Abstract and Keywords

This introductory chapter provides a selective contextual overview. The salient features of Smith’s life are outlined and what little information is available of his personality is identified. That Smith was a key member of the Scottish Enlightenment is recognized with a discussion of the broad social milieu in which Smith lived as well as an overview of what was distinctive about the thought of the Scots and what they shared with the Enlightenment more generally. The legacy and history of Smith’s two key books (and) from his death to the present day is sketched.

Keywords: Adam Smith, Scotland, enlightenment, economics

The chapters that follow examine in depth the various facets of Adam Smith’s writings. The aim here is to give some selective background context. As far as possible it is descriptive. No claims, let alone arguments, are made that Smith is a ‘product’ of his times, in any sense beyond the truism that no-one is immune to their social environment (in the widest sense).

Smith's Life (1723-90)

What follows can only claim to be an outline (for detailed information readers can consult Ian Ross (2010) and, with a different emphasis, Phillipson (2010) who reprises some salient themes in his contribution to this Handbook; see also Gavin Kennedy’s chapter which provides some additional biographical detail). Though he has been the focus of many biographies, Smith is not a helpful biographical subject. Unlike his great friend David Hume (1711–76), he was a poor correspondent and he is as far removed from another contemporary—Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78)—as it is possible to get when it comes to self-conscious self-revelation. The objective outlines of his life, though, are well-known.
Adam Smith was born in 1723 in Kirkcaldy on the east coast of Scotland. His father, also Adam, was a lawyer, but he died six months before the son Adam was born. His mother (Margaret), twenty-nine when she gave birth, never re-married, and Adam was a devoted son throughout her long life—she only died in 1788, predeceasing her son by just two years. Dugald Stewart (1753–1828), Smith’s first biographer, who knew him and was able to gain additional information from contemporaries, remarks that Adam was a sickly child who received the ‘tender solicitude of his surviving parent’ but he was ‘able to repay her affection, by every attention that filial gratitude could dictate during the long period of sixty years’ (Life I.2: 269).

He attended the local school in Kirkcaldy from about the age of eight and benefited from the rigour and enthusiasm of a new master. Smith entered Glasgow University (founded 1451) in 1737 at the early—but for the time not unusual—age of fourteen. His school-gained proficiency in the classics was such that he was effectively able to by-pass the early years in the curriculum devoted to Latin and Greek. It is not certain why Glasgow was chosen. There were drawbacks to St Andrews (the closest) and Aberdeen (where there had been some past association) and perhaps Edinburgh was a city more lax in its behaviour than Smith’s mother wished for—in 1759 Smith was less than complimentary, judging it a ‘very dissolute town’ (Corr 42: 59). More positively there may have been a relative (an aunt) in Glasgow, a circumstance that W.R. Scott conjectures would have been an important consideration for his mother (Scott 1937: 28 cf. 235 that reprints a letter to Smith in inferential evidential support). Ian Ross observes that his father had been made a Glasgow burgess and proffers that as a reason to carry some weight in choice of University (Ross 2010: 29).

At Glasgow, Smith studied under some of the leading scholars of the day. He was taught mathematics by Robert Simson, who was (or became) a leading authority on Euclid (Smith owned a copy of the second edition of his Sectionum Conicarum). Much later Smith called him one of the two greatest mathematicians of his time (TMS III.2.20: 124). On what we might loosely call the ‘scientific front’, Smith was taught experimental philosophy by Robert Dick, using instruments that been bought as part of a self-conscious modernizing drive on Glasgow’s part to elucidate the ‘doctrine of bodies’ and explicitly as that ‘science (natural philosophy) is improved by Sir Isaac Newton’ (Emerson 1995: 29).

However, the most important teacher was the Professor of Moral Philosophy, Francis Hutcheson. In a letter towards the end of his life, Smith pays eloquent tribute to his abilities and virtues as the professor of moral philosophy (Corr 274: 301) and this, despite the fact that in his Theory of Moral Sentiments (TMS) Smith openly disagreed with his teacher’s views of benevolence and moral sense.

In 1740 Smith was awarded a Snell Scholarship to study at Balliol College, Oxford (this is still in existence today and Tom Campbell the author of Chapter 27 held the same scholarship). The purpose of this scholarship, according to the original bequest, was to enable its holders to prepare for ordination in the Church of England and join the Episcopal Church in Scotland but even before Smith took it up this provision had been nullified (Phillipson 2010: 58). Smith stayed at Oxford until 1746. This was not because he was enthralled by
the education on offer; indeed in a frequently quoted passage from *The Wealth of Nations* (WN) he made the scathing remark that at Oxford ‘the greater part of the publick professors have, for these many years, given up altogether the pretence of teaching’ (WN V.i.f: 761). In the absence of documented evidence, the justified presumption is that Smith spent his time at Oxford keeping up his scientific interests, cultivating his linguistic skills and in developing, as Dugald Stewart conjectured, ‘the study of human nature in all its branches, most particularly of the political history of mankind’ (Life I. 8: 271). Nicholas Phillipson has argued that the ‘decisive event’ in this ‘study’ was Smith’s reading of Hume (Phillipson 2010: 64 and see his chapter below). When Smith first read Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739: 40) is not known definitively but that he did so during his Oxford sojourn would seem difficult to deny.

On his return to Scotland in 1746 he returned to live with his mother in Kirkcaldy but in 1748 he moved to Edinburgh where, thanks to the patronage of Henry Home (1699–1782) —later ennobled on his appointment as a judge as Lord Kames—he was invited to give a series of lectures on rhetoric and later (though the evidence is less secure) on law and philosophy. There is only indirect evidence of what Smith actually delivered but Phillipson claims that it is plausible that this period is when the ‘foundations of his system were laid’ (Phillipson 2010: 106). What is certain is that Smith's lectures were successful (he repeated them) and, with the continuing support of Home and, decisively, Archibald Campbell (1682–1761), Earl of Ilay (later Duke of Argyll), Smith returned to Glasgow University.

He was appointed the Professor of Logic in 1751. There was one other candidate and although the vote for Smith was unanimous his rival (George Muirhead) was no cipher and later became Professor of Oriental Languages and then Humanity at Glasgow (Ross 2010: 108). Smith's appointment necessitated that he read a dissertation (De Origine Idearum) (Scott 1937: 138 quoting the official University Minute) and that he sign the Confession of Faith, a document embodying Calvinist theology, before the Presbytery of Glasgow. The Kirk maintained a formal link with the University which earlier in the century had been source of dispute (with some bearing on Simson's father, as will be noted below). Smith would appear to have had no qualms about signing this document, but it would be highly presumptive to read into this any indication as to his own beliefs (if he has any such they would be of general Deistic sort) (see Evensky (2005), Otteson (2002), Hanley (2009) and for Smith on religion generally see Gavin Kennedy's chapter below). In 1752 Smith was appointed, without competition, Professor of Moral Philosophy. He succeeded Thomas Craigie, who had moved from St Andrews, to take on the Chair on Hutcheson's death, and whose short tenure was marked by ill health and an early death. Smith held that post until he left academic life in 1764.

Smith professed on a wide variety of subjects. Beyond courses in philosophy and jurisprudence he also discoursed on history, literature, and language and a series of notes of his lectures, on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, have been discovered and published (see the discussions below by Michael Amrozowicz, Jan Swearingen, and Catherine Labio). Although in his will he asked for his manuscripts to be destroyed he did allow some essays to be
published. Among these is an essay on ‘Imitative Arts’ (see James Chandler below) and another on the ‘History of Astronomy’ (see Leonidas Montes’ Chapter). The latter is notable not only for the breadth of Smith’s knowledge but also for his attempt to link the development of different astronomical accounts to a basic human propensity to seek order. In 1762 the University awarded him a LL.D in virtue of his ‘universally acknowledged Reputation in letters and particularly that he has taught Jurisprudence these many years in this University with great applause’ (quoted in Scott 1937: 187).

Smith published two great books and the seeds of both were sown in his Glasgow professorial years. TMS appeared in 1759 and drew on his lectures. It went through six editions in his lifetime and the final one, containing extensive revisions appeared in the year of his death (1790). What the simple fact of this chronology tells us is that Smith’s commitment to the moral point of view endured alongside and beyond the publication of WN, his second great book published in 1776. Although by that date Smith had left Glasgow, we know, from student notes that have survived, that he had already considered many of its leading themes in his Glasgow classrooms. This judgment is substantiated by the testimony of his pupil, then professorial colleague, John Millar (1735–1801) who recalls that Smith lectured on ‘those arts which contribute to subsistence, and to the accumulation of property, in producing correspondent movements or alterations in law and government’ (as recorded by Stewart (Life I.19: 275)).

Smith left the University in 1764 for the more lucrative post of tutor and companion to the 18-year-old Duke of Buccleuch; a position obtained through the influence of the Duke’s father-in-law, Charles Townsend. The university expressed their ‘sincere regret’ at this event commenting that his ‘uncommon Genius, great Abilities and extensive Learning did so much Honour to this Society’ (quoted in Scott 1937: 221). This was not to be Smith’s last contact because in 1787 he was elected Rector of the University (a largely formal post). In a letter of thanks he declares that he remembers his professorial days as ‘by far the most useful and therefore as by far the happiest and most honourable period of my life’ (Corr 274: 309). On leaving Glasgow he travelled with his charge to France, settled in Toulouse but (typically) we know little of what he did there, though this period is the focus of concentrated research by Phillippe Massot-Bordenave. Smith visited, and resided for a while in, Geneva and met Voltaire who lived nearby at Ferney and of whom Smith had a high opinion. Armed with introductions, Smith visited Paris where he mingled with a number of the literary men and some women of the French Enlightenment. Of particular note among those he met were the economists Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–81) and François Quesnay (1694–1774). Quesnay was the formative thinker of the Physiocratic school. We know Smith was familiar with the Physiocrat's writings. Quesnay, who sent Smith a copy of his Physiocratie (1767), was commended in WN as an ‘ingenious and profound author’ (WN IV.ix.27: 672) but, as we will note later, Smith was deeply critical of what he called the ‘agricultural system’. It is certainly far-fetched to claim that these meetings, and these writings, were decisive in the formation of Smith's arguments (see Nerio Naldi’s Chapter).
Smith's tutorship was cut short in 1766 by the unfortunate death of his pupil's brother, who had been with them since 1764. Despite the brevity of his responsibilities Smith was granted a handsome pension (£300) which relieved him thereafter of the necessity of having to earn a living. On his return to Scotland he went back to his mother's house in Kirkcaldy, where, Smith, speaking retrospectively in 1780, states that 'I continued to live for six years in great tranquillity and ... amused myself principally with writing my Enquiry concerning the Wealth of Nations' (Corr 208: 252). He moved to Edinburgh (taking his mother with him) in 1777 when, again with the support of the Buccleuch connection, he was appointed a Customs Commissioner. This post paid well and Smith was able to establish himself in a substantial property but not in the fashionable New Town (whither Hume had moved) but in the Canongate area of the Old Town. The job was not a sinecure and Smith was conscientious in his fulfilment of its obligations to such an extent, though with perhaps a hint of disingenuousness, that he judged that it interrupted his 'literary pursuits' (Corr 208: 253).

Among these pursuits were preparing further editions of both WN and, especially, TMS. The final sixth edition of the latter was an extensive revision and the source of much subsequent commentary (as can be seen in the chapters that follow). Smith may also at this time have been trying to complete 'two other great works upon the anvil; the one is a sort of Philosophical History of all the different branches of Literature, of Philosophy, Poetry and Eloquence; the other is a sort of theory and History of Law and Government' (Corr 248: 286–7). In the end this defeated him as he intimated it would in the Advertisement to the 6th edition of TMS where he remarks that he has left intact the penultimate paragraph from the first edition that expressed his intention to give 'an account of the general principles of law and government and of the different revolutions they have undergone in the different ages and periods of society' (TMS VII.iv.37: 342). There was material, though its extent unknown, since Smith instructed his executors to destroy his manuscripts, excepting some (including the 'juvenile' (Corr 137: 168)) 'History of Astronomy' (HA) which were published in EPS in 1795.

As to Smith the man, his own reticence means relying principally on the testimony of others. Dugald Stewart's 'Life' is the most revealing. Stewart observes that his 'private worth' can be vouched for by 'the confidence, respect and attachment which followed him through all the various relations of life'. He had 'many peculiarities' which, reading between the lines, were perhaps off-putting and it was only his 'intimate friends' who were able to appreciate the 'inexpressible charm of his conversation' and 'artless simplicity of his heart' (Life V.12: 329). As Stewart continues to depict him, the portrait that emerges is of an introverted, self-contained man, given to absent-mindedness and taciturnity in public. As to his external appearance, all Stewart can say is that 'there was nothing uncommon' about it but does add the profile medallion produced by James Tassie 'conveys an exact idea of his profile'. Smith never sat for his portrait (itself unusual among his friends) and, aside from Tassie's work, there only exists a stylized memorial print from John Kay. The statue in Glasgow University is a nineteenth-century 'imagination' as is the recent (2008) one in Edinburgh.
Scotland in the age of Smith

In what sort of society did Smith live? All ages are ages of transition but that cliché does have some purchase in eighteenth-century Scotland. What follows is an indicative survey to help situate Smith without making any claims that he was in some way a passive product of his times. This survey will touch upon the political, economic, religious, and educational institutions and conclude with a few words on the informal linkages between them.

The most momentous political events took place before Smith was born though so profound were these that he lived with the consequences. The genesis lies in the seventeenth century. The last Stuart king, James II (and VII) was, in effect, deposed by the English Parliament in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Scotland at that time had its own Parliament but a succession of bad harvests, the ruinous collapse of the ‘Darien scheme’ (the Parliament’s attempt to establish Scotland as a colonial power) together with a trading dispute with the English supplied a backcloth to the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Whether the Union was an act of betrayal by some leading Scots, was the product of English chicanery or was an ‘escape’ from immediate pressing difficulties is still a matter of academic (and political) dispute.

The Treaty of Union gave the Scots as Scots little direct political power (only 16 nobles in the Lords and about 8 per cent of the complement of the Commons). But the Treaty allowed the Scots to retain their own legal system and their own form of church administration and doctrine. These were significant exceptions since it meant that what mattered most immediately to most people remained in Scottish hands. The lawyers became pivotal figures. On behalf of their patrons, such as notably Ilay (whom we have already met), they effectively ran Scotland. Legal independence also reflected an intellectual difference. Unlike English law, Scots law had always had closer links with European/Roman systems; indeed until the eighteenth century, when Law chairs were founded, its lawyers were educated abroad, especially at the great Dutch universities of Leiden and Utrecht. Smith’s own law lectures follow, albeit distinctively, the Roman Natural Law curriculum.

When Queen Anne (a daughter of James) died in 1714 the throne of England and Scotland passed to George of Hanover as the closest Protestant heir (he was married to a granddaughter of James I and VI). It was that succession that had particular political consequences in Scotland. The members of the Scottish Enlightenment were Hanoverians. This meant more than supporting the current system because that very support signified their opposition to Jacobitism. The Jacobites were the supporters of the Stuart line and in the first half of the eighteenth century there were regular flare-ups against the new dynasty. The regularity of these flare-ups suggests that the Hanoverian succession was far from bedded-down (though disquiet with the effects of the Union is not conterminous with support for the Jacobite cause). The two most significant rebellions were the ‘15 and the ‘45. The ‘15 had widespread support, tapping into a well of general dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of benefits flowing from the Union. The ‘45 initially posed a great threat to the British state as the army of the Young Pretender or Bonnie Prince Charlie penetrated as far south as Derby in England, about 120 miles from London. Smith commented in his
lectures à propos the effects of commerce that four or five thousand 'naked unarmed Highlanders' took possession of 'the improved parts' without resistance (LJB 331: 540). The initial military success of the Jacobites was not matched by popular support from the bulk of the Scottish people and was soon reversed. After the battle of Culloden (1746), which crushed the rebellion, it was deliberate Government policy to destroy the political separateness of the Highlands (Youngson 1972: 26). One such Act of Parliament abolished 'heritable jurisdictions'. These jurisdictions, which gave local clan chiefs rights to administer justice (including the power to punish by death), had been explicitly preserved by the Treaty of Union but were nonetheless overturned on the grounds that it had given these chiefs the power to raise an 'army' from their vassals (Shaw 1983: 169). Smith refers to one of these chiefs (Cameron of Locheil) in WN (III.iv.8: 416) in the context of an explanation of the emergence of a commercial society.

One of the motives behind the Union was the need for Scots to gain unrestricted access to English markets. Eventually, by about mid-century, the Union began to have an economic pay-off and rapid change took place (Devine 1985). The growth of Glasgow was the most remarkable of these changes. Its population grew from (roughly) 17,000 when Smith was a student to over 42,000 in 1780 (Hamilton 1963: 18). The city attracted numbers from the rural Western Highlands as a process of urbanization began. A phenomenon that has caused some commentators to speculate that Smith's 'four stages theory', and the attention paid by the Scottish literati to the mode of subsistence, as William Robertson called it in his 1777 History of America (1840: 823), was stimulated by the rapidity of socio-economic changes apparent in Scotland. Excluding agriculture, the production of textiles, especially linen, was the chief Scottish industry (Dorie 1979). In Glasgow the crucial development was the growth in the tobacco trade as it overtook Bristol to become the major port. Smith knew a number of the Glasgow 'tobacco lords'. He participated in the Glasgow Literary Society, presided over by Andrew Cochrane, one of these 'lords' (Sher 1995: 335ff). A passage in WN where Smith remarks on the tendency of merchants to have the ambition of becoming country gentlemen (WN III.iv.3: 411) does reflect the activities of a number of these tobacco merchants such as John Glassford (who, like Cochrane, gave his name to still extant Glasgow street names (Devine 1975: 27)).

The development of 'heavier' industry like mining, chemicals, and smelting did not take off until the last quarter of the century and it is frequently noted that Smith's model of 'industry' was small-scale (Kennedy 2005: 132). What urbanization and textile production did require was a supportive infrastructure both physical and financial. Transportation was by horse (Smith rode to Oxford) and boat. While there was a reasonably efficient coach service between Edinburgh and London, cross-country travel was arduous. The only way to transport in bulk was by boat and to get from Glasgow to Edinburgh (about 45 miles apart) meant a long and hazardous voyage via the Pentland Firth (well over 600 miles). A canal linking the estuaries of the rivers Forth in the east and the Clyde in the west was started in 1768 and completed in 1790. This was a considerable engineering achievement but clearly took extensive capital funding. The concomitant of this capital investment was the development of a banking system. The Bank of Scotland predated the Union but the Royal Bank was established in 1727 and the British Linen Company (Bank)
in 1746. There were a host of smaller banks, not all of them viable. One of the problems faced by the shareholders in the Forth-Clyde Canal was the depression in confidence caused by the crash of the Ayr Bank in 1772. Of this Smith was aware and his views on speculators (‘projectors’) banking and financial regulation are found in WN (see Hugh Rockoff’s chapter).

As mentioned above, the Union left intact the 1690 Settlement that established Presbyterianism as the officially sanctioned form of Church government in Scotland and subscription to the tenets of the Calvinist Westminster Confession was made the test of orthodoxy (Cameron 1982: 116). This was not mere lip-service. In 1696 a 19-year-old student Thomas Aikenhead was executed for blasphemy. This confessional commitment lasted into the eighteenth century with attempts to remove for heresy the Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, John Simson (father of Robert) in 1717 and again in 1727. This was a murky business, a mixture of theology, doctrine, and politics—a cocktail that affected more than Simson (Skoczylas 2001). Yet, here too, change was afoot (at least at elite level). The loss of a Parliament at the Union enhanced the Kirk’s role as the nearest equivalent to a national debating forum in the form of General Assembly (Clark 1970: 202). This salience made it the focus of political attention and this eventually helped the Scottish Church (or elements of it) and the Scottish Enlightenment to come to some sort of rapprochement, as manifest in the historian William Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University (1762–93), becoming the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1762 (succeeded by another professor—Alexander Gerard of Marischal College and author of a prize-winning Essay on Taste). The shift this represented can be gauged by the fact that Hume and Kames were unanimously denounced in the Assembly for their ‘impious and infidel principles’ (McIntosh 1998: 70).

Robertson was a leading figure in the ‘Moderate’ movement. Through astute manoeuvrings, this group of like-minded ‘modernizers’ managed to make itself the dominant ‘party’ in the Assembly. This enabled the Moderates to oversee the appointment of ministers sympathetic to improvement and to ‘enlightenment’; an outlook suited to the political ‘management’ of Scotland (Shaw 1983: 100). This does not mean the Moderates’ religious beliefs were insincere even if their seeming emphasis on social duties (Christian neighbourliness) and relative effacing of hellfire sermonizing prompted an evangelical reaction (the ‘High-Flyers’). It is evident that the Moderates were the ‘Enlightenment’ party. With the institutional centrality of its key members, this makes the Enlightenment in Scotland very different from that typically associated with the French situation. Smith was friendly with the leading Moderates and this circle was sufficiently catholic (as it were) to include Hume. The view of Moderates like Robertson and Adam Ferguson has been called Christian Stoicism (Sher 1985: 325). Many Smith scholars enlist him, with varying degrees of commitment, in the Stoic camp even if his own religious views are enigmatic (see Ross 2010: 432) and Gavin Kennedy’s exploration below).

With the exception of Hume and law-lords like Kames, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment were, like Smith, university professors. For a country of Scotland’s size and population the presence of five universities—St Andrews, Glasgow, and Kings College Ab-
erdeen, which predate the Reformation, and Edinburgh and Marischal College Aberdeen, which were Reformation foundations—is striking. The traditional task of these universi-
ties was to turn out ministers of religion and this continued throughout the century (Cant
1982: 44) but here, too, there was change. We have already mentioned the establishment
of law chairs, and medical schools were officially recognized in Edinburgh (1740) and
Glasgow (1760) (the provision of a medical education, though formally part of the
curriculum, had become moribund). This ‘vocationalism’ was symptomatic of the recog-
nized need to address the demands of societal change. The system of regents whereby
one teacher took the same class for all its subjects throughout its four years of study was
abandoned (only Kings College retained it through the century). A second change was the
move from lecturing in Latin. Here Hutcheson at Glasgow was an important pioneer and
his personal impact, as well as his writings, has led to him being called the ‘father of the
Scottish Enlightenment’. He was a key influence on Smith who, late in life, remembered
him as ‘the never to be forgotten Dr. Hutcheson’ (Corr 274: 309). Though Smith criticized
Hutcheson's recourse to a ‘moral sense’, as a constitutive part of human nature (TMS
VII.iii.3.13–15: 324–6), he followed his teacher in his opposition to all rationalist and ego-
istic accounts of morality (Hutcheson features in a number of chapters).

The practical aspect of learning was clearly important. Aside from the development of vo-
cational classes in law and medicine there was expansion in subjects like chemistry and
botany which had obvious uses in agricultural improvement and ‘industry’. For example,
William Cullen at Glasgow corresponded with Kames on the chemistry of fertilizers and
gave special lectures on the principles of agriculture—he had a farm of his own where he
put his own principles into practice (Donovan 1982: 100). Cullen also researched into the
application of chemistry to linen-bleaching (Guthrie 1950: 62). But the universities were
also open to intellectual developments (in which Cullen also made his mark). Curricula
were changed and especially notable was the speed with which Newton's system was
adopted and professed (Shepherd 1982). Newton himself gave the Glasgow graduate Col-
in McLaurin—already a professor at Marischal College—a testimonial for his appointment

As part of the ‘system’, university appointments were, not surprisingly, another arm of the
patronage system. The apparently simple fact that the theorists of the Scottish Enlighten-
ment were overwhelmingly university professors is prima facie evidence that in this sys-
tem ability counted. While it would be a mistake to deny that nepotism and cronyism was
present, little was to be gained by appointing lazy incompetents if for no other reason
than that they would not attract students to pay their fees (another Scottish practice that
Smith compared favourably to Oxford).

Implicit in much of the above is the interweaving nature of the Scottish institutions of the
law, the church and the academy. These can be characterized as interwoven strands be-
cause the intellectual elite were involved across the board. This involvement was embod-
ied in the proliferation of clubs and debating societies that were established as they
formed a point of convergence for the universities, the law, the church and the ‘improv-
ing’ gentry (Phillipson 1973). For example, the ‘Select’ Society (or more formally and in-
dicatively ‘the Edinburgh Society for the Encouraging of Arts, Sciences, Manufactures and Agriculture’) included amongst its number key social theorists like Smith, Hume, Kames, Robertson, and Ferguson. For all his somewhat retiring nature and reputation, Smith was an active member of a number of these associations (we have already mentioned the Glasgow Literary club with its mix of ‘town and gown’).

(p. 10) It is instructive that a number of these clubs were concerned with ‘politeness’. English periodicals like The Tatler and The Spectator were reprinted quickly in Edinburgh and widely circulated (cf. Phillipson 1987: 235). What was attractive in these publications was the attention paid to ‘manners’. In the words of John Ramsay, one of their contemporaries, they ‘descanted in a strain of wit and irony peculiar to themselves on those lesser duties of life which former divines and moralists had left almost untouched’ (Ramsay 1888: I, 6). Such a concern with social propriety was the corollary of the burgeoning urban culture so that indeed ‘urbane ness’ (and the related ‘civility’) became positively valued traits of character and behaviour (see Richard Boyd’s chapter). Any reader of TMS cannot but be aware of the centrality of propriety in Smith’s social ethics and his delineation of elaborate social interactions so as to induce, among an ‘assembly of strangers’, a ‘concord’ of sentiments (TMS I.i.4.7–9: 22–3). These aspects of his thought are explored in several of the chapters, especially in Part Three. In summary, it is not too fanciful to see this interweaving mix of formal non-state institutions, informal societies, and civic consciousness as a manifestation of many of the aspects that have come to characterize a ‘civil society’.

The Enlightenment: Scotland and beyond

Smith is unquestionably a member of what Peter Gay called the ‘Enlightenment family’ (Gay 1967: 4). The Enlightenment was a self-conscious movement. To a significant extent this self-consciousness militates against a stringent reading that would deny the appropriateness of referring to ‘the’ Enlightenment (see Pocock 1999, Robertson 2005, Sher 2006, and Withers 2007 for a representative sample of the debate). The participants —referred to variously as philosopshes, the Aufklärer and the literati—were by definition members of the educated stratum of society. In Scotland, as we have observed, they were professionals, especially lawyers, doctors, and university professors and this is replicated elsewhere (Kant, Linnaeus, Genovesi for example, were also professors). For all its popular association of the Enlightenment with France, France is in this regard something of an outlier, since with one or two exceptions, the philosopshes were either professional men of letters or of independent means.

Nor was the Enlightenment a localized affair. There were family members throughout Europe as well as America. The literati genuinely were participants in an international dialogue, seeing themselves as engaged in the same debates. One form of this dialogue was direct engagement. So, for example, Smith engaged Rousseau by reviewing his Discourse on Inequality for the short-lived Edinburgh Review in 1755 (included in EPS) (see Dennis Rasmussen below). A second form of dialogue was the widespread dissemination of works
and translations. For example, the Italians typically knew WN via its French version and in his professorial days Smith had for a time (1758–60) responsibility for the University Library and in that capacity purchased seven volumes of Diderot's *Encyclopedie* (Scott 1937: 179).

If we turn to the core concerns of these self-conscious intellectuals, then their imagery of ‘light’ provides a helpful clue. Light implied that earlier times were comparatively benighted. In less metaphorical terms this contrast between light and dark is the contrast between knowledge and reason over against ignorance, prejudice, and superstition. Hence any institutions such as slavery, torture, witchcraft, or religious persecution that still existed were to be opposed as relics, as creatures of the night. Smith’s writings establish his subscription to this agenda (see Samuel Fleischacker below for examples of Smith’s commitment to equality). Even though Smith as a writer was not given to expressions of outrage he was clear that slavery is evil (LJB 132: 451), was unambiguous in his deprecation of judicial cruelty (as in the treatment of Jean Calas (TMS III.2.11: 120) and in his condemnation of infanticide (TMS V.2.15: 210; though see Fonna Forman-Barzilai 2010 for the possible limits to Smith’s sympathy (a topic also explored by Duncan Kelly in his chapter)). On occasion Smith did blazon his Enlightenment credentials as in his open declaration that ‘science is the great antidote to enthusiasm and superstition’ (WN Vi.g. 14: 796).

Central to the lifting of darkness was the light shone by science. The brightest star in that firmament was Isaac Newton. Newton was the hero of the Enlightenment. To speak generally, his achievement was to encompass within one comprehensive schema an explanation, derived from a few simple principles (laws of motion plus gravity), of the range of natural phenomena, from the orbit of the planets to apples falling from trees. Crucially and decisively these laws were proved to be right. Newton’s calculation that the earth was not, contrary to Descartes, elongated at the poles and flat at the equator but flatter around the poles was vindicated by expeditions to Lapland and the Equator. His prediction that a comet would enter the solar system was duly borne out by its (Halley’s Comet) arrival in 1758. Well before that date Newton’s system had become accepted especially in Scotland.

One hallmark of Newton’s status was that to liken someone’s work to his was to pay it the highest possible compliment. For example, John Millar in his *Historical View* declared Smith to be the ‘Newton of political economy’ because he had discovered the principles of commerce (Millar 2006: 404). Smith shared this Enlightenment enthusiasm and in his case this was backed up by an impressive knowledge of astronomy (see Leonidas Montes’ chapter below). In the posthumous (but very likely early-written) HA, Smith declared that Newton’s system was ‘the greatest and most admirable improvement that was ever made in philosophy’ (HA IV: 67) and his principles ‘have a degree of firmness and solidity that we should in vain look for in any other system’ (HA IV: 76). Though this declaration has been subject to debate—see Berry (2006).
In his rhetoric lectures (on which see Jan Swearingen’s chapter), Smith explicitly identified, within what he termed the didactical mode, a style of writing as the ‘Newtonian method’. This method lays down ‘certain principles known or proved in the beginning, from whence we account for the several Phenomena, connecting altogether by the same chain’ (LRBL ii.134: 146). Such a procedure is the ‘most philosophical’, especially in contrast to its chief alternative—the Aristotelian method—where a different principle is given to every phenomenon. Because it is the most philosophical then in ‘every science whether of Moralls or Naturall philosophy’ it is sufficient reason to pursue it. Some commentators have sought out Smith’s Newtonianism. Norriss Hetherington (1983: 487), for example, thinks there are ‘obvious similarities’ between Smith’s effort to discover general laws of economics and Newton’s success in discovering natural laws of motion and David Raphael (1979: 88) judges that ‘Smith clearly regards sympathy as the gravitational force of social cohesion and social balance’. Others have been less confident that Smith himself carried out this project, though this is largely because of their more historically informed appreciation of what Newton’s system in fact represented (see for example Schliesser 2005; Montes 2008). As Raphael acknowledges, and as we have already noted, Smith himself is not very helpful—and despite his emblematic status, there are minimal references to Newton in his two major works.

The Scots for their part are believers in progress. This belief required a theory of history and much of the writing of the Scottish Enlightenment was of this cast (Berry 1997). Certainly it is a major component across Smith’s work as his adoption of the so-called ‘four stages theory’ testifies (see, among others, the Chapters by Michael Amrozowicz, Fabrizio Simon, and Maureen Harkin). In this he was part of the Enlightenment mainstream. The Enlightenment’s attitude to the past has come in for heavy criticism, for being in effect ‘unhistorical’ ((Collingwood 1946) is a classic statement and with particular reference to the Scots, see Höpfl 1978). Others have been more sympathetic seeing in this period a new conception of history as universalist, including all of humanity and all facets of humanity in its scope (see e.g. Barraclough 1962; Trevor-Roper 1963).

In Smith and his compatriots this twin-track universalism was captured in the idea of ‘civilization’. While they do maintain that it has advanced across a wide front and that the growth of knowledge is indeed a crucial ingredient in this advance, they are less confident than Frenchmen like Claude Helvetius, or Englishmen like Joseph Priestley, that it is automatic and necessarily always and in all respects an improvement. An important factor accounting for this less than wholehearted approach is that the Scots attach less weight to deliberative reason (Forbes 1954). Smith’s subscription to the ‘law of unintended consequences’ (of which the ‘invisible hand’ is but one manifestation) reveals his awareness of the gradualness of social change and the distance between the particular action of individual agents and its outcomes. Hence the ‘revolution’ that brought about the collapse of the power base of the ‘landed proprietors’ was achieved by the ‘silent and insensible operation of foreign commerce’ as it changed the ‘state of property and manners’ (WN III.iv.10.8: 418, 416).
'Property' is crucial to the ‘four stages’ theory, and ‘manners’ reflects Smith's (and the other Scots) sensitivity to the role of social habits or customs. Here the Scots demonstrate their debt to Montesquieu. The Scots are fulsome in their praise of his *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), though that is consistent with criticism of, for example, his climate theory. Smith (typically) is sparing in his published references to him but it is clear from the LJ editions that he had a close knowledge of the work. What impressed the Scots was Montesquieu's notion of ‘un esprit général’ (Montesquieu 1989:19, 4: 310). This ‘spirit’ was a composite of the many factors that ‘govern men’ and which impact differently on different nations. It is characteristic of the *Spirit* that it contains a mixture of ‘discourses.’ It speaks both the language of natural law and gives voice to the idiom of republicanism. Smith's thought contains both registers and much interpretative debate and scholarship centres on emphasizing differing aspects.

The natural law discourse stems ultimately from the system of Roman jurisprudence that was a staple of Scottish legal education, which Smith both received and delivered. A key ingredient in the curriculum was the re-formulated, post-Reformation, accounts of Natural Law. While there were home-grown authorities (notably James Dalrymple, Lord Stair's *Institutions* (1681)), the most notable of these formulations—and both picked out in this regard by Smith (LJB 1.3: 397–8)—were those of Grotius (*The Law of War and Peace* (1625)) and Pufendorf (*On the Law on Nature and Nations* (1672)). The latter was especially influential, obtaining a central place in University curricula; with Scotland no exception (see Chris Berry's Chapter). Gersholm Carmichael, the first Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, wrote a commentary on Pufendorf's *Duties of Man and Citizen* (1673), that his successor Francis Hutcheson declared, in his *Short Introduction of Moral Philosophy* (1747), to be ‘by far the best’ (Hutcheson 2007: 3). Hutcheson himself in his lectures followed the jurisprudentialist outlines. As subsequent chapters will explore, one of the significant contributions of Smith was to recast this tradition along what may be called more sociological or historical lines.

But for all its obvious importance, the jurisprudentialist talk of law and rights had no monopoly. An equally venerable vocabulary, with its roots in Aristotle, spoke of virtue and the political or civic life as the authentic expression of human nature (see now classic exposition by Pocock (1975)). This too had a decisive Roman input with the articulation of ‘republican’ thought and a loaded diagnosis of how it came to be ‘corrupted’ (a key term of art). Inherent in this tradition was a critical attitude towards commerce because of its preoccupation with private gain and thus possessing the potential to subvert the virtuous commitment to the ‘public good’. This dimension gained a new lease of life in the eighteenth century as economic changes unfolded to produce a commercial society, where, as Smith said, ‘everyman’ becomes ‘in some measure a merchant’ (*WN* I.iv.1: 37), a statement seized upon by Marx in his ‘early writings’ (Marx [1844] 1975: 266; and see Spencer Pack's chapter). Smith's relationship to this critique of commerce is a running theme in this volume and is explored in the chapters by Spiros Tegos and Ryan Hanley among others.
Legacy and reputation

Aside from the relative weight to be attributed to the twin presence in Smith of the language of ius and virtus (Pocock 1983: 248) there is a more infamous interpretative question, namely, the relation between Smith's moral philosophy as expressed in TMS and his economics and WN. This was given the grandiloquent label of ‘Das Adam Smith Problem’ (ASP). While its initial manifestation, that there was a contradiction between the supposed sympathetic altruism of TMS and the supposed selfishness as the governing principle of WN has been discredited, the relationship itself continues to be investigated (for recent explorations of a ‘new’ ASP, see e.g. Otteson 2002; Montes 2004). What fuelled the initial account of the relation was the fact that Smith ‘the economist’, the author of WN, had overshadowed his work as a moral philosopher. And the more recent treatments which take fully on board, even when they do not start from, TMS still accept the salience of WN in any assessment of Smith.

Smith is, and always will be, indelibly associated with ‘economics’. His economics is, of course, not straightforwardly assimilable into the present practice of the discipline, though as Hugh Rockoff, Tony Aspromourgos, and Nerio Naldi demonstrate in their chapters a number of his conceptualizations and ‘problematics’ are recognizable. His own wider contextualization of the ‘economic’ is picked up by Maria Pia Paganelli in her contribution to that Part.

Smith the economist was neither a lone voice nor without precedence. Within Scotland, Hume's Political Discourses (1752) contained important and influential essays on commerce, trade, money, tax, and interest. In an uncharacteristic acknowledgement of the work of others, Smith commended Hume's argument in these essays that commerce gradually introduced good government and liberty (WN III.iv 4: 412). He did not offer that compliment to another Scottish (though exiled as a Jacobite sympathizer) economist, Sir James Steuart. This was not from ignorance since Smith says in a letter that he had no need to mention Steuart's work since he has confuted ‘every false principle in it’ (Corr 132: 164). Steuart's Principles of Political Economy (1767), while also expressing a debt to Hume, and sharing some ground with Smith, nonetheless exhibited a significant difference with its supposition that at the head of government is a ‘statesman’ who will act so as to ‘prevent the vicissitudes of manners and innovations, by their natural and immediate effects or consequences from hurting any interest within the commonwealth’ (Steuart 1966: I, 12). Of his contemporaries, Smith engaged with the French Physiocrats. As we noted earlier, Smith met its leading proponents such as Quesnay and Mirabeau, when he was in Paris. They undoubtedly made an impression on him, but he identified a ‘capital error’ in their dismissal of artificers, manufacturers, and merchants as ‘unproductive’ (WN IV.ix.29: 674).

As this suggests, WN is a notable work of polemics. Of all his targets the ‘mercantile system’ comes in for the heaviest treatment. He does not mince his words. Its endeavour to direct economic activity is ‘mean and malignant’ (WN IV.vii.c.56: 610); it is ill-conceived and injurious to the wealth of nations, that is, to the welfare of its inhabitants. Smith is
not a negative figure; he makes the case for various reforms, as with the treatment of the American colonies but he is not sanguine that his advice will be heeded (WN V.iii.68: 934) (for Smith's complicated relation to 'reform', see David Levy and Sandra Peart's contribution). The epithet 'father of economics' frequently attached to Smith reflects the subsequent emergence of 'liberal' economics. His commitment to 'natural liberty' where every-man is 'left perfectly free to pursue his own interest his own way', with its corollary that the 'sovereign is completely discharged' from the 'duty of superintending the industry of private people' (which is just as well since executing any such obligation is beyond any of 'human wisdom or knowledge'), constitutes perhaps its basic tenet (WN IV.ix.51: 687). The restriction of government to the seemingly limited tasks of external defence, internal order, and the provision of 'public goods' and his judgement that the pursuit of their own interests by individuals will generally produce a superior outcome than one emanating from some predesigned aspiration, are all expressions of a 'free market model' (see Craig Smith's chapter). Of course this is a gross simplification of Smith's own position, as Amartya Sen argues in the concluding chapter of this volume. Liberty is itself a 'blessing' as he terms in LJA (iii.111: 185) and enabling it is good. What government does properly, via the exact administration of justice, is enable the 'system of natural liberty' to function. It is morally wrong to use the power of the state to direct individual actions, as in choice of employment or dress (WN II.iii.36: 346; cf. IV.vii.c.87: 630). It follows, too, that liberty can justifiably be restricted (as with bank lending). Nor is he above criticizing those private individuals who would distort the 'market'. His well-known judgement of merchants belongs in this context—they are hypocrites who complain of others while being silent on the 'pernicious effects' of their own gains (WN I.ix.24: 115); they are conspirators as they contrive to raise prices (WN I.x.c.27: 145), indeed they have an 'interest to deceive, and even to oppress the publick' (WN I.xi.p.10: 267). Since unintended outcomes are not always benign, the government's responsibilities include ameliorating both the material and moral circumstances of its citizens. One example of this is Smith's argument for the provision of education to counteract the effects of repetitive work.

WN was rapidly translated—it appeared Danish, French (twice) and German (twice) all before Smith's death in 1790 (Campbell and Skinner 1985: 168). The initial reception in Scotland was enthusiastic. Hume who read it shortly before his death exclaimed his delight (Corr 150: 186) and its arguments (and even his 'trivial' example of pin-making) were reproduced. Although there is dispute about the immediacy of Smith's impact or the depth of WN's penetration in the reading public (for a critical survey see Sher 2004), Smithian principles did percolate into the political, policy sphere. Prime Minister William Pitt in a 1792 speech declares that it is in only in WN that an explanation has been given as to how capital will accumulate when not obstructed by some 'mistaken or mischievous policy'; it is, indeed, Smith who has furnished the 'best solution to every question connected with the history of commerce or systems of political economy' (in Ross 1998: 159). Notwithstanding this, it would be mistake to assume Smith's 'impact' was univocal. In contrast to Pitt's view, Samuel Whitbread cited Smith in Parliament in 1795 in support of bill for minimum wage legislation (Rothschild 1992: 85). Indeed, his work was rapidly taken up by Thomas Paine and other 'radicals' (Stedman Jones 2004). One consequence of
this was that in the early nineteenth century Smith was criticized from the Right. It was much later in that century that he was criticized from the Left because he had by then become associated with the glorification of competition and self-interest.

The history of TMS is far less eventful. As Glenn Morrow remarked in a lecture to mark the sesqui-centennial of WN, the same anniversary had not been celebrated for TMS (Morrow 1928: 173). The bi-centennial by contrast was marked by conferences in Glasgow and Balliol and globally. The book, however, was far from ignored when it first appeared. Across the Enlightenment it received a warm reception, with eighteenth-century translations into French and German. Although editions continued to appear periodically through the nineteenth century, its impact was muted. In Britain, neither of the two nineteenth-century mainstream approaches—Utilitarianism and Idealism—paid it much attention. Regarding the former, J.S. Mill does not refer to him though he does receive a careful and respectful exegesis in Henry Sidgwick’s *History of Ethics* (1886) even if the concluding assessment is lukewarm (Sidgwick 1962: 218). Regarding the latter, T.H. Green selects Hume as his representative target for his critique of ‘naturalism’ (which quickly passes into his attack on evolutionists) (1906: 5ff). On the continent, Kant’s system with its fundamental rejection of the heteronomous reliance on ‘experience’, and thus ‘sentiment’, became dominant. But Smith was not a ‘target’; indeed the only reference to Smith in Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) is to WN (Kant 1996: 71) and Hegel similarly, in his *History of Philosophy* lectures (published 1840), refers to him as the best known of the ‘Scottish School’ but that is in virtue of his work as an economist (Hegel 1995: III, 378). The French followed Reid’s ‘Common Sense’ (an edition of his works was edited by the influential teachers Jouffroy and Royer-Collard) rather than Hume or Smith. Although, in contrast, Auguste Comte (1842) did commend both these thinkers but singled out HA rather than TMS for particular mention (Comte 1853: II, 428).

Walter Bagehot, in a not unkind if rather patronizing essay of 1876, notes TMS was once celebrated but is now judged to be of ‘inconsiderable philosophical value’ (though he also dubbed WN an ‘amusing book about old times’) (Bagehot 1965: 91, 101). A brief volume on Smith by R.B. Haldane was unambiguous in its declaration that ‘his contribution to ethics ... was unimportant’ (Haldane 1887: 14). In another slim, though more scholarly book, Hector Macpherson still judged that TMS’ ‘philosophical value is slight’ (Macpherson 1899: 38). Leslie Stephen’s late nineteenth-century survey *History of English Thought* (1876) does devote several pages to TMS but treats him as unoriginal and the book as the publication of an ambitious professor’s lectures (Stephen 1962: II, 65). In his compendious *The Scottish Philosophy* the President of Princeton, James McCosh, despite seeing William Hamilton’s development of Reid as the high point, gives a reasonable overview of TMS though concludes it is likely now to be read for its style rather the theory it expounds (McCosh 1875: 170). The most informed account is by L.A. Selby-Bigge, who included a lengthy extract from TMS in his *British Moralists* (1897). While John Rae’s *Life* (1895) and W. Scott’s *Smith as Student and Professor* (1937) advanced Smithian scholarship neither indulged in any evaluative discussion of TMS.
Such discussion in any detailed length had to await Tom Campbell's book length treatment of TMS (Campbell 1971) (his chapter in this Handbook revisits some of its themes). Notwithstanding that work, what was crucial to prompting, and then increasing, serious interest in TMS was its appearance in the Glasgow edition of Smith's works of 1976. In the wake of the Glasgow editions the rest of Smith's writings also came into focus. The Glasgow publication in definitive edition of discovered lecture notes (LJ and LRBL) brought the breadth of Smith's interests to scholarly notice to complement his posthumous collection EPS.

This Handbook aims to reflect, and embody, the depth and width of Smith's work. He was not only responsible for, in Alfred Marshall's judgement, 'the greatest step that economics has ever taken' (Marshall 1890: 55) (only a notch or two down from Thomas Buckle's verdict of 1861 that WN is 'probably the most important book ever written' (Buckle 1904: III, 315)) he was also a subtle and significant philosopher, an informed and creative historian, an attentive and insightful sociologist, and an observant and acute analyst of culture. His view of the world, and of human behaviour inside it, is complex and sophisticated. While he was a son of his time he was also a teacher for future generations. The substantial and up-to-date chapters collected in this volume provide the materials to appreciate the wealth of his work.

References


Introduction: Adam Smith: An Outline of Life, Times, and Legacy


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Notes:

(1) It is an exaggeration to see Stair as a key factor in Smith's articulation of the stadial theory of history (MacCormick 1982). Indeed, there is little evidence of Smith's indebtedness to any supposedly native tradition of thought (for Smith's intellectual hinterland, see Chapter 4).

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