marked those changes in western cultures⁸². Policies were now seen as better rooted in a social conservatism which looked not to the making of general improvements but which tended to see those as risky, as harbingers of revolution or uncontrollable changes with fearful unintended consequences. That old doctrine again took on providential and mysterious overtones. Progress and improvement might come but there was no need to look for it in all fields or to relate it to a systematic and coherent pattern of ideas which needed constant elaboration and application. The Scottish enlightenment as a general improving movement dissolved in sentiment, industrial revolutions, class tensions, and the imperatives of empire. Improvement there would be in some things but not in all. It would come not from the applications of science but from the good will or heroism of men whose acts had unintended consequences known only to God. Scots were often movers and promoters of those changes but they ceased to be enlightened. Carlyle's time had come.

6. *So Where Does this Leave Us?*

This paper started by asking if we should keep *enlightenment* as an organizing concept and the name of a period. It seems to me that perhaps we should not. If we do, then we should think more about *improvements* and the changing means to realize changing ends. The continuities with the past could be better shown. We should retain the sorts of criteria which Hume thought produced ages of improvement or enlightened ages. The number and kinds of intellectuals and doers who would be of interest would be widened and we would not be stuck with so many partial and peculiar enlightenments. It would also bring into this movement more of the practical improvers of the time ranging from bankers and economic theorists, like John Law or Richard Cantillon, to inventors, like Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau or Pierre Joseph Macquer, and ministers like Count Kaunitz who read the Physiocrats and Adam Smith and whose attitudes to change were rather Humean. It would make the period one less defined by literary men. That, it seems to me, would be a clear gain. At the same time, an age of improvers runs the risk of never ending since there are more improvers today than there ever were and many now see the intellectual and the real world in holistic ways. I have no great hopes that the name of the period will change but perhaps we can all be a bit more sensitive to the degree that our periodisations reflect our interests as well as what happened in the affairs we study.

⁸² I first heard Berlin make this argument at a conference on the Enlightenment held in Cleveland in 1970. He recycled it in several essays including *The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West*, in *Unity, Plurality and Politics. Essays in Honour of F.M. Barnard*, ed. by J.M. Porter, R. Vernon, London-Sydney, Helm, 1986, pp. 120-142.