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The Triumph of Commercial Sociability

Paul F. Armstrong
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In this paper, we pick up the story about the juristic and economic contributions to a different conception of civil society in the centuries following the *societas civilis* of Leonardo Bruni. The objective is to expose the transition to the commercial sociability which emerges with the Enlightenment.

The scholarship of the last few decades in the intellectual history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, has given us quite a different picture of the evolution of European social thought in that period than was held previously.¹ Indeed, the moral philosophy² of the nineteenth century is now “seen increasingly as not so much an antithesis to the Enlightenment, but rather as a continuation, restatement and critical re-working of eighteenth century themes” (Hont, 1994: 54).

The Enlightenment itself has been successively decomposed, first by geography,³ then by religion,⁴ and then by individual thinker,⁵

¹ Bradley and Van Kley (2001: 2-17) have a good review of the historiography of the French Revolutionary image of the Enlightenment and its collapse since the linguistic turn.

² I am using ‘moral philosophy’ as a portmanteau term to refer to political, economic, and legal thought, a form of inquiry distinguished from ‘natural philosophy’. It is used here in the sense it held before the rise of the social sciences. Adam Ferguson, for instance, held the Chair in Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh from 1764 to 1785.

³ See, for instance, Porter and Teich (1981), which inaugurated the geographic decomposition. Since that publication, the decomposition has continued, with many texts now addressing different national Enlightenments.

⁴ See, for instance, Sorkin (2008) and Miller (1978).

⁵ The work of Quentin Skinner, John Pocock, Istvan Hont, Duncan Forbes, Donald Winch, Keith Baker, James Moore, Knud Haakonssen, Dale Van Kley, John Dunn, and Richard Tuck are of particular note in this context.

cumulatively reorganizing our understanding of the evolution of social thought. Close historical reconstruction of the debates in theology and political thought which actually took place, and the dialectic of revision and adjustment which that reconstruction shows, lead to a rather different understanding of Enlightenment thought (Hont, 1994: 55). The overall picture is one of a series of incremental changes in moral philosophy, often moving hand-in-hand with expressions of religious reform and dissent, throughout the early Modern period. Modern culture has both secular and religious roots (Lehner, 2010: 1). As Keith Baker has suggested, “neither could be thought without reference to the other” (Baker, 1994: 105).

Already when still a young man, John Dunn had disabused us of the notion of a Lockean liberal revolution which replaced the virtue ethic of civic humanism.⁶ Unlike Hobbes, or Hume, or Adam Smith, who can be described as “practical atheists”, Dunn argues that “the entire framework of [Locke’s] thinking was ‘theocentric’ and the key commitment of his intellectual life as a whole was the epistemological vindication of this framework” (Dunn, 1983: 119).⁷ For Locke, our conduct in this life was simply preparation “to meet the requirements of an alien, objective and non-human authority” (Dunn, 1989: 148). As Hont comments, “Dunn’s reading ... severed the cherished link in the liberal mythology of American histories of modern political thought which place Locke at the beginning of ‘liberalism’ and ‘Enlightenment’” (Hont, 1994: 56).

In the lacuna resulting from this severance, current scholarship has identified three different strands in the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment: (1) the virtue tradition of civic humanism; (2) the discourse on natural jurisprudence; and (3) the theory of the moral sciences.⁸ While there were elements of a common discourse throughout the European societies, innovation and reception are always local. The

⁶ Dunn’s first book, *The Political Thought of John Locke*, was published in 1969 when he was 29 years old. See also, Dunn (1983, 1989, 1996).

⁷ Cf. Dunn, 1996: 105: “Locke was a theocentric thinker for whom the truth of the Christian religion as he understood this was an indispensable major premiss of a scheme of practical reason within which most human beings had sufficient motivational grounds for behaving as in his view they ought”.

⁸ Haakonssen (1996b) discusses these strands in his “Introduction”, although the formulation I have given them is my own.

nature or extent of the innovation, and the depth and character of the reception, are not therefore, homogeneous across cultures. Despite a wide dissemination of ideas, the concepts of 'history' in Germany, or 'equality' in France, or 'commercial society' in Scotland, had a salience that was particular to those local cultures. In this paper, I want to examine the sociability of commercial society, a concept for which Scottish moral philosophy was central.

I will examine, then, each of these three strands in some detail, and conclude with a few comments about their joint influence on the paradigm of sociability which emerged as the new constitutive framework for civil society. The new understanding of sociability, something which was practically mobilized as 'commercial society', was one of the conditions for the transition to the modern world.

Civic Humanism

John Pocock has been one of the most persistent scholars in examining the construction of Renaissance humanism and its subsequent declension through the early modern period. In his important monograph, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock described the philosophical tenor, context, and dynamics of Renaissance political philosophy, with some notes on "the fortunes of the texts, and the discourses they may be said to have conveyed" in the various contexts of the Atlantic World (Pocock, 2003: 554) – in this respect, arguing that "the American Revolution can be considered the last great act of civic humanism of the Renaissance" (Pocock, 1975: 606). By civic humanism, Pocock is referring to the classical conception of citizenship which was revived, first in Florence, notably in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth by Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni, and later famously by Niccolò Machiavelli's "doctrine of the armed and active citizen" (Pocock, 2003: 566):

It was enough for me to affirm that ideas of active citizenship were formulated by Florentines, that they could be said to have rested on the ideal of the *zoon politikon* expressed by Aristotle, and that they had

come to be identified with the possession of arms by the citizen. (Pocock, 2003: 555).⁹

In much of his subsequent work, the notes have become the central focus, exploring the clash between “the ancient ideal of civic and military virtue, and its response to the challenge, in the eighteenth century, of the new ideals, and realities, of commercial and civil society” (Pocock, 1999: 2). Much of Pocock’s later attention has focussed on English politics, with particular attention to James Harrington (1611-1677), a political theorist of classical republicanism, and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), “British historian of Rome and universal historian”.¹⁰ The civic humanist ideal in Britain, Pocock argues, was used as a form of criticism of the ‘Whig oligarchy’, concerning the institution of public credit, political patronage, and English-Scottish union, each of which were seen as either a form of corruption or dependency. The republican model was one of aristocratic equality, rather than democratic equality. It relied on agrarian production to yield the independence, self-mastery, and leisure necessary for the active political life. The Whig reforms were aimed at supporting commerce and the growth of trade in order to underpin the English parliamentary monarchy. It can be seen, therefore, as a struggle between the Country and the Court, a struggle that had been lost in England to the emerging state by the late 1700s (Pocock, 1983).

An improved understanding of the developments in political and theological thought during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of which Pocock’s analysis of the civic humanism tradition was one strand, led to a reevaluation of the Enlightenment. As Pocock suggests in an article published more than twenty years after *The Machiavellian Moment*:

We are moving toward a reassessment of Enlightenment, in which there will no longer be “The Enlightenment”, a unitary and universal phenomenon with a single history to be either celebrated or condemned, but instead a family of discourses arising about the same time in a number of European cultures, Protestant as well as Catholic,

⁹ Pocock comments that he views “Quentin Skinner’s employment of ‘Ciceronian’ concepts of citizenship, as against the ultimately ‘Machiavellian’ concepts developed by Baron and myself, as tending toward the reconstruction of the republic as a community of citizens regulated by law and justice” (Pocock, 2003: 561-562).

¹⁰ This phrase is taken from the title of an article by Peter Ghosh (1999).

insular as well as peninsular, and certainly not all occasioned by the Parisian intellectual hegemony that sought to establish itself among them. (Pocock, 1997: 7)

One of the lines of discourse within that family was the historical concern about *enthusiasm*, a concern which ultimately contributed to the undermining of the civic humanism tradition. Pocock (1985) has made important contributions to this historiography with his arguments for a conservative Enlightenment in England. The concern about enthusiasm arose with the European Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, triggered by the onset of the Protestant Reformation and, although conventionally closed with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Pocock argues for its extension to cover the War of the Three Kingdoms, the series of civil conflicts in England, Scotland and Ireland which lasted a few years longer (Pocock, 1997: 9). The central thesis of Pocock is that “the Enlightenment was first and foremost a movement to preserve civilised society against any resurgence of religious enthusiasm and superstition, that is to say, of evangelical Protestantism and Counter-Reformation Catholicism” (Haakonssen, 1996a: 2).

In the British Isles, the initial cross-pollination of Enlightenment ideas, Bradley and Van Kley indicate, was with the other northern Protestant countries, which “stretched like a crescent from England and Scotland through the Protestant Netherlands and western Germanies only to end in the Swiss cities like Geneva and Lausanne”. This had a counterpart in a Catholic Enlightenment which “seems to have formed another and southern crescent from the the Catholic Germanies in the southeast through the north-central Italies, including Rome in the center, and on through the Iberian Peninsula in the West” (Bradley and Van Kley, 2001: 15).¹¹ This leaves France where secular Enlightenment thought – the enlightenment of the *philosophes* – was the strongest, and even there the Jansenist movement constituted a continuing backbone of religious dissent (see Van Kley, 1996). “Between and within these crescents”, Bradley and Van Kley note, “a distinctively civic humanistic and proto-

¹¹ In this discussion, Bradley and Van Kley reference Pocock’s work (1999) concerning the Protestant crescent (cf. also Pocock, 1985: 530) and Plongeron (1969) and Miller’s (1978) work concerning the Catholic crescent.

republican Enlightenment which, opposed to commerce, 'luxury,' and many aspects of modern 'civilization,' made common cause with certain forms of British Nonconformist and Jansenist dissent, has forced itself onto the scholarly agenda" (Bradley and Van Kley, 2001: 15).

Pocock pursues this by arguing that the beginnings of an English Enlightenment *sans philosophes* were to be found among the clergy of the Church of England, a church *re-established* in 1660, with the return of Charles II to a restored monarchy.¹² Among churchmen, sympathies ran towards latitudinarianism, which built upon Richard Hooker's position, perhaps the greatest of the Anglican Divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Pocock indicates that among the concerns of the Latitudinarians:

was the perceived need to overcome, reject or assimilate what was known as 'enthusiasm': the belief in personal inspiration, in the infusion, in-pouring or in-breathing of the Holy Spirit to the psyche of the individual, which during the Interregnum of the 1640s and 1650s had shown itself capable of leading to antinomian and so to socially revolutionary consequences. (Pocock, 1985: 531)

Hume and Gibbon, Pocock goes on to note, "concurred in a polemic against enthusiasm which had been initiated by churchmen" (Pocock, 1985: 532). Hume, for instance, considered enthusiasm and superstition to be "two species of false religion" ([1777] 1987: 73), and contended that "religions, which partake of enthusiasm are, on their first rise, more furious and violent than those which partake of superstition" (p. 76), going on to provide examples of the Anabaptists in Germany, the Camisars in France, the Levellers in England, and the Covenanters in Scotland, although ultimately concluding that superstition was the worse of the two diseases.

Locke, also, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, devoted an entire chapter to a critique of enthusiasm, and suggested for its containment, the check of reflection:

¹² The famous 1662 revision of the Book of Common Prayer became the central text of a restored Anglican church.

This I take to be properly Enthusiasm, which though founded neither on Reason, nor Divine Revelation, but rising from the Conceits of a warmed or over-weening Brain, works yet, where it once gets footing, more powerfully on the Perswasions and Actions of Men, than either of those two, or both together ... For strong conceit like a new Principle carries all easily with it, when got above common Sense, and freed from all restraint of Reason, and check of Reflection, it is heightened into a Divine Authority, in concurrence with our own Temper and Inclination. (Locke, Nidditch edition, Chapter XIX, Book IV, §7: [1790] 1975: 699)

The critique of enthusiasm, however, was pushed farther than Locke allowed with a ratcheting of insistence on *polite* society, an emphasis on the reciprocity between persons - a reciprocity of interaction which contained both social intercourse and commercial trade. "With the growth of trade and more complex exchange relationships, manners began to be softened and passions refined, *le doux commerce* made its appearance" (Pocock, 1983: 241). At this time, the English word *polite* (*politesse, gentile*)

retained the meaning of 'polished', and so joined with 'reasonable' and 'sociable' to convey the meaning that even in religion, men were social beings: that even their communion with God in His Church was formed as they interacted with one another in society, and thus 'polished' or wore away the angular fanaticisms of the Puritan and the uncontrolled pseudo-spiritual impulses of the 'enthusiast' (Pocock, 1985: 533).

What Pocock's discussion of civic humanism shows is the slow migration of ideas from the Renaissance into something quite different in English society of the early eighteenth century. Civic humanism was transformed: no longer an ethic of individual virtue in the *polis*, but a social conception of reciprocity and *politesse* in social interaction. Such a changed conception is open to commercial sociability. This transmutation of civic humanism prepares the way for a reconstruction of moral philosophy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and we turn to that now.

Natural Jurisprudence

Whereas in England, Locke's writings were used in the early eighteenth century to promote stabilization "in a prolonged debate concerning the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England", they were employed in Scotland, where the moderate Dissension of the Presbyterian Kirk was the established church, with a much different reception "as an academic treatise on moral philosophy" (Moore, 1991: 62). This was true more generally, though: moral philosophy was the central discourse of the Scottish Enlightenment. Indeed, Peter Stein makes this claim about Adam Smith himself, whose moral philosophy is often seen as, at best, complementary to his prime allegiance to economics:

The recent publication of an extended set of notes of Adam Smith's Lectures on Jurisprudence has demonstrated how his economic theory grew out of his legal theory and how his legal theory grew out of his moral theory. The line of this development was suggested by the course of studies in moral philosophy in Scotland, and more particularly in the University of Glasgow in which Smith held the Chair of Moral Philosophy from 1752 until 1763. (Stein, 1988a: 381)

Scottish moral philosophy did not develop autonomously, but was part of a larger European discourse during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. What was significant about the Scottish philosophers was the unusual concentration of talent which developed there as the eighteenth century developed, and the particular engagement they had with the discourse of natural jurisprudence. This resulted in a new theory of sociability comprised of three conceptual building blocks – *material progress*, *naturalized interests*, and *spontaneous order*. In this section, I will concentrate on the evolution of these several concepts.

(a) *Conjectural Histories and Material Progress*

In the Scottish context, the contrast category for *polite* was *rude*, used in the sense of primitive, and these categories were employed widely in a

literature expounding a conjectural history of civilization.¹³ ‘Conjectural history’ was terminology first used by Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), holding the Edinburgh Chair in Moral Philosophy (immediately following Adam Ferguson), who was described by Annette Meyer as the “ideographic custodian of the inheritance of the Scottish Enlightenment” (Meyer, [2008] 2016: 134). Stewart provided a substantive definition of what such a conjectural history would consist: “our intellectual acquirements, our opinions, manners and institutions, [and] those which prevail among rude tribes” (Stewart, quoted in Hopfl, 1978: 19). Much of the intellectual debate in the Scottish Enlightenment took place through the mixtures of historical inquiry, comparative studies, philosophical anthropology, and logical claims in the various conjectural histories. “The reliance on accounts of ‘rude nations’ and the use of anthropological data”, particularly those accounts of North American natives, “permitted the development of analogies that would allow plausible conjecture about epochs of early history otherwise subject only to wild fantasizing” (Meyer, [2008] 2016: 134). Conjectural histories of this kind can be found in different forms in the writings of such Scottish intellectuals as Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), John Millar (1735-1801), Lord Kames (1696-1782), David Hume (1711-1776), and William Robertson (1721-1793).

‘Conjectural history’ is not, however, a neutral term, even in 1793 when Stewart first used it, as Meyer so brilliantly demonstrates, but allowed Stewart to distance himself from “attempts to develop a universal history with scientific claims” (Meyer, [2008] 2016: 134). In his later *Dissertation Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy Since the Revival of Letters in Europe*, written in the early nineteenth century more than twenty years after his initial formulation, Stewart rejects the approach altogether as having any serious intellectual value:

To a philosophical mind, no study certainly can be more delightful than this species of history; but as an organ of instruction, I am not disposed to estimate its practical utility so highly as D’Alembert. It does not seem to me at all adapted to interest the curiosity of novices; nor is it so well calculated to engage the attention of those who wish to enlarge their scientific knowledge, as of persons accustomed to reflect on the

¹³ Richard Sher (1995) has edited a magisterial seven-volume collection of primary sources for the conjectural histories of the Scottish Enlightenment.

phenomena and laws of the intellectual world. (Stewart, [1815-21] 1829: 351; partially quoted in Meyer, [2008] 2016: 134)

The problem for Stewart by this time was that he no longer recognized the legitimacy of the historico-philosophical frameworks of his Scottish forebears – his commitment to the empirical method “already points to nineteenth-century positivism” (Meyer, [2008] 2016: 135). But Adam Ferguson, arguably the leading Scottish theorist of civil society, had rejected the notion that history was just ‘one damn thing after another’, and sought to engage history at the level of mankind itself. “According to Ferguson, the only scientific account of all human concerns – whether present, past or future, whether of the species or of the individual – is the ‘natural history of man’” (p. 139). Such a task, however, requires a theoretical framework – a philosophical history – while, as an empirical science, continuing to use whatever historical evidence, comparative studies, and anthropological research can be found:

Ferguson pointed out that, analogous to the physical law, the correspondence between the isolated historical fact and the scientific historical theory was ‘moral law’ ... a conception of individual morality as the indicator of the historical sustainability of societies (Meyer, [2008] 2016: 140).

Ferguson’s species-history, however, can only be understood against the historical development of mankind over time, with a conception of historical change:

In other classes of animals, the individual advances from infancy to age or maturity; and he attains, in the compass of a single life, to all the perfection his nature can reach: but, in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual; they build in every subsequent age on foundations formerly laid; and, in a succession of years, tend to a perfection in the application of their faculties, to which the aid of long experience is required, and to which many generations must have combined their endeavours. (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 10; quoted in part by Merolle, [2009] 2016: 80)

Ferguson is, therefore, developing a species-history which incorporates a concept of historicity. This is different from the stadial theories of Hume

(and I would add Smith) which “could conceive the idea of progress, but not that of historical change” (Merolle, [2009] 2016: 87). Indeed, more than a century passes until German historicism is able to put paid to the stadial conception of progress.

Ferguson’s historicity was not embraced by his Scottish fellow-philosophers – indeed, Hume was sharply critical of Ferguson’s *Essay*, even though they were close friends. So, let us turn now to these more limited stadial histories. The tradition of conjectural history during the Scottish Enlightenment led eventually to the four-stage stadial theory of Adam Smith (1723-1790):¹⁴ a model which marked the evolution of society through various forms of production from a hunting base, to the several pastoral, agricultural, and finally commercial bases of society (Meek, 1976).¹⁵ It is not the case, however, that different forms of production, and their influences on institutional formation, were not known before this time. “What happened in the 1750s was that a three stage theory, which had been known since antiquity, was transformed and given new meaning by the addition of the fourth stage” (Stein, 1988b: 396). Aristotle, in his *Politics*, had discussed the relation between different means of obtaining food and the consequences for different ways of life. He also recognized that some people made a living with barter and trade. So, while Aristotle held all of the elements, he “refused to put them in any kind of order of progression; indeed he stressed that many people combine different ways of life, such as those who engage in both hunting and agriculture” (Stein, 1988b: 396). It is now acknowledged that the Ancient Greeks had a conception of progress, contrary to Walter Bagehot’s 1872 assertion. However, when it did emerge, in what was a rather limited way as compared to the modern conception of progress, it “found the field already occupied by two great anti-progressive myths which threatened to strangle it at birth, the myth of the Lost Paradise ... and the myth of Eternal Recurrence” (Dodds, 1973: 3). Even when those myths were discounted, the Greek conception

¹⁴ There was a French tradition as well, and Anne Robert Jacques Turgot independently developed a four-stage theory in the late 1850s.

¹⁵ Meek is committed to seeing Adam Smith’s four-stage theory as a satisfactory resolution of eighteenth century stadial theory – that is, to a Smithian understanding of the mode of subsistence as the key factor in a progressive framework of socio-economic development. His normative commitment is so strong, though, as to vitiate his historical analysis. Cf. Meek (1971) for an even stronger version of this position.

of progress was constrained by a teleological conception of life that was even more widely held.

What does emerge briefly with Dicaearchus, a student of Aristotle, is an argument relating the mode of production to the forms of property that were held: “the rise of private property was associated first with the domestication of certain animals, such as sheep, and then with the acquisition of land for cultivation” (Stein, 1988b: 397). “The earliest period”, Stein summarizes, “was a state of nature in which man lived on the earth’s spontaneous produce, the second stage was marked by the domestication of such wild animals as were capable of being tamed and the third stage by the cultivation of the earth” (p. 397). What Adam Smith accomplishes for the Scottish Enlightenment is to add ‘commercial society’ as a fourth stage.

As Istvan Hont has noted, “a closer look at Smith’s own position, however, reveals a certain incoherence”:

[Smith’s] explanation for the emergence of the fourth stage was quite different in kind from those which explained the first three. The principle of progress in the first three stages was simple. Mankind found itself compelled to turn from hunting to shepherding and then to agriculture as the primary ways of self-preservation under the double pressure of depleting natural resources and growing population. (Hont, 1987: 254)

The stadial theory of material progress such as we find in Smith, however, gets its power from the presupposition that historical change is ‘progressive’. In contrast, Ferguson allows for historical change to be either progressive or regressive, and maintains that different forms of change in the moral order cannot be ranked as an unalloyed good:

We are generally at a loss to conceive how mankind can subsist under customs and manners extremely different from our own; and we are apt to exaggerate the misery of barbarous times, by an imagination of what we ourselves should suffer in a situation to which we are not accustomed. But every age hath its consolations, as well as its sufferings (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 103).

Even if one were to accept the stadial narrative of material progress, though, Smith's next step does not follow:

Smith claimed that the age of commerce was just as much a 'natural' development. But it was a development of not quite the same kind. It was not marked with any further step in the natural acquisition of property through occupation or accession. Commerce itself could not possibly be a *primary* mode of acquiring property, since barter presupposed that the objects offered for exchange were already owned. (Hont, 1987: 254)

Stein (1988b: 401-409) has suggested an alternative that, since the development of 'commercial society' did not involve new property rights, "the elaboration of the three-stage theory into a four-stage theory was thus the result of applying an historical perspective to legal institutions other than property ... It was a switch from attention to property to attention to contract that made the four stage theory" (p. 401). What commercial society did introduce, Stein argues, was a requirement for new contract law, and he believes that it was this recognition by Smith which led him to theorize 'commercial society' as a fourth stage. The really significant innovation in stadial theory, though, was not the recognition of the fourth stage per se, but the view that changes in law were being propelled by changes in the mode of production – indeed, that the mode of production was the engine of civilization – and this innovation had multiple sources. Montesquieu's followers, for instance, "treated mode of subsistence not merely as one of several factors affecting a society's laws [as Montesquieu had] but as the crucial circumstance that dictated their character and extent (p. 402). It is an innovation as this thinking was not characteristic of ancient or medieval thought. Montesquieu was, himself, "reluctant to acknowledge any relationship of cause and effect" (p. 403) between the mode of production and the legal regime, and raises just this point that there is no evidence of its existence in ancient thought: "I am not ignorant that men prepossessed with these two ideas, that commerce is of the greatest service to a state, and that the Romans had the best regulated government in the world, have believed that these people greatly honoured and encouraged commerce: but the truth is, they seldom troubled their heads about it" (Montesquieu, quoted in Stein, 1988b: 403).

This is one of the pivotal issues in terms of the theory of spontaneous order and the emergent conception of civil society as a sphere with its own autonomous dynamics, separate from the polity, a conception finally stabilized with Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. If the development of four-stage theory did not revolve around an expansion of legal rights or a deepening of commercial law – if it was not about the legal order – then what was Smith doing?

Hont argues that Smith was using the quantitative increases in commercial activity, “as an index of qualitative changes in the basic modus operandi of that society” (Hont, 2015: 3). Smith's four-stage theory was announcing the shift, and connecting it to a moral philosophy which could support a conception of sociability “to describe a society whose members related to one another as interactive commercial individuals, behaving generally as merchants act when entering a market” (p. 3).¹⁶ Self-interest, as Bernard Mandeville had already suggested in 1714 in *The Fable of the Bees*, was a better engine than virtue.

(b) Pufendorf's Naturalization of Interests

To appreciate the centrality of self-interest, it is necessary to review a somewhat earlier set of developments in moral philosophy which influenced the Scottish Enlightenment through Samuel Pufendorf (1632-1694), a century before. Pufendorf is of interest for his reconstruction of natural jurisprudence in reaction to Hugo Grotius and Thomas Hobbes. Hegel, for instance, claimed Pufendorf as the “real modern starting point” of modern natural law (Hont, 1994: 62), and Pufendorf, himself, was self-consciously responding to Grotius and Hobbes:

Pufendorf used *socialitas* [the social life of man] as the cornerstone of the anti-relativist or anti-sceptical intellectual strategy which lay at the

¹⁶ See also: “A commercial society is not a theory of trading communities, nor in the first instance an economic notion at all; a Christian society could easily be a trading community. A commercial society was rather an alternative model of imagining how human beings can form a society, for example a sustained form of common living, if they did not share such bonding principles as the ones offered by Christianity” (Hont, 1994: 60).

centre of the modern tradition which he claimed began with Grotius and was continued by Hobbes. (Hont, 1994: 62)

To what then was Pufendorf responding? Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), born in Holland, was widely recognized by the end of the seventeenth century as “the one who ‘broke the ice’ after the long winter of Aristotelianism ... He was the inventor of a new ‘science of morality’, which was taken up in various ways by all the major figures of the seventeenth century, including Hobbes, Locke, and Pufendorf himself” (Tuck, 1991: 499).

Grotius realized that he needed to distinguish the positive law of particular societies, from the natural law common to all mankind. In doing so, he contrasted the civilized with the rude society, and set out a model in which self-preservation and sociability, both of which he thought were characteristic of social life, were the grounds for his moral philosophy:

These two properties temper and inform each other: the desire for self-preservation is limited by the social impulse, so that humans do not naturally seek to maintain and enhance their being at all costs; conversely, the need for the company of other humans is limited by the self-preservation drive, for individuals must naturally strive to secure the means for their well-being. (Miller, 2011: 13)

His position on the sociability of human nature, which would limit the impulse for self-preservation, was, therefore, a *primitive* for Grotius. It was exposed, however, to a skeptical criticism. If the claim of Grotius was that Aristotle’s *zoon politikon* was simply positive law drawn from a particular Greek society, what insulated the position of Grotius from the same consideration: “For by admitting as a means of establishing the law of nature the common custom of the more civilised nations, he had given a place within his own system to the sceptical view of history as cultural diversity” (Hont, 1987: 259).

Hobbes (1588-1679) responded to Grotius with a reduction, rejecting sociability as the natural state of man. While Hobbes agreed that self-preservation “offered the only incontrovertible anthropological foundation for natural law” (Hont, 1987: 262), the sociability of Grotius

was vulnerable. If universal love was natural, the plurality of nations and states, which was everywhere in evidence, would not exist. Hobbes rejected the natural teleology of sociability and held that “every *Voluntary Action* tends either to *Profit*, or *Pleasure*” (Hobbes, quoted in Malcolm, 1991: 534). The foundation of natural law for Hobbes was self-preservation, and given this state of nature, government was an arrangement to minimize the war of all against all. His rejection of teleology was, therefore, a cleansing of moral philosophy of its theological and metaphysical roots:

The main Ciceronian and Thomist traditions of natural law saw self-preservation as the ground floor, so to speak, of a whole structure of human needs and values ... In Hobbes’ argument, self-preservation is a sheer need which takes precedence over other needs. (Malcolm, 1991: 539)

Let’s return to Pufendorf now, and see what he does with this. Pufendorf agreed that man shared the same basic need for self-preservation with the animals,¹⁷ but “lacked the corresponding ability”. The essential human condition was one of *imbecillitas* and *indigentia* – weakness and need – with desires which “did not cease when the instinct of self-preservation was minimally satisfied” (Hont, 1994: 66). The deconstruction of self-preservation in this way allowed sociability to be brought back in:

While a human being was helpless alone, what men had discovered was that they could be of use to each other in escaping from their indigence by joining their efforts. Once co-operation started men could not only satisfy their basic needs, but also perfect their life and then create new needs ... The theory of society presented here was a theory of needs, *Bedürfnisse*, leading to a theory of civilisation and to the idea of a fully developed commercial society. (Hont, 1994: 67)

The accomplishment here is not obvious. For Hobbes, civil society emerges out of the natural state only with the institution of government. What Pufendorf does is establish civil society within the natural state itself, prior to government.

¹⁷ “From the time of Augustine Christian theologians had developed the doctrine of rationally ordered love, *caritas ordinata*, which prescribed that a man has a duty to himself as strong as his duty to his neighbour” (Stein, 1988a: 380).

Legal institutions could be natural in two ways. First, there were certain institutions which could be regarded as necessary even for men living in a state of nature, before any kind of civil society had been established. Secondly, there were those conclusions of natural reason which men in certain kinds of society have thought fit to establish for the better running of such societies. (Stein, 1988b: 398)

Thus, Pufendorf builds on Hobbesian self-preservation with a deeper diagnosis of the human condition, one that is more compatible with his Lutheran commitments, in order to transcend the Hobbesian account. The significance of this, for our purpose, is that, in doing so, Pufendorf separates *civil society* from the *polis*.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Pufendorf's *De Officio hominis et civis (On the Duty of Man and Citizen)* was "the standard textbook of moral philosophy" in Scotland and other parts of Europe (Stein, 1988a: 381).¹⁸ Pufendorf's text had been published in an English translation by Andrew Tooke at London in 1691 (and in four subsequent editions, the last in 1716), and in French translation by Jean Barbeyrac in 1707. The text was published in Scotland in Latin by Gerschom Carmichael (1672-1729) in 1718, together with notes and supplements. Carmichael was the first occupant of the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow – a chair subsequently held by Francis Hutcheson, a little later by Adam Smith, and then by Thomas Reid. Hutcheson commented that he considered the notes of Carmichael on Pufendorf to be "of more value than the text itself" (Moore and Silverthorne, 1983: 74). In short, Pufendorf was injected directly into the bloodstream of the Scottish Enlightenment.

(c) *Ferguson's Spontaneous Order*

I turn back now to the work of Adam Ferguson to compare several arguments in his conjectural history, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, to the work of Samuel Pufendorf, a century before. Ferguson (1723-1816) was born in Perthshire, on the boundary between the Scottish

¹⁸ This text was an abridgement for students of his masterwork, *De jure naturae et gentium (On the Law of Nature and Nations)* (Saunders and Hunter, 2003: 218). John Locke declared the masterwork as "the best book of that kind" (Locke, quoted in Moore, 2014: 6).

Highlands and Lowlands. He had knowledge of Gaelic,¹⁹ and a “keen awareness of the tension between the integrous community of the highland clans and the urban, polite, and commercial sensitivities of a modern age” (Oz-Salzberger, 2004). Ferguson was friends with William Robertson, Hugh Blair, and Alexander Carlyle, and had close associations with Adam Smith, and David Hume. Sometimes referred to as the “Scottish Cato”,²⁰ his writings were read by Herder, Hamann, Novalis, Hegel, and Marx, and had a distinguished following through the early nineteenth century. Ferguson was appointed to the Chair in Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh in 1764, and published his *Essay* three years later in 1767. It has proved to be his most durable work. Oz-Salzberger refers to him as “the last ‘neo-Roman’ of eighteenth-century Scottish thought” (Oz-Salzberger, 2003: 168), and, among Scottish Enlightenment figures, its “keenest promoter of the political discourse of civic humanism” (Oz-Salzberger, 1993: 61).²¹ While this is obviously true, Istvan Hont agreed with Oz-Salzberger that Ferguson’s humanism needs to be qualified: “Ferguson wasn’t simply the bard of the old Machiavellian song vis-à-vis the new line of Hume and Smith. He used the Machiavellian tradition selectively and his struggle with the implications of the new line took place inside the new discursive space itself” (Hont, n.d.). Oz-Salzberger puts it somewhat differently:

Yet, as the Scottish thinkers would readily admit, the modern senses of ‘politeness’ and ‘civilization’ had new power of their own ... The traditional republican discourse had no answers for the new respectability of wealth and social refinement, which eighteenth-century Scots came to associate with the modern age. A choice had to be made: the civic values had to be radically adjusted to the new ethics of sociability, commerce and freedom under the law; or else new proof was required for their relevance to the modern state. David Hume, and

¹⁹ Testa (2007: vii) suggests that Ferguson had “native-like control of the Gaelic sound system, indicating fluency from a young age”.

²⁰ See Nicolai’s (2011) doctoral dissertation and her discussion of the literature.

²¹ Denise Testa in her doctoral dissertation examines the influence of Gaelic culture on Ferguson, particularly its “vestigial shame-honour culture” (p. vii). She writes about the various forms of conflict common in Highland culture at that time, and suggests that “experiencing and witnessing these types of events may have been just as crucial and influential in the formation of Ferguson’s theory concerning conflict as those of the civic humanist tradition and classical antiquity” (Testa, 2007: 141-142).

more decisively Adam Smith, chose the first of these solutions. Adam Ferguson opted for the second ... The Essay was a bid to reclaim the idea of civic virtue on behalf of the modern, commercial state ... It conveys an attempt to come to grips with the ideas of the natural jurists, Montesquieu and Mandeville, and to shift their combined significance into a course different from the one taken by Hume and Smith. (Oz-Salzberger, 1995: xvi-xvii)

Indeed, Ferguson's position is already captured in the title he used, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*: the word 'history' refers to the methodology of conjectural history, the word 'civil' captures the civic humanism which he advocates, and the word 'society' underscores his commitment to a moral order distinct from the state.

Hobbes, I noted above, contrasted a rude state of *nature* riven by the war of all against all, in comparison with the *artifice* of the civilized state, where the state adjudicates right and enforces sociability. Pufendorf modified this by arguing that, given the *imbecillitas* and *indigentia* of mankind, self-preservation required more than self-interest, it required cooperation. The cooperation generated, nevertheless, is still a form of utility. Ferguson, on the other hand, advances a much broader conception of sociability. He takes up this question, in the very first chapter of the *Essay*, "Of the Question relating to the State of Nature", and again in a later chapter, "Of the History of Arts". Ferguson begins by naming the Hobbesian position with which he disagrees,²² and then advances his argument by showing that the arts have been present at all stages of rude and civilized society:

We have already observed, that art is natural to man; and that the skill he acquires after many ages of practice, is only the improvement of a talent he possessed at the first. Vitruvius finds the rudiments of

²² "Among the writers who have attempted to distinguish, in the human character, its original qualities, and to point out the limits between nature and art, some have represented mankind in their first condition, as possessed of mere animal sensibility, without any exercise of the faculties that render them superior to the brutes ... Others have made the state of nature to consist in perpetual wars, kindled by competition for dominion and interest, where every individual had a separate quarrel with his kind, and where the presence of a fellow-creature was the signal of battle" (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 8).

architecture in the form of a Scythian cottage. The armourer may find the first productions of his calling in the sling and the bow; and the ship-wright of his in the canoe of the savage. Even the historian and the poet may find the original essays of the arts in the tale, and the song, which celebrate the wars, the loves, and the adventures of men in their rudest condition (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 161).

While broadening the conception of sociability beyond utility, Ferguson has done so in a way which maintains it as part of the natural world, concluding finally that all human behaviour is natural, and the distinction of his opponents is false:²³

Opposed to affectation, frowardness, or any other defect of the temper of character, the natural is an epithet of praise; but employed to specify a conduct which proceeds from the nature of man, can serve to distinguish nothing: for all the actions of men are equally the result of their nature (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 15).

With this discussion of human nature, Ferguson has established key elements of a foundation to push back against the naturalized moral philosophy of Hume and Smith.

Ferguson's own naturalism supports a conception of spontaneous order, albeit one in which he aims to preserve morality from its naturalization. The understanding of spontaneous order and unintended consequences had already been established in Scottish discourse with Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* in 1714. Mandeville had argued that the "self-interested actions of private individuals, bent on accumulating wealth, could amount to increasing comfort and liberty in the public sphere ... [and justified] the replacement of political virtue with time-tested institutions" (Oz-Salzberger, 2003: 169-170). Ferguson rejected this account of self-interest by showing how different interests beyond utility are found across all societies. When he engages directly with Mandeville, though, Ferguson makes it clear that it is the moral character of human action that stands in opposition to Mandeville's beehive, and grounds his objection to Hume and Smith:

²³ McDaniel (2013: Ch. 3) has a nice discussion of Ferguson's position on this question.

Is man therefore, in respect to this object, to be classed with the mere brutes, and only to be distinguished by faculties that qualify him to multiply contrivances for the support and convenience of animal life ... As actors or spectators, we are perpetually made to feel the difference of human conduct ... Our sensibility on this subject ... joined to the powers of deliberation and reason, it constitutes the basis of a moral nature (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 35-36).

Ferguson then deconstructs Mandeville's position showing that he cannot escape his own strictures – hoisting Mandeville on his own petard:

It is pleasant to find men, who, in their speculations, deny the reality of moral distinctions, forget in detail the general positions they maintain, and give loose to ridicule, indignation, and scorn, as if any of these sentiments could have place, were the actions of men indifferent; and with acrimony²⁴ pretend to detect the fraud by which moral restraints have been imposed, as if to censure a fraud were not already to take a part on the side of morality (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 36-37).²⁵

Despite a philosophical anthropology which puts the moral nature of mankind at the centre, however, Ferguson accepts the Mandevillian corollary of spontaneous order. Indeed, he is the author of one of its most famous formulations:

Every step and every movement of the multitude, even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future; and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 119).

Scottish moral philosophy in this period largely resisted the account of will which the Lockean tradition promoted:

²⁴ In the 1768 edition of the text, Ferguson changed “and with acrimony” to “or with acrimony” (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 267).

²⁵ Oz-Salzberger notes that “the moral dimension of political society, where men cease to behave like bees, is set in blunt opposition to Mandeville's bees (and all other ‘gregarious and political’ animals in Ferguson's *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 176, fn 45). See Part I, Chap. 1, Sect. II, *Of the Definition of Animals Associating and Political* (Ferguson, [1792] 1975: 18-25).

The Scottish science of man is particularly attuned to the non-deliberative aspects of human social life – to sympathy, to habit and to custom. This, as we will see, complements the awareness of unintended complexity and the downplaying of purposive action in the generation [of] social institutions (Smith, 2009: 12).

Ferguson accepted this common sense Scottish discourse on the 'habit of society'. While mankind, he acknowledged, has dispositions for self-preservation, he also has powers of discernment, or reason, and a disposition to habit:

He enjoys his felicity likewise on certain fixed and determinate conditions; and either as an individual apart, or as a member of civil society, must take a particular course in order to reap the advantages of his nature. He is, withal, in a very high degree susceptible of habits; and can, by forbearance or exercise, so far weaken, confirm, or even diversify his talents, and his dispositions, as to appear, in a great measure, the arbiter of his own rank in nature, and the author of all the varieties which are exhibited in the actual history of his species (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 16-17).

Ferguson's recognition of the instinctive propensity to habit, and his rejection of what would now be called 'social constructivism', led him to endorse the theory of spontaneous order. Where he differs with Hume and Smith, however, is in rejecting its rationality. Drawing from his commitment to the virtue tradition of civic humanism, he maintains, in the first instance, that commerce is (we might now express it) 'necessary but not sufficient' for national felicity:

Wealth, commerce, extent of territory, and the knowledge of arts, are, when properly employed, the means of preservation, and the foundations of power. If they fail in part, the nation is weakened; if they were entirely with-held, the race would perish: their tendency is to maintain numbers of men, but not to constitute happiness. They will accordingly maintain the wretched, as well as the happy. They answer one purpose, but are not therefore sufficient for all; and are of little

significance, when only employed to maintain a timid, dejected, and servile people (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 60).²⁶

This failure of national felicity is not, in Ferguson's view, a direct cause of the pursuit of commerce, but of the corruption of the political domain (Geuna, 2002: 185).²⁷ As participation in political affairs is its own good, corruption is not just a consequence of a disorder within the polity – not just a result of such particulars as malfeasance or graft – but is also a failure of the constitution of the polity itself. "Ferguson pointed at the moral loopholes of a politics devoid of virtuous civic alertness and over-dependent on the – essentially apolitical – ideas of 'unintended consequences' in economic and social processes and perennial constitutions of either the 'ancient' or the philosophical brand. There are no self-regulating mechanisms in politics, Ferguson argued" (Oz-Salzberger 2003: 168).

The history of England, and of every free country, abounds with the example of statutes enacted when the people or their representatives assembled, but never executed when the crown or the executive was left to itself. The most equitable laws on paper are consistent with the utmost despotism in administration. Even the form of trial by juries in England had its authority in law, while the proceedings of courts were arbitrary and oppressive ... If even the safety of the person, and the tenure of property, which may be so well defined in the words of a statute, depend, for their preservation, on the vigour and jealousy of a free people, and on the degree of consideration which every order of the state maintains for itself; it is still more evident, that what we have called the political freedom, or the right of the individual to act in his station for himself and the public, cannot be made to rest on any other foundation (Ferguson, [1767] 1995: 160).

The question that remains open is whether Ferguson's conception of spontaneous order, beyond the potential for political disorder which he recognized, is really compatible with his commitment to naturalization.

²⁶ Quoted in part by Geuna, 2002: 185.

²⁷ "For Ferguson, economic expansion and the accompanying preoccupation with individual economic improvement can be both cause of the advance of the political arts and also responsible for their deterioration" (Varty, 2007: 42).

Theory of the Moral Sciences

Ferguson's arguments did not carry the day. It was not a matter that his position did not get a hearing among the Scottish philosophers, but that he failed to convince his audience. Indeed, David Hume disliked Ferguson's account (Raynor, [2009] 2016; Merolle, [2009] 2016), and this dislike seems to derive from the greater empiricism of Hume as against the greater historicism of Ferguson:

Hume is a man of the Enlightenment, Ferguson a precursor of Historicism and Romanticism ... The *Essay* has much to say in the field of historical knowledge because it constitutes a comprehensive theory of historical change, on the basis of the concept of human nature, which remains similar and stable through the ages. By contrast, the Enlightenment, and Hume with it, could conceive the idea of *progress*, but not that of *historical change*. (Merolle, ([2009] 2016: 86-87)

In this section, I will explore this division by further probing the evolution of the concept of *interest*, which played, as I will argue, a crucial role in the failure of Ferguson's arguments for civil society, and established the foundation for an alternative in the moral sciences.

Johan Heilbron has suggested that there were two reasons that led to the concept of 'interest' assuming its intellectual prominence in early modern Europe: "first by suggesting a more realistic conceptualization of human nature and human action; and second, by providing a conceptual basis for new forms of political, social and economic theory" (Heilbron, 1998: 77).²⁸ What will become clear is that the "more realistic" view of human nature is a replacement for an understanding of virtue as the telos and end of humankind. Given the dominance of the various virtue traditions at that time, it is not clear how the transition could have happened very easily. The language of "more realist" is a claim, not a fact, and only plausible because anachronistic.²⁹ More emphasis will need

²⁸ For much of this section, I will follow Heilbron's argument. Albert Hirschman (1977, 1986) has offered an important parallel account, complementary to Heilbron's study.

²⁹ Given the success of the new moral philosophy of commercial sociability, it is now the case that larger and larger swathes of late modern behaviour are explicitly understood as self-interested, but it is an historical question of what was the case in the eighteenth century. This paper is not the place to examine this complex question. Suffice it to say

to be placed, therefore, on Heilbron's second reason, the desire for a 'science of man'.

In the story which I have portrayed up until now, Scottish Enlightenment discourse has played the central role, although I have referred to Dutch, English and German debates. Indeed, I could have discussed the influences of Montesquieu and Rousseau on the Scottish discourse as well,³⁰ but it still would not have altered the centrality of the Scottish position. However, on the question of the *interests*, the French discourse is the central one.

The re-conceptualization of interest arose in France during the seventeenth century out of the Jansenist anthropology. Jansenism was a pietistic movement within Catholicism, oriented toward Augustinian theology, and emphasizing the unredeemable depravity of mankind in the absence of God's grace, without which "man was a prisoner of concupiscence and could only do evil" (Van Kley, 1987: 70). Jansenist theology rested on the Augustinian separation of the City of Man and the City of God, rooted in "mutually exclusive drives: self-love and the love of God" (Heilbron, 1998: 83).

Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), Professor of Scriptural Interpretation at the Old University of Louvain, in what is now Belgium, published his masterwork, *Augustinus*, on the theology of St. Augustine in 1640, and it attracted many adherents, notably Blaise Pascal,³¹ Pierre Nicole, Antoine Arnaud, Jean Racine, and Pasquier Quesnel. The Old University of Louvain became a great centre of Jansenism as did the Abbey of Port-Royal-des-Champs, located near Paris. Established in 1204, the Abbey was reformed in the early seventeenth century by its abbess, Mother Marie Angélique Arnaud. In 1634, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne, a companion of Jansen, was appointed as spiritual director of the Abbey, and he promoted Jansenism in France, eventually acquiring a widening

that Heilbron makes no argument as to why he thinks it is "a more realistic conceptualization".

³⁰ One might begin by examining Hont (2015) for a comparative study of the thought of Rousseau and Smith, and see Sher (1994), Moore (2009), and Broadie (2012) on the influence of Montesquieu on the Scottish philosophers.

³¹ Pascal's piety shines such a strong light that he is really in a different category from the others. Kolakowski (1995) provides a starting place.

circle of friends within the nobility and at court. The Jansenists advocated “a simple and pious life, while opposing the laxist morality of the Jesuits” (Heilbron, 1998: 83). David Hume commented on the differences in the orientation of the Jansenists and Jesuits in terms of his analysis of superstition and enthusiasm, discussed earlier:

... the jesuits are great friends to superstition, rigid observers of external forms and ceremonies, and devoted to the authority of the priests, and to tradition. The jansenists are enthusiasts, and zealous promoters of the passionate devotion, and of inward life; little influenced by authority; and in a word, but half catholics. (Hume, quoted in Heilbron, 1998: 84)

This conflict between Jansenists and Jesuits became a kind of ‘trench warfare’, engaged in over many years throughout much of the Catholic world. It was a conflict which led to a succession of Papal condemnations of the Jansenist position, and eventually led to the expulsion of the Jesuits from each of France, Portugal, and Spain.³²

However, before these events, in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Jansenists created an intellectual network of ‘co-travellers’ with major nodes at Louvain and Port-Royal. The Marquise de Sablé, for instance, lived next door to the Port-Royal Abbey, and hosted a prominent salon which was frequented by clerics, literary figures, and nobility, contributing to the “French Moralists” tradition³³ by such authors as Francois de la Rochefoucauld, Abbé Nicolas d’Ailly, Madame de Lafayette, Pierre Nicole, Jacques Esprit, Blaise Pascal, and the Marquise herself.³⁴

The predominance of self-love and its consequences was one of the main themes in the exchanges between disillusioned nobles and Jansenist writers. Jansenists demonstrated that because even the noblest human acts were manifestations of self-love, there was no reason to credit human beings with any virtuous or noble motive. In

³² See Van Kley (1975) for a discussion of the Jesuit expulsion from France.

³³ See Chamard (1931) for a discussion of La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, and La Bruyère as “French Moralists”. The tradition is often seen as beginning with Montaigne’s *Essais* in 1580.

³⁴ See Heilbron (1998) and Péligray (2009).

this respect they followed the Augustinian psychology in which self-love and love of God were radically opposed. (Heilbron, 1998: 89)

The theological issue of self-love for the Jansenists turned on the question of concupiscence, or sensuous desire. Given that a Godly life – sanctified and made holy – is not available without help from God, a grace that is not in abundance given the pervasive sinfulness of mankind, how could one account for the degree of social order which is present?

Some Jansenists did so in terms of sin or ‘concupiscence’ itself. Now for the Jansenist, the essence of ‘concupiscence’ was the preferment of self or self-love to God. To explain order and civility in terms of concupiscence was therefore to explain it in terms of self-love which, however much an impediment to one’s salvation in the hereafter, became by the same token indispensable to the smooth running of the world here below. (Van Kley, 1987: 72)

Pierre Nicole, Jansenist theologian and key participant in the Port-Royal circle, became the foremost architect of this position, communicated in his widely read *Essais de morale*. The Second Treatise of Volume 3 is entitled “Of Charity and Self-Love”, published about 1680, and is explicit about the role of concupiscence in promoting social order.³⁵ Nicole indicates that “the name of self-love is not sufficient to make us know its nature, being we may love our selves divers ways” (Nicole, 1680: 124). He goes on to suggest three bonds which temper naked self-love and promote social order: self-preservation (fear), material conveniences (interest), and the good estimation of others (esteem), of which the last is, if not “the strongest passion which springs from self-love, at least it is the most general” (p. 133). The inclination for the esteem of others is “so nice, and

³⁵ Nicole had read Hobbes, and had noticed the obvious parallels with the Augustinian view of humanity, but could not accept the Hobbesian position on the role of the state. Jerome Schneewind has commented on Nicole’s response to Hobbes: “What Nicole argued, therefore, is that Hobbes failed to see everything that followed from his thesis of the dominance of self-love in our psychology. He did not see that – because of a providence that is benevolent, no matter how few souls are actually saved – self-love mimics the work of grace-given charity so perfectly that we are never in a position to say from which motive an action springs, not even an action of our own. But if selfishness is nearly the same as Christian love, in regard to observable behavior, then forms of government less authoritarian than Hobbes would allow can be sufficient to guarantee public order and civic decency” (Schneewind, 1990: 370).

subtle, and at the same time of such a latitude, that there is nothing it cannot enter into, and it knows so well how to trim it self up with the appearances of Charity, that it is almost impossible to know exquisitely what distinguishes it from Charity ... there is nothing in this, but what self-love imitates perfectly" (p. 135, 138). If this is so, then "this obscurity which impedes and hinders him from distinguishing clearly whether he acts by Charity, or by Self-love" (p. 172), means that it "should be very unfortunate to wander and stray out of the way whereto Charity and Self-interest equally inclines me, and to render my self, in forsaking them, equally odious to God and man" (p. 176).

Writing more succinctly in his *Pensées*, Blaise Pascal made the same argument. Pascal held that the Fall had left mankind with "inquiétude and irresoluteness", and without God as the centre and "proper object for human longing" (Rahe, 2013: 130, 133), charity becomes self-love. Even in this fallen state, Pascal noted "the grandeur of man amidst concupiscence itself, in knowing how to derive from it such an admirable order and in having made of it an image of charity" (Pascal, quoted in Van Kley, 1987: 79).

From the point-of-view of moral philosophy, Nicole and the Jansenists made a strong and interesting response to Hobbes, one consistent with their pietistic Christianity. Indeed, there are some parallels with Pufendorf's response to Hobbes. However, unlike Pufendorf's cooperative self-interest, the austerity of the Jansenist theology, rooted in the unrelieved sinfulness of mankind, leads to an emphasis on the self-love which seeks the esteem of others, which parades self-interest as concern for others. Without the theological roots, however, how would the Jansenist psychology be picked up in Enlightenment thought?

The key link, at least for the Scottish Enlightenment, was Bernard Mandeville and his 'succès de scandale', *The Fable of the Bees*. Mandeville, was "not simply an eccentric who surfaced unaccountably" (Horne, 1978: 19), as he appears on first reading to someone in the present day. Mandeville (1670-1733) was born in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, studied philosophy and medicine at Leiden University, and moved to London in the early 1690s, where he practiced as a "specialist in the diseases of the nerves and the stomach, that is, as a psychiatrist, and continued to do so for the following thirty-seven years" (Hayek, 1966:

126). In 1705, he published a satirical poem, *The Grumbling Hive*,³⁶ subsequently republished with a prose commentary in 1714 as *The Fable of the Bees, Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, expanding in successive editions until its sixth version in 1729 (with a seventh edition, the last while Mandeville was alive, published in 1732).

The fable aims to show how public benefit can be an outcome of private vice, and, spurred by his invocation of self-love, yielded “the twin ideas of evolution and of the spontaneous formation of an order” (Hayek, 1966: 126). Mandeville’s association with the ‘French Moralists’ was widely recognized, and his contemporaries “noted the importance of Bayle,³⁷ while many also mentioned Esprit and La Rochefoucauld” (Horne, 1978: 19). As Horne notes, “Mandeville’s work clearly shows certain similarities with this kind of religious thought” (p. 22). Laurence Dickey argues that “Jansenism provided Mandeville – as early as 1705 – with sophisticated ideological tools with which to fashion an egoistic psychology that did not require the development of a Hobbesian political mechanism to sustain it”, and used that psychology “to historicize the concept of self-love (*amour-propre*)” (Dickey, 1990: 387-388). What I think would be a better construction here would be to talk about Mandeville using that psychology to *naturalize* the concept of self-love. Pierre Nicole, as I noted above, identified fear, interest, and esteem as social bonds. Mandeville uses the same three bonds in his argument, but places “interest at the end of the sequence” (p. 422).

³⁶ The first stanza of the poem gives something of the idea: “A Spacious Hive well stockt with Bees, That liv’d in Luxury and Ease; And yet as fam’d for Laws and Arms, As yielding large and early Swarms; Was counted the great Nursery Of Sciences and Industry. No Bees had better Government, More Fickleness, or less Content: They were not Slaves to Tyranny, Nor rul’d by wild Democracy; But Kings, that could not wrong, because Their Power was circumscrib’d by Laws” (Mandeville, [1732] 1988).

³⁷ Rahe (2013: 135) reports that Mandeville was a student of Pierre Bayle, but Van Bunge (2008: 203) indicates that this has not yet been positively established. Goldsmith (2004) indicates that Mandeville was “likely to have heard” the two notable French Protestant exiles, Pierre Bayle and Pierre Jurieu. What is certain, though, is the considerable influence that Pierre Bayle, *le philosophe de Rotterdam*, had on Mandeville. Apart from textual analysis, we have it in Mandeville’s own words: “Those who are vers’d in books will soon discover, that I have made great use of Monsieur Baile without mentioning him” (Mandeville, quoted in Van Bunge, 2008: 203; and in Robertson, 2005: 262). Pierre Bayle was himself much influenced by the French Moralists, but “secularized what had been in Augustine, Pascal, and Nicole a religious argument, contending that *amour propre* is a ‘passion inseparable from our nature’” (Rahe, 2013: 135).

In short, I am arguing that the big difference between seventeenth and eighteenth century moral philosophy is the naturalization of sociability. We have seen the naturalism already in the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment, but it is being reinforced also by the progress in the natural sciences and the emerging philosophy of science which underpins it. “Although there were many contributions in the seventeenth century, it was the philosophers of the early to mid-eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hume, and Smith, who took pains to articulate the sense in which the moral sciences were analogous to the natural sciences” (Schabas, 2015: 3).

Roger Emerson has argued, rather strenuously, that more attention in Enlightenment studies should be paid to the impact of the natural sciences, the practical improvements that they engendered, and the networks of patronage and support that they required. His “Science and the Origins and Concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment” (Emerson, 1988) describes the growing dominance of Newtonian Science in the Scottish universities during the Enlightenment, and the intricate pattern of faculty appointments which supported that. In his 1992 and 2008 studies, Emerson builds on his early works to detail the elaborate system of patronage and appointments at the five Scottish universities. He directly confronts the accounts of civic humanism and natural jurisprudence which I have laid out earlier:

Scottish social and political thought in the eighteenth century is usually seen as belonging to one of two traditions – to natural law theory or to civic humanism. In either case there can be little doubt³⁸ that the enlightenment in Scotland put both views upon an increasingly sophisticated empirical foundation which was consciously related to the new science. (Emerson, 1988: 351)

Moral philosophy could neither be separated from logic or from natural philosophy, nor developed separately as students of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Phillipson seem to believe. Scots who wished to become the Newtons of the moral sciences could and did

³⁸ Of course, it has been disputed by two prominent scholars, John Robertson and Richard Sher, both with articles in Wood (2000).

borrow a method and an aim from the natural sciences along with the logic which seemed appropriate to them (Emerson, 1988: 349).

And what is of considerable interest with this last comment is that it was just this aspiration – “to be the Newton of the moral world” – which was found in Turnbull, Hutcheson, Kames, Hume, and Reid (Emerson, 1988: 364).

David Hume (1711-1776) is paradigmatic for the new ‘moral science’. Indeed, the full title of his first major work, *A Treatise of Human Nature: An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*, published in several volumes during 1739 and 1740, announces his intent. In his ‘Introduction’, Hume explains that it should not surprise anyone that “the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects should come after that to natural at the distance of above a whole century” (Hume, [1739-40] 1978: xvi), that is between Francis Bacon and “some late philosophers in England”,³⁹ as there had been a similar interval of time between Thales and Socrates at the origins of the sciences in Ancient Greece. While he contends that “the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation” (p. xvi), Hume suggests there is one significant difference with the natural sciences, that “in collecting its experiments, it cannot make them purposely, with premeditation” (p. xviii-xix), so that it is necessary to glean our knowledge “from a cautious observation of human life”. He concludes by expressing his ambition that “where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension” (p. xix).

Hume’s empirical commitment, then, is obvious, and recent scholarship is shedding more light on Hume’s knowledge of natural philosophy and the question of his ‘Newtonianism’ (Barfoot, 1990; McIntyre, 1994, Sapadin, 1997, Schliesser, 2007). Be that as it may, other scholars – Broadie (2007) and Wood (2003), for instance – concur with

³⁹ Hume specifies Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutchinson, and Butler as being among those “late philosophers”. In the 1740 promotional abstract which Hume published, he also mentions Malebranche, Leibniz, and Descartes.

Emerson about the significance of natural philosophy for the Scottish Enlightenment.

This is consistent with earlier scholarship as well. James McCosh's *The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical*, published in 1875 while he was President of Princeton University, argued for a common methodological stance to the Scottish Enlightenment:

Successive generations of scholars have celebrated what McCosh perceived to be the signal methodological innovation of Hume, Reid, and the Scottish 'school', namely the application of the inductive method to the study of human nature. (Wood, 1989: 114)

We won't spend any more time on the question at this general level. At this point in the argument, we can bring it to a close by establishing Hume's link with Mandeville with a few comments.

Hayek saw Mandeville as providing "the foundations on which David Hume was able to build" (1966: 138). John Robertson agrees that "the general principles of [Hume's] approach to the study of man were congruent with Mandeville's" (Robertson, 2005: 291). This is so, particularly with regard to Mandeville's naturalism, but Hume goes well beyond Mandeville in his moral philosophy. Hume criticized Mandeville's account on two grounds: firstly, the range of virtues and vices is considerably broader than Mandeville allows with an analysis restricted just to social consequences; and, secondly, the social regulation accomplished through approbation and blame, regardless of how it was instituted, requires some natural sentiment for it to arise in the first place. Hume accepted Mandeville's establishment of the foundations of sociability on interest, but argued that interest is not opposed to the passions, as it was for Mandeville, but grows out of them: approbation and blame are not means of securing interests, but rather "utility makes a direct contribution to the way we draw moral distinctions" (Robertson, 2005: 292). The 'natural sentiment' which Hume posits as the mechanism which converts interests into the moral codes of approbation and blame is *sympathy*:

But tho' this system be erroneous, it may teach us, that moral distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities

and characters to the interest of society, and that 'tis our concern for that interest, which makes us approve or disapprove of them. Now we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy; and consequently 'tis that principle, which takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in the characters of others, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss. (Hume, [1739-40] 1975: III.3.1.11, with variant reading; quoted in Robertson, 2005: 292, without variant reading)

Hume's essential criticism of Mandeville, therefore, was that his naturalism had not gone far enough: "Mandeville had missed the extent to which men had (and must have) developed moral sentiments compatible with human nature, and hence with the passions" (Robertson, 2005: 292). It was in this way that Hume founded the moral sciences. The foundation needed some further work to solidify a conception of material progress, something which finds its fullest flower in Adam Smith, but the hard work in naturalizing morality had been accomplished with Hume.

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The philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment played *the* central role at the beginning of the *Sattelzeit* – the transition from early modernity to modernity proper. The moral science which Hume baptized turned out to have been itself a stepping stone to the final elimination of a moral framework from the social sciences in the early twentieth century. The Scottish philosophers were not, for the most part, secular in intent, so much as seeking to re-establish moral philosophy on certain grounds, and those grounds needed to be naturalistic. Other Enlightenments made other contributions, many of them more enduring than the Scottish philosophy, which "had had its day by the mid-nineteenth century" (Graham, 2003: 340).

What characterizes the contribution of the Scottish Enlightenment is the troika of material progress, naturalized interests, and spontaneous order. I have tried to follow the several discourses which developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to show the conjunction of the

several traditions of civic humanism, natural jurisprudence, and philosophy of science, and how they overlapped and reinforced one another. The question that I raised was why Ferguson's critique of spontaneous order and naturalized interest was not sufficient to alter the course of events. It is all too easy, and equally anachronistic, to see him as paddling against the stream. Clearly, Hume's critique of the Mandevillian conception of interest is more cogent than the objections which Ferguson brings to bear, and Ferguson's rhetoric does not have the same analytical power as Hume, but the question remains why Ferguson wasn't more influential. There is the suggestion that the strands of civic humanism and his upholding of warrior culture were seen as old-fashioned and out-of-step with the emerging commercial society. This criticism, however, has already assumed the outcome, rather than explained it. What made the difference, in the narrative I have outlined, was the powerful foundational work in the philosophy of science. The movement toward a naturalized epistemology, and the conveniences it brought, carried the day against the virtue ethic of Ferguson.

The Renaissance translation of *koinōnia politikē* as *civilis societas* made the political order – what became the state – the centre-piece of the moral order. With the naturalization of the spontaneous order of society and the grounding of the interests of *amour propre*, the state was no longer at the centre. The moral order had been re-founded on an autonomous sociality.

It seems clear from the dictionaries, then, that a critical shift in the meaning of *société* occurs at the end of the seventeenth century. The earlier, voluntaristic associations of the term with partnership, companiability, and civility do not disappear; but they are joined by a more general meaning of society as the basic form of collective human existence, at once natural to human beings and instituted by them, a corollary of human needs and a human response to those needs ... to a notion of society as an autonomous ground of human existence. (Baker, 1994: 108, 119)

None of the Scottish philosophers, including Adam Ferguson, outlined a systematic philosophy of civil society. That had to wait for Hegel. However, the building blocks are clear. Civil society would now be understood as *commercial sociability*.

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