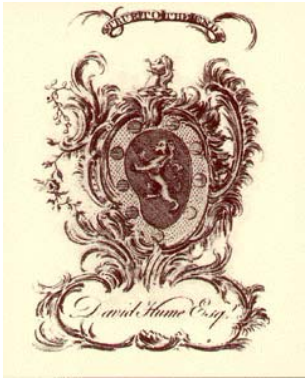

Review of Paul B. Wood. *The Aberdeen Enlightment: The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century*

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Book Reviews

PAUL B. WOOD. *The Aberdeen Enlightment: The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century.* Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993. xvi + 240 pages.

Professor Wood premises that "the history of the Scottish Enlightenment is largely co-extensive with that of her universities," and that "this was particularly the case in Aberdeen, where intellectual life focused almost entirely on the two universities" (xiii). Drawing on an array of archival sources, Wood carefully traces the evolution of the arts curriculum at Aberdeen's two colleges, King's and Marischal, from 1717 to 1800. He offers a wealth of detail concerning the lectures and the agendas of key professors in the fields of natural and moral philosophy: among them, Marischal's George Turnbull, Thomas Blackwell, Alexander Gerard, and James Beattie; and King's Thomas Reid and Robert Eden Scott. Wood thus contributes to the growing body of literature on the nexus of university, Kirk, and Enlightenment in eighteenth century Scotland, and he demonstrates a thorough acquaintance with work done by scholars such as Anand Chitnis, Peter Jones, Richard Sher, and M. A. Stewart.

Wood develops a number of theses that challenge views advanced or accepted by these earlier writers; and his inductive mode of argumentation—and apparently exhaustive research—lend authority to his claims. His major claim is that Francis Hutcheson "was a less novel figure in Scottish academe than historians have previously thought, and that his Glasgow years, like those of [George] Turnbull in Aberdeen, have to be seen in the light of the assimilation

of Shaftesbury's writings by...Scottish savants of the 1710s and 1720s" and "the impact of the civic tradition and of Old Whiggery in Scotland in this period" (47–49). Wood argues that Hutcheson was not only less original, but also less influential than has traditionally been thought; as Wood amply demonstrates in his survey of the teaching of moral philosophy from 1760 to 1800, Hutcheson's style of "polite moralizing" had few adherents other than James Beattie. For the most part, Aberdonians presented themselves as "anatomists of human nature" who only secondarily, if at all, sought to inculcate practical morality (109, 145).

Some of their enthusiasm for the science of human nature may be traced, as Wood suggests, to the influence of David Hume. Wood indeed implies a congruity between the program Hume announced in the Introduction to the *Treatise* and the course of study institutionalized in the Aberdeen colleges. More precisely, Wood treats Hume's vision of the filiation of the human sciences—logic, morals, criticism, and politics—both as an effect of ideas that were brewing in Scottish classrooms during the 1710s and 1720s (41), and as a partial cause for the curriculum revisions formally instituted at both King's and Marischal in 1753 (66–67).

In addition to suggesting a general consonance between Hume's overarching project and that of the Aberdeen professors, Wood also examines the more particular ways in which Hume's writings resonated among men such as Reid, Gerard, and Beattie. Inevitably, he reviews their well-known "common sense" objections to Humean epistemology; but he notes too the praise of Hume's political and economic essays expressed in the lectures of both Reid and Reid's successor at King's, Robert Eden Scott.

For all his admirable thoroughness, Wood does neglect to comment on one of the leading Aberdeen figures, and one who is very indebted to Hume—George Campbell, principal of Marischal from 1759 to 1795, professor of divinity from 1771, and author of *A Dissertation on Miracles: containing an Examination of the Principles Advanced by David Hume, Esq.* (1762), and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776).[1] Although Wood notes that he makes "no attempt in this book to analyse developments in the teaching of theology" (166 note 4), Campbell's teaching assignments included lectures on pulpit eloquence—a topic that is more closely related to rhetoric than it is to systematic theology. The subject of rhetoric in general, however, receives scant notice by Wood, and it is difficult for the reader to determine whether this is a shortcoming of the Aberdeen curriculum or of Wood's monograph.

Furthermore, Wood might have explored how the Aberdeen arts curriculum was influenced by related institutions. Campbell, for example, originally presented his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, as Reid and Beattie did their major

works, as discourses to the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, an organization made up entirely of Aberdeen professors. Wood might have addressed the ways in which this important extra-curricular institution and the arts curriculum acted and reacted on one another; he might also have examined more closely the ways in which both reacted to Hume. For as Reid wrote Hume: "A little Philosophical Society here...is much indebted to you for its entertainment....If you write no more in morals, politicks or metaphysics, I am afraid we shall be at a loss for subjects."[2]

REFERENCES

1 For an assessment of Hume's influence on Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* see Lloyd F. Bitzer's Introduction to his revised edition of the text (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), vii-li.

2. J. Y. T. Grieg, *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 1:376 note 4.

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