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# *Essays on Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment*

by Christopher J. Berry, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, 452 pp., £99.80 (hardback), ISBN 978-1474415019

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contemporary literature. At the very least, it serves to demonstrate how limited more conventional intellectual histories are. Some of this material is invisible to us simply because it no longer exists; pamphlets and broadsheets, for example, that were thought too ephemeral to be worth any library acquiring, and which have not survived otherwise. But this work shows us that a very great deal of writing exists that we have just not bothered to look for, or at. The sheer volume of such publication provides ready material for the exploration of networks of readers, translators and publishers, and this project provides a very welcome impulse for future work.

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***Essays on Hume, Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment***, by Christopher J. Berry, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, 452 pp., £99.80 (hardback), ISBN 978-1474415019

***Commerce and strangers in Adam Smith***, by Shinji Nohara, Springer Nature, Singapore, 2018, 192 pp., £80 (hardback), ISBN 978-9811090134

***The rhetoric of tenses in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations***, by Hye-Joon Yoon, Brill, Leiden, 2018, 283 pp., £103 (hardback), ISBN 978-9004347908

For over 40 years, Christopher J. Berry has been one of the most insightful commentators on the political and moral thought of the Scottish Enlightenment. It is thus, as David Hume would put it, both useful and agreeable to have many of Berry's previously published papers collected here, alongside several lectures and earlier working papers appearing in print for the first time. (Many of Berry's other published essays do not feature, but an

apparently comprehensive bibliography of Berry's voluminous output to date is included, which is invaluable for those of us who frequently rely on his work.) After an illuminating bibliographical essay detailing the development of the field of Scottish Enlightenment studies over the past 40 years, the papers offered range from Berry's earliest articles on James Dunbar, and arguments regarding sociability and the development of language in the late eighteenth century, to specialist studies on Adam Smith's view of science, and Hume's views on the variability of cultural practice despite a uniform underlying human nature (an area where Berry's readings are particularly convincing).

With unfailing clarity, Berry helps to illuminate and untangle many issues that have often been obscured, rather than clarified, by existing scholarly treatments. Standout examples include already well-known papers such as Berry's deft dismantling of the still too commonplace notion that Hume was a "conservative", as well as his lightly worn, but nonetheless penetrating, account of Hume's views on luxury (aka "the problem of Epictetus's slippers"). Yet particularly valuable are some of the new contributions, notably with regard to Smith. Against the grain of recent scholarship, Berry argues (correctly, in my view) that Smith was not deeply troubled by the threat of "corruption" in modern economically advanced societies, and saw "commercial society" as overwhelmingly a source of individual political *and* moral liberation. Sceptical of a recent trend whereby scholars juxtapose Smith with Rousseau, Berry moves away from this paradigm by putting Smith firmly into dialogue with Hume, letting the Scots speak for themselves, and without forcing them through the distorting lens of the Genevan's idiosyncratic concerns. The results are convincing. Likewise, Berry's martialling of the evidence for reading Smith as purposefully developing Hume's "science of man" is the most compelling that I know of, whilst the closing essay covering Smith's ideas on "modern" liberty, whilst perhaps a little short (being more suggestive than comprehensive), nonetheless represents an excellent jumping off point for future research.

If there is a weakness in Berry's *oeuvre*, it is (perhaps a little ironically) revealed by bringing all of these essays together in one convenient location. Since his earliest papers dating from the 1970s, Berry has been content to refer to "The Scots" as a group of individual thinkers who nonetheless can be considered to have shared essentially the same views on a number of important, indeed often foundational, issues, such as the so-called "four stages" theory of economic development, or how to try to explain the emergence of language. Likewise Berry is happy to talk of "The Enlightenment" in general, and "The Scottish Enlightenment" in particular: no concerns here about the recent problematisation of such broad-sweep historical terms, and whether (and how) they can meaningfully illuminate intellectual phenomena. (Both tendencies were also exhibited in Berry's 2013 book, *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment*.) In the latter case, it is merely to be observed that such questions are clearly not of major interest to Berry, who has consistently focused primarily on the analysis of arguments

made by specific thinkers from the perspective first of sociology, and later of political theory. That, ultimately, is his prerogative.

Regarding the former however, an odd effect is generated when juxtaposing Berry's careful and insightful treatments of major thinkers – in particular Hume and Smith – with his willingness to attribute views to "The Scots" in general. After all, part of what marks Hume and Smith out is how much greater their intellectual achievements were than figures such as even a Hutcheson or a Ferguson, let alone Kames and relatively minor figures like Dunbar or Millar. (It is not an insignificant fact that Hume was dismissive of Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, nor that he and Smith apparently found Kames a bore.) Furthermore, most of "The Scots" certainly did *not* follow Hume in important matters (especially regarding religion and morals), and frequently looked at Smith with suspicion. (Witness Thomas Reid's erroneous – but telling – quip that Smith's moral theory was simply Hobbes's selfish system restated.) Berry knows all of this, and knows also the differences between the thinkers he is expertly regarding, which makes his willingness to talk simultaneously in such broad-brush terms of "The Scots" a little perplexing. But that, really, is just a niggle. The main point here is to salute a lifetime of excellent scholarship, which has improved the field immeasurably.

More problematic is Shinji Nohara's *Commerce and Strangers in Adam Smith*. Based in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Tokyo, Nohara offers a valuable insight into how Adam Smith is read and received beyond the Anglophone mainstream – although it is clear from this book that Nohara has himself made considerable efforts to grapple with the English language scholarship and incorporate it into his own readings. Proposing to combine a contextualist (roughly: "Cambridge school") approach with more recent trends in "global" intellectual history, Nohara offers readings of most of the major features of Smith's work (morals, politics, history, political economy, theories of markets, and so on). Furthermore, he proposes to unify these readings by emphasising the importance of "strangers" to Smith's work, i.e. the impact that coming to see the world through the eyes of others who do not share one's cultural and social starting points has on one's evaluations of the world. This is a product, Nohara thinks, of Smith believing that "commercial society" facilitated much greater levels of movement between societies, and thus increasing clashes of perspective, and hence reflective re-evaluation in the second half of the eighteenth century.

This is an interesting thesis, but unfortunately Nohara's commendable ambition to cover such a wide range of aspects of Smith's thought, as well as being both contextualist and aspiring to detailed technical readings of the original texts, means that the results are uneven. On the one hand, because of the range of topics addressed in a relatively short book, we often do not get much beyond the existing scholarship, and much of the text serves simply as overview. On the other, the theme of "strangers" turns out to be hard to sustain in practice. Often it is brought in tangentially at the end of a chapter, and unconvincingly tied to the foregoing analysis (e.g. regarding Smith's

theory of money). At other times it leads to philosophically dubious readings. For example, contra-Nohara, Smith's account of the "impartial spectator" is categorically *not* the view obtained "through a stranger"s eyes' (as the author puts it), because Smith's impartial spectator, whilst an idealised detached observer, nonetheless knows relevant facts about the interacting parties, and moderates normative judgements accordingly. A genuine stranger cannot do that, because a genuine stranger does not know all of the relevant facts.

Furthermore, it is very disappointing to see that the publisher, Springer, has not here lent proper editorial assistance. Nohara must be commended for issuing this work in English so as to reach a wider audience, but the publisher ought to have put a great deal more effort into facilitating the translation. Linguistic errors and straightforward grammatical mistakes populate virtually every paragraph, which makes the reading experience laboured (there are also several obvious typesetting errors – where was the copy editor?). However, this book will nonetheless be of value in introducing wider audiences into the main lines of research in Smith scholarship today. Accordingly, one hopes that it facilitates the spread of interest in Smith beyond the relatively confined specialist scholarship in the Anglophone world.

Harder to assess is Hye-Joon Yoon's *The Rhetoric of Tenses in Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations. The author proposes to analyse Smith's *magnum opus* regarding what he claims to be a third, usually missing, element in a trivium that ought properly to contain not just logic and rhetoric, but also grammar. Whereas intellectual historians have long paid attention to both logic (i.e. philosophical argument) and rhetoric, Yoon claims, they have disregarded grammar, largely seeing it as merely the nuts and bolts that hold the overall edifice together. But refocusing attention on the nuts and bolts, he suggests, enables us to better appreciate the functioning of the logic and the rhetoric. This is particularly true, it is proposed, by looking at how *tenses* are used by Smith, so as to generate crucial rhetorical effects that are in turn part of the argument.

This is a difficult claim to evaluate. One need not be a die-hard follower of Quentin Skinner to suspect that we will need proof that *Smith himself* thought that he was using tenses in the way Yoon suggests in order to attribute to his work the rhetorical effects that Yoon claims to find there. For if Smith himself had no conception that he was doing this (and it is not clear that such proof exists), then the risk opens up that what we get are not readings, but *projections*. These may be interesting to a certain philosophical bent of mind, but the potential pitfalls for historians are obvious, and alarming. Having said that, Yoon's is clearly a serious work, and indeed the first chapter here offers detailed historical reconstruction of eighteenth-century accounts of grammar (including Smith's own discussion of the origin of language). Yet I struggled to make an assessment as to whether on the basis of the rest of the book, when it comes to Smith's "logic", focusing on his grammar enlightens us in any significant way. Yoon laments intellectual historians' reluctance to engage in the study of the precise grammar of their great

texts. Alas, from the other side of the fence, it remains obscure why doing so is supposed to make any meaningful difference.

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***Condorcet et Adam Smith. Réformes économiques et progrès social au siècle des Lumières***, by Simona Pisanelli, Classiques Garnier, Paris, 2018, 214 pp., €29.00, ISBN: 978-2-406-07050-4

Simona Pisanelli's preface acknowledges a debt to Nicolas de Condorcet's view of human development. It is widely accepted that human progress is more than economic growth, and a basic standard of living is required for the development of human capabilities. But this also depends upon advances in technology and science, improvement in the standard of living and related aesthetic changes. So Condorcet suggests that we cannot understand human progress without considering the work of the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. This is how Simona Pisanelli tackles Condorcet's economic ideas in her new book. It is organised according to three major topics that reveal the distance between Enlightened writers and most modern commentators: (i) the personal relationships among authors (in this case, Adam Smith and Condorcet), (ii) the structure of taxation, and (iii) the problem of slavery.

The quantity and quality of data available for the biography of each author is obviously quite different. In this case, thanks to Nicolas Rieucau and Ian Simpson Ross our knowledge of the Condorcet and Smith's biographies has advanced considerably in recent years. Pisanelli begins by wondering whether Smith and Condorcet ever met. However, this first chapter is more than that. It is a picture of the personal, social and institutional links that explains the circulation of economic ideas, in particular the direct reception of *Wealth of Nation* and the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in France.

After clarifying the actual relationship between both authors, Pisanelli explores the extent to which the two writers shared a common understanding of economic problems. The second chapter explains the market as a mechanism