SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY
in the Nineteenth &
Twentieth Centuries

edited by
GORDON GRAHAM
Scottish Philosophy in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries
A HISTORY OF SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY

David Hume has long been Scotland’s most famous philosopher, to the extent of overshadowing all his contemporaries. It was not always so, however, and in the last few decades, philosophers and historians of ideas have come to see Hume once more in the context of debates that occupied a significant number of Scottish Enlightenment figures. Alongside Hume, and partly in response to him, the philosophical and scientific investigations of Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Adam Ferguson, George Campbell, Dugald Stewart, and many others, set in train a line of inquiry that was vigorously pursued in Scotland and North America for over two centuries. Moreover, it has come to be better understood that though these Enlightenment philosophers were highly innovative, they drew upon a distinctive intellectual tradition embodied in the ancient Scottish universities, where teaching responsibilities shaped research interests.

*A History of Scottish Philosophy* is a series of collaborative studies by expert authors, each volume being devoted to a specific period. Together they provide a comprehensive account of the Scottish philosophical tradition, from the centuries that laid the foundation of the remarkable burst of intellectual fertility known as the Scottish Enlightenment, through the Victorian age and beyond, when it continued to exercise powerful intellectual influence at home and abroad. The books aims to be historically informative, while at the same time serving to renew philosophical interest in the problems with which the Scottish philosophers grappled, and in the solutions they proposed.

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*Edited by Gordon Graham*
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Gordon Graham
Preface

There is a very striking contrast between the attention that has been given to Scottish philosophy in the eighteenth and in the nineteenth centuries. Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, and Reid are names well known beyond the circle of scholars who have made them a special subject of study, and even rather more minor figures like Ferguson, Kames, and Stewart are not unknown to a wider philosophical readership. Philosophers of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, whose standing and prestige in their own time could hardly be exaggerated, are almost completely unknown. Thomas Brown, Sir William Hamilton, James Frederick Ferrier, Robert Flint, Edward Caird, and A. S. Pringle-Pattison have virtually disappeared from modern philosophical consciousness. Their books are long since out of print (except in facsimile editions), and references to them make no appearance in contemporary philosophical debates.

The purpose of this volume, and its compilation in association with a preceding volume devoted to Scottish philosophy in the eighteenth century, is to begin the process of remedying this neglect by uncovering the vigour, novelty, and continuing interest of the philosophical debates that the nineteenth century carried over from the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. The chapters are devoted both to single figures who were especially highly esteemed, and to intellectual developments that were regarded as especially significant. The first chapter aims to provide something of a synoptic overview and the last a philosophical retrospective. The hope is that the volume as a whole will constitute the first ever complete and coherent account of Scottish philosophy in the nineteenth century. At the same time, the chapters are also intended to serve as informative, free-standing essays for readers with special interests. This means that, even between those by the same author, there is an unavoidable measure of repetition—names, dates, publications, and the like, that each of the essays requires in its own right—and each essay has its own bibliography, using whatever editions the author has thought best.

This volume has been a very long time in the making. In its final form it owes much not only to the authors of the various essays, but to many other people whose advice has been sought and freely given, and to the patience of the publisher. To all of them, grateful acknowledgement is made.

Gordon Graham

Princeton
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The owl of Minerva, Hegel famously remarks, takes its flight at dusk. True understanding, in other words, has to await hindsight. Although Joseph Priestley had coined the (derogatory) term 'Scotch metaphysics' as early as 1774, the expression 'Scottish philosophy' was unknown when those who subsequently came to be regarded as its principal exponents were engaged in their enquiries. In 1829, Victor Cousin published twelve lectures to which he gave the title Philosophie écossaise. Though widely read in Britain, the book was never translated into English, and the expression ‘Scottish philosophy’ dates from a considerably later period when, in line with Hegel’s dictum, those for whom the Scottish style of philosophizing mattered perceived it to be in decline. A key event in this regard was the publication in 1875 of The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical, by James McCosh, then President of the College of New Jersey, subsequently Princeton University. In this seminal text McCosh traced a course of enquiry that stretched from Gersholm Carmichael, whose teaching career began at the University of St Andrews in 1693, to Sir William Hamilton, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in Edinburgh from 1836 until his death in 1854. The starting and ending points are not coincidental; as McCosh notes, it was Hamilton who (in his notes on Reid) declared Carmichael ‘the real founder of the Scottish school of philosophy’ (McCosh 1875: 36).

Looking back across this century and a half, McCosh perceived ‘a unity, not only in the circumstances that its expounders have been Scotchmen, but also and more especially in its methods, its doctrines, and its spirit’ (McCosh 1875: 2). Accordingly, his aim was to delineate the general characteristics of a style of philosophical enquiry in which he had himself been educated and to which he was intellectually committed. But he did so precisely because he was grieved by the increasing neglect that he saw it suffering at the hands of his philosophical contemporaries, both in Scotland and abroad.

1 Preface to the Philosophy of Right.
2 An Examination of Dr. Reid’s Inquiry into the Human Mind.
Over the next few decades, the expression ‘Scottish philosophy’ appeared in a number of books and articles, but always as the name of a traditional inheritance, which, if not vanishing completely, had at least become unfashionable or under threat. Thus in 1877 John Veitch, Professor of Logic at Glasgow, published two lengthy articles surveying Scottish philosophy from its medieval origins to the present day. Their implicit purpose is to vindicate the traditional place of Logic and Moral Philosophy in a university education. Since mid-century, Veitch contends, Scottish philosophers have produced ‘an amount and quality’ of intellectual work ‘not surpassed by any form of scientific effort in the same period’ (Veitch 1877: 234). This remark reflects a sense, widely shared, that modern ‘scientific’ progress had made the Scottish veneration of philosophy antiquated.

The threat was not merely from the new sciences, however. It came from within philosophy, and within Scotland. In his Balfour Lectures On the Scottish Philosophy (1885) Andrew Seth (successor but one to Hamilton in the Edinburgh Chair) expressly observed that ‘the thread of national tradition . . . has been but loosely held of late by many of our best Scottish students of philosophy’ (Seth 1885: 1–2). He had in mind, chiefly, the apparently increasing attractiveness of Hegelian Idealism, a movement to which Seth himself subscribed (in a qualified way). Some years later Henry Laurie, a Scottish-educated philosopher teaching in Australia, published another retrospective book entitled Scottish Philosophy in its National Development (1902). In the introduction he records what may be said to be a consensus among all these writers. ‘In the present day, Scottish philosophy is somewhat discredited by the influence of the deeper speculations of Germany on the one hand, and on the other by theories in which empiricism has joined hands with the doctrine of evolution.’ His task, accordingly, was ‘to view it impartially and to appreciate the place to which it is justly entitled in the history of thought’ (Laurie 1902: 9).

Even if, as Laurie alleges, by the turn of the twentieth century the Scottish philosophical tradition was ‘no longer a living rival to later forms of speculation’ its historical pre-eminence reached well beyond the period of the Scottish Enlightenment (an expression coined even later), and thus beyond the authors most immediately identified as ‘Scottish’ philosophers—Hume, Smith, and Reid, chiefly. Furthermore, the extension runs in both directions—before as well as after. McCosh follows Veitch and Hamilton in looking back to Carmichael, while Laurie thinks that ‘the history of Scottish philosophy begins, curiously enough, with an Irishman’: namely, Francis Hutcheson, Carmichael’s student and successor at Glasgow. Either way, we must find the origins close to the start of the eighteenth century, and thus at least half a century before the emergence of the ‘School of Common Sense’ inspired by Thomas Reid. McCosh ends with Hamilton, while Laurie extends it to James Frederick Ferrier, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews, who died in 1864. Much more recently, and contra Laurie, Alexander Broadie’s History of Scottish Philosophy (2008) finds representatives of the tradition working up until the mid-twentieth century, modern manifestations of a seven-century tradition that (according to Broadie) originates in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308).
The issue is one to be returned to in the final chapter, but in the face of such differences of opinion about the duration of Scottish philosophy after the Enlightenment, the present volume aims to be both catholic and critical. It is catholic in supposing that the ‘science of man’ with which the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century are so closely identified did indeed continue to motivate philosophical thought in the nineteenth century, while placing no definitive date on its demise. It is critical because it makes the issues of continuity and decline philosophical as well as historical—matters to be determined not simply by contingent connection but by philosophical coherence also. The key questions are these. Who is to be counted as working in the same tradition, and on what grounds? Is it philosophically illuminating to see them as continuing it? Do their labours, now for the most part forgotten, promise to be of philosophical as well as historical interest? What does it mean to identify philosophers who often disagreed with one another as parts of a single ‘tradition’? Finally, is it important, as McCosh held, to identify this tradition as Scottish, and what exactly does such a national label imply?

The last two questions will be deferred to a concluding chapter. The purpose of this opening chapter is to chart the development of philosophy in Scotland from the end of the eighteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century, and thus to offer an interpretation of its diffusion and decline that will provide a general context within which the more specific topics of the next six chapters can be better appreciated. The eighth chapter explores the story of Scottish philosophy abroad, in Europe, North America, and Australia. The United States spawned a distinctively ‘native’ philosophy—pragmatism—whose similarity and differences compared to Scottish Common Sense warrant a chapter of its own (Chapter 9). The next two chapters take the subject into the twentieth century, and into the broader perspective of education. In an influential book first published in 1961, George Davie claimed a key role for philosophy in the Scottish educational ideal of ‘The Democratic Intellect’ (the title of his book). Chapter 10 explores the cogency of this contention from the perspective of fifty years on. Chapter 11 considers the philosophical work of John Macmurray. During his tenure of the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, Macmurray largely stood apart from the linguistic style of analytical philosophy that was coming to dominate British universities, and this raises a question about the extent to which he can be considered a last bastion of the older Scottish tradition. The final chapter returns to the issues with which this one began—the idea of a philosophical tradition and the possibility of its having a national identity.

1.1 Eighteenth-Century Origins

There is little dispute that eighteenth-century Scotland witnessed a remarkable intellectual flowering. The Act of Union of 1707 had made Scotland and England into a single state, and replaced the Scottish and English parliaments with a single legislative body. But the two countries remained very different culturally, and Scotland
retained its own distinctive ecclesiastical, educational, and legal institutions. The Union greatly increased intercourse between Edinburgh and London, certainly. On the other hand, the preservation of these institutions had the effect of creating and maintaining a small but identifiably Scottish intelligentsia, whose members enjoyed a sufficiently high degree of exchange and familiarity to warrant the description ‘intellectual community’.

The term ‘community’ is now so overused that it requires some effort to appreciate what it means when it has real substance—as it did in Enlightenment Scotland. One important unifying element lay in a shared intellectual project: ‘the science of man’. The prospect of a new and enormously promising approach to the study of human nature and human society was an idea explicitly or implicitly endorsed by a remarkable company of thinkers. This company included the subsequently famous triumvirate of David Hume, Adam Smith, and Thomas Reid, but it began with their teachers Francis Hutcheson and George Turnbull, and was enthusiastically endorsed by most of their contemporaries—George Campbell, Alexander Gerard, Adam Ferguson, James Beattie, John Miller, and Henry Home (Lord Kames), for example. Equally important, if less obviously philosophical, were figures such as the historian William Robertson and the rhetorician Hugh Blair. The list is not exhaustive. The eccentric judge Lord Monboddo, and William Smellie, printer and editor of the first *Encyclopedia Britannica*, might be added, as might Alexander Carlyle, a moderate Presbyterian clergyman who was in many ways an archetype of the educated classes.

The ‘science of man’ was by no means an idea confined to Scotland, or even native to it. In his inaugural lecture at Glasgow, Francis Hutcheson expressly mentions Samuel Pufendorf, and elsewhere takes Thomas Hobbes as his starting point. In the introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume, who explicitly employs the term ‘science of man’, names Hutcheson as one of its innovators—but his name appears alongside John Locke, Lord Shaftesbury, Bishop Butler, and Bernard Mandeville. Nevertheless, though thinkers from further afield were plainly influential, what made the ‘science’ distinctively Scottish was the extent to which it both stimulated, and was shaped by, discussion and debate within a specific coterie of thinkers. In part this was a consequence of the fact that Scotland’s intellectual community had an institutional base: the universities.

In the closing decades of the seventeenth century, steps were put in place to coordinate a single set of Scottish-authored philosophy texts that would be used in all the Scottish universities. Two such texts were finally published in 1701 (a text on metaphysics emanating from Edinburgh and one on logic from St Andrews). Thereafter the idea came to nothing, but it nevertheless reinforced a common character that the universities had always had, and this was strengthened very substantially when all of them underwent a reform in which generalist regents were replaced by specialist professors. The result was that, although Scottish university students continued to be rather young by modern standards, the places of learning in which they studied became more obviously places of enquiry as well.
The leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment had all been students at Scottish universities, and a great many of them subsequently held professorial positions, not infrequently moving between universities. Hume, of course, was a notable exception—in other ways also—but his unsuccessful application for a university post, first in Edinburgh and then in Glasgow, shows how closely the ideas of intellectual distinction and professorial appointment were linked. Hume and his supporters automatically supposed that a university professorship was the obvious occupation for a person with notable intellectual gifts and accomplishments. The same assumption could not apply to England where, De Quincy remarked, speculative philosophy ‘has at all times tended to hide itself in theology’.

The intellectual community of Scotland also found institutional expression in the rise of philosophical clubs. It was in the deliberations of the Aberdeen Philosophical Club, the Glasgow Literary Society, the Rankenian Club, and subsequently the Philosophical Society in Edinburgh that many of the ideas and investigations of the ‘science’ first took place. The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh was especially important in this respect, since the university in Edinburgh, though famous as a school of medicine, was less philosophically vibrant than its counterparts in Aberdeen and Glasgow. The formation of philosophical and scientific societies culminated in the establishment of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1783, of which Adam Smith was a founding Fellow, and to which Thomas Reid was elected.

It was a truly remarkable period of intellectual activity, yet in just twenty years, all the luminaries were dead. Only Adam Ferguson lived on—to the unusually old age of 93, and largely in retirement at St Andrews. Dugald Stewart, who succeeded him in the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, can be thought of as the next generation, but he scarcely counts as a new phase. Although a figure of immense prestige in his own day—celebrated teacher, prolific author, biographer of Reid and Smith, and editor of Smith’s *Collected Works*—it is debatable whether he made any truly novel contribution to the intellectual tradition he undoubtedly upheld. Indeed his close identification with the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially Reid with whom he had studied briefly, makes him, arguably, the last in the Enlightenment line. It is the work of the Scottish philosophers who came after Stewart that needs to be assessed.

### 1.2 Thomas Brown

Most evidently the first among them was Thomas Brown, Stewart’s successor in the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, and the subject of Chapter 2. Brown was a gifted man and a popular lecturer. His *Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect* first appeared in 1805 as a pamphlet, then as a book (1806), which he revised into a

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3 See Emerson 1995.
much more substantial volume finally published in 1818. *Part One* of his textbook, a *Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of Mind*, was published shortly before his sudden and early death in 1820. These volumes address the same issues that engaged Hume and Reid, and expressly discuss their treatment of those issues. But it was the posthumously printed version of Brown’s lectures at Edinburgh University that came to be most highly acclaimed. This ran to many editions, and was still widely read by college students and the general public several decades on.

Brown is of special interest to the story of Scottish philosophy for two reasons: he reveals an important tension within it, and he constitutes an early example of the way in which its focus narrowed. The tension, as it emerges in Brown, lies in the relation between Hume and Reid. Reid, of course, had been heralded as having provided a definitive and compelling answer to Hume’s scepticism. In a famous quip, recorded by James Mackintosh, Brown drastically reduces the gap between them.

Reid bawled out that we must believe in an outward world; but added in a whisper, we can give no reason for our belief. Hume cries out we can give no reason for such a notion; and whispers, I own we cannot get rid of it. (Brown 2010: 19)

This quip somewhat disguises the fact that Brown’s sympathies lay much more with Hume than with Reid. Indeed, Brown’s philosophy of mind rests on an empirical phenomenology that makes nothing of Reidian principles of common sense, and expressly advances a version of psychological associationism strongly reminiscent of Hume. His criticisms of Reid are unapologetic (though he hinted that Stewart rather than Reid may have been their principal target), and he was regarded by many as guilty of a sort of betrayal—the subversion of a tradition into which he had been dutifully inducted.

The charge, which was to be repeated against others regularly over the century, was of course intertwined with debates about morality and religion. Hume’s religious scepticism, which had only been revealed in full by the posthumous publication of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, was not easily disentangled from his philosophical scepticism, and Brown was perhaps less circumspect than Stewart in leaving it unclear just how far the ‘rational’ religion to which he gave a mild assent made him largely indifferent to Christianity. Still, setting these undercurrents aside, Brown’s lectures revealed that the project which had animated the Scottish philosophers of the previous few decades could be pursued in opposition to a ‘particular School of Metaphysics prevalent in the northern part of the island’ by pressing further in the direction of formulating empirical laws of the mind’s operation and in alliance with French ‘sensationalism’. This separation between metaphysics and psychology presented itself again and again in the decades that followed.

Brown’s divergence from the traditional path had another dimension also. Although he fulfilled his professorial duties in accordance with much the same programme as Stewart, his lectures might more accurately be described as *mental* rather than *moral* philosophy. Social subjects like economics and politics, hitherto the responsibility of the Professor of Moral Philosophy, are largely absent, and ethics is treated as a subject
within the philosophy of mind. This is a departure from Stewart, but an even more radical one from Adam Ferguson. The issue has considerable significance. Is the ‘science of man’ (Hume’s phrase) really the ‘science of mind’? Or should the science of human nature (also Hume’s phrase) broaden its concept of ‘observation’ and abandon the method of introspection in favour of experimentation? In which terms should ‘the project of the Scottish Enlightenment’ be described? Writing in 1945, when the debates with which she was concerned were almost completely forgotten, Gladys Bryson begins her book on ‘the Scottish inquiry of the Eighteenth Century’ with Adam Ferguson, because she takes him to be the most characteristic of the Scottish philosophers. She gives closer attention to Hume’s writings on social and religious matters than to his metaphysics, and is doubtful about including Reid at all, since his philosophical works are so focused on the mind. By contrast, S. A. Grave’s *Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense*, published fifteen years after Bryson, contains just two fleeting references to Ferguson. As the title of his book indicates, Grave devotes almost all his attention to Reid and the philosophy of mind, thereby following the common assumption—contrary to Bryson’s—that at the heart of Scottish philosophy lies Reid’s response to Hume’s metaphysical scepticism. These are extremes, perhaps, but they direct attention to key issues that, as we shall see, become more pressing as the nineteenth century proceeds. At the heart of this issue lies a debate about the proper focus of philosophy and the practical value of a philosophical education.

Brown’s prestige and popularity were strengthened by the lack of any serious competition. Not everyone was enamoured of the rather flowery style which earned him the sobriquet ‘Miss Brown’. The writer Thomas Carlyle, an Edinburgh student at the time, was less than enthusiastic, but he paints an even poorer picture of the philosophy on offer from Brown’s colleagues, notably the Professor of Logic, David Ritchie, who contented himself (if Carlyle is to be believed) with a largely uncritical regurgitation of Reid. A similar situation prevailed at the University of Glasgow, where no one even approaching the stature of Hutcheson, Smith, or Reid had appeared to take their place. McCosh, a student at this time, later recorded his memory that ‘the dry instruction of the class-room was solid, but not inspiring. The course of instruction was substantial, but very narrow, and the professors were bitterly opposed to enlarging it’ (McCosh 1896: 27). Yet it was from these somewhat inauspicious circumstances that Scottish philosophy’s next great luminary, the subject of Chapter 3, emerged: Sir William Hamilton.

### 1.3 Sir William Hamilton

Hamilton entered the University of Glasgow in 1803. The ‘Common Sense School’ was still dominant. Hamilton attended the lectures of James Mylne, Reid’s successor in the Chair of Moral Philosophy. Mylne was a conscientious and even inspiring

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4 Bryson’s contentions are taken up again in Chapter 12.
teacher but he published nothing during his tenure. His colleague in the Logic Chair, George Jardine (a student of Reid), won something of a reputation for innovative pedagogy, but according to McCosh, his lectures showed ‘no originality or grasp of intellect’ (McCosh 1875: 316). Despite, or perhaps in the context of this mediocrity, Hamilton’s academic record at Glasgow was a brilliant one, and gained him a scholarship to Oxford. There it was Aristotle who was in the ascendant, and once more Hamilton proved a brilliant student. He graduated with first class honours in 1811.

The next few years were spent vacillating between law and philosophy, and it was during this period, and in the course of two visits he made to Germany, that he encountered the immensely influential German philosophical movement inaugurated by Kant. This third strand in his intellectual formation gave Hamilton a unique orientation. By the time he finally succeeded in obtaining a philosophical post—the Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at Edinburgh—he combined a grounding in the philosophy of Reid with considerable facility in logic and an unrivalled textual knowledge of Kant’s philosophy. The combination was to prove key to the development of the Scottish philosophical tradition.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the admiration, amounting almost to veneration, that Hamilton attracted during his lifetime. A large part of this resulted from his astonishing learning, ‘perhaps the most learned Scot who ever lived’ according to his successor Alexander Campbell Fraser (Fraser 1904: 62). From Ferguson through Stewart to Brown, Moral Philosophy had been the most prestigious of the Edinburgh chairs, but with Hamilton’s appointment, the Chair of Logic soon came to be held in higher regard, making it (according to Andrew Seth) ‘in some respects the most famous of Scottish philosophical Chairs’ (Seth 1892: 42), a status it still retained during the occupancy of Norman Kemp Smith (1919–45).

Hamilton published surprisingly little during his lifetime. His reputation rested principally on three very lengthy articles that appeared anonymously in the Edinburgh Review between 1828 and 1831. The first—ostensibly a review of Victor Cousin’s lectures—engages Kant and Schelling, and though Reid is not mentioned by name, Hamilton’s vigorous arguments against any ‘Philosophy of the Unconditioned’ are by implication a defence of philosophy ‘conditioned’ by common sense. The second, entitled ‘The Philosophy of Perception’, launched a ferocious attack on Thomas Brown’s Humean rejection of Reid. The third, a review of Archbishop Whateley’s logic, elaborated an alternative, more formal conception of logic.

Hamilton was widely regarded as having made substantial advances in logic, an assessment that still bears investigation. His legacy in this respect was most notable at St Andrews, where successive professors of logic made significant contributions to the revitalization of the subject. William Spalding published an influential textbook on the Elements of Logic, while Thomas Spencer Baynes was the author of An Essay on the New Analytic of Logical Forms that introduced Hamilton’s views on logic to a much wider audience.
But it is the first two essays that were most important for the development of Scottish philosophy. First, they brought Kant and post-Kantian philosophy to the attention of the philosophical community in Scotland. This resulted not only in a general recognition that the tradition of Reid had to take account of an alternative Kantian answer to Hume. It also inaugurated an interpretative endeavour—the Scottish reception of Kant (the subject of Chapter 6)—which lasted well into the twentieth century, one to which Robert Adamson, Edward Caird, Norman Kemp Smith, and H. J. Paton—who all held Scottish chairs—were especially distinguished contributors.

Hamilton’s essay also seemed to lay the groundwork for a promising integration of Kant and Reid, while at the same time reasserting the centrality of ‘common sense’ at the heart of the Scottish philosophical enterprise. This last aspect was further underlined by Hamilton’s most enduring contribution to philosophical literature: his heavily annotated edition of Reid’s *Collected Works*. Published in 1846, Hamilton’s was the first complete edition to appear, and remained the only one for over 150 years. To Reid’s own works he added a substantial number of ‘supplementary dissertations’, including an explication and defence of ‘common sense’. Thereafter, his reputation as Reid’s most learned champion and true successor was firmly established, at first to the benefit, and then (arguably) to the detriment of Reid’s philosophical accomplishment.

The *Edinburgh Review* essays, along with other non-philosophical writings, were republished a few years before his death, and his university lectures a few years after. Within a decade, his philosophical writings came under strenuous attack from several sides (see Chapter 3). The best-known attack came from John Stuart Mill, whose *Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy* appeared in the same year (1865) as Hutcheson Stirling’s *William Hamilton’s Philosophy of Perception*. These two books illustrate the same tension revealed by Brown. Both reject the suggestion that Hamilton has successfully integrated Reid and Kant in a happy synthesis. Mill reasserts the spirit of Hume and criticizes Hamilton from the perspective of empirical, associationist psychology, while Stirling, a representative of the new Hegelians, chastises him for being insufficiently metaphysical.

Mill and Stirling were profoundly unsympathetic to Hamilton, but he was not without ardent defenders, notably his student and amanuensis John Veitch, professor at St Andrews and then Glasgow, and H. L. Mansel, regius professor at Oxford, who together edited his lectures for posthumous publication. But despite their best efforts—especially Mansel’s scintillating response to Mill in *The Philosophy of the Conditioned* (1866)—Hamilton’s brilliant reputation faded surprisingly rapidly.

There had in any case already been significant critics on the inside, as it were, students and admirers of Hamilton who had nonetheless put doubting pens to paper. In 1854, for example, Henry Calderwood, later Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, published *The Philosophy of the Infinite, with Special Reference to the Theories of Sir William Hamilton and M. Cousin* (1854). In the preface he declared himself
‘indebted to the instructions of that distinguished philosopher’. Nevertheless, he had, however unwillingly, ‘come to results differing widely from those of Sir W. Hamilton’ (Calderwood 1854: iv). In a different context, Hamilton’s most gifted student—James Frederick Ferrier (the subject of Chapter 4)—reaches the same position. His review of Hamilton’s edition of Reid manages to praise the editor highly while wholly deprecating the material he has spent so much time editing.

1.4 Ferrier and Bain

Ferrier is in many ways the test case for any conception of ‘Scottish philosophy’. He does not merely reject the philosophy of common sense, he explicitly deplores it, and excoriates Reid in the fiercest of terms. Yet, in a privately printed pamphlet, he declares emphatically that ‘my philosophy is Scottish to the very core; it is national in every fibre and articulation of its frame’ (Ferrier 1856: 12). This sentence was written in the aftermath of a bitter contention over the contest for Hamilton’s successor, and this perhaps raises a doubt about the wisdom of treating it as a strictly intellectual judgement. At the same time, there is good reason to resist the idea that Ferrier’s unusually explicit rejection of Reidian ‘common sense’ automatically rules him out. If appeal to common sense were the test, ‘the Scottish School’ would exclude a great many—including Hutcheson, Smith, and Ferguson, none of whom could be counted a Scottish philosopher on these grounds. Besides, though there has undoubtedly been a recurrent tendency to identify ‘Scottish philosophy’ with ‘Common Sense’, Reid’s appeal to common sense has to be seen as an important strategy within an intellectual project that was already well under way. This is demonstrated by the fact that the value of that strategy subsequently became a significant debating point among those engaged in that same project. Why should Ferrier not pursue the project’s central topics in a way that was radically different from Reid’s? The question is a rhetorical one, obviously, but it raises this still deeper issue. By what criteria are the works of different philosophers to be declared engagements in the same project?

It is a key question for this book, of course, though its consideration will be deferred until the concluding chapter. At this stage the following observations are worth making. First, Ferrier rejects the Humean conception of the mind as a ‘wretched association machine’ no less strenuously than he rejects Reid’s appeal to common sense. Accordingly, he has no inclination to resolve the problems with which he is concerned by a more obviously empirical approach in the manner of Brown. Second, in his appeal to the philosophy of George Berkeley he identifies the concept of ‘matter’ that Berkeley’s idealism is said to reject, as an idle philosophical construct that lacks any warrant from ordinary life. This is a move that is unmistakably in the spirit of Reid. Third, he reaffirms the educational significance of philosophy by reaffirming the ‘moral’ over the ‘mental’. Philosophy’s proper goal is not securing advances in the scientific study of mind, but extending and refining human consciousness. These themes, it is true, are features of the series of essays that appeared in the years 1838–47. The Institutes of Metaphysic, first
published in 1854, appears to constitute a more radical departure—a ‘demonstrative system of metaphysics’ as Veitch describes it, that ‘shows the influence of Fichte’, as well as Hamilton (Veitch 1877: 229). The Institutes proceed by a purely deductive method, and seek to establish the fundamental propositions of philosophy as necessary truths. The book was Ferrier’s magnum opus, but it was not well received, and it revealed his intellectual estrangement from the other philosophers in Scotland. His endeavour is so far removed from the methods of observation employed not only by Reid, but by Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, Ferguson, and others, that, had it been widely adopted across Scotland, it would have been correct to describe the result as a ‘blackout of the Scottish Enlightenment’.

This phrase is George Davie’s, part of the title of a short book published well over a century later. However, Davie attributed to Ferrier far greater influence in this respect than appears to be warranted. Much more significant than the Institutes, it seems, was The Secret of Hegel, by Hutchison Stirling, a book published in 1865, one year after Ferrier’s death, and in the same year as Stirling’s attack on Hamilton. Interest in Hegel took time to establish itself, however, and it is not hard to find later nineteenth-century philosophers educated and working both in Scotland and abroad, for whom the Enlightenment inheritance still generated important problems waiting to be resolved. Among the more empirically inclined, Alexander Bain (the subject of Chapter 5) constitutes the most distinguished example. A personal friend of J. S. Mill, and an admirer of Hume, Bain was no follower of Reid or Hamilton. What makes him party to the same debate, however, is that he expressly addressed the tension within Scottish philosophy and firmly resolved it in one direction. Having done pioneering work in experimental and empirical psychology, in 1860 he was appointed to the Regius Chair of Logic in the newly united University of Aberdeen, a notable appointment not least because he was an acknowledged agnostic. Bain held the position for twenty years, and in retirement continued to write and publish. In his essay ‘On Association Controversies’, originally published in Mind (the journal he founded) in 1887, Bain writes as follows:

We are at this moment, in the midst of a conflict of views as to the priority of Metaphysics and Psychology. If, indeed, the two are so closely identified as some suppose, there is no conflict; there is in fact, but one study. If on the other hand there are two subjects, each ought to be carried on apart for a certain length. (Bain 1903: 38)

The uncertainty to which Bain alludes here was widely discussed. His declared preference was to concentrate on empirical psychology informed by physiology, and though he does not explicitly reject metaphysics as a legitimate avenue of enquiry, he describes any attempt to investigate ‘ultimate questions’ about the mind in advance of

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5 In later years even those of an idealist bent did not make much reference to Ferrier. His name does not appear in the indexes of any of Caird’s major works, and he is not mentioned by any of the authors of Essays in Philosophical Criticism.
substantial empirical progress as ‘a device that may be handed over to the Committee for arranging debates in Pandemonium’. This sets him decidedly at odds with philosophers who sought to resolve the tension in a diametrically different direction—by the development of an idealist metaphysics (the subject of Chapter 7).

1.5 Scottish Idealism

Ferrier is an example of this alternative move, but it came to greater prominence within Scottish philosophy some considerable time after his death. Substantial evidence that idealism was finally gaining favour among Scottish philosophers is to be found in a book that was published in 1883. *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* reveals its idealist allegiance immediately because of its dedication—to the memory of T. H. Green. Furthermore, it has a commendatory preface by Edward Caird, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, renowned as an interpreter of Kant and a protagonist of Hegel. The collection was edited by Andrew Seth and R. B. Haldane, two of Edinburgh’s most gifted recent philosophy graduates. Since all but one of the contributors held philosophy degrees from Scottish universities, and several subsequently held professorial appointments in Scotland, the authors can be said to constitute a new generation of Scottish philosophers. In his preface, Caird denies that they wished ‘to advocate any special philosophical theory’, and describes them, rather, as having ‘a certain community of opinion in relation to the general principle and method of philosophy’ (Seth and Haldane 1883: i). This is precisely, of course, what might be said of the philosophers whose work contributed to the Enlightenment project of the ‘science of man’. Caird further observes that ‘such an agreement is consistent with great and even vital differences’ between the authors of the essays. Once again, this is an observation that might be made in explaining the relation between, for example, Hume and Reid (and their respective followers). Crucially, however, Caird identifies the new generation’s agreement as having its source, not in the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, but in Kant and Hegel.

The writers of this volume believe that the line of investigation which philosophy must follow, or in which it may be expected to make its most important contribution to the intellectual life of man, is that which was opened by Kant, and for the successful prosecution of which no one has done so much as Hegel. (Seth and Haldane 1883: 2)

It was this manifesto, presumably, that Seth was referring to just two years later when (as already noted) he remarked in his lectures *On the Scottish Philosophy* that ‘the thread of national tradition’ had not found many followers among the ‘best Scottish students of philosophy’. By implication, of course, he himself was one, though there is more to be said about this.

Here, if anywhere, it might seem, we can find a deliberate departure from the tradition of Scottish philosophy that stretched back to Hume, Hutcheson, and Carmichael (or even further). Nor is the shift confined to these particular essayists. Edward Caird
was called upon to write the preface because of his intellectual stature. Both he and his brother John, first Professor of Divinity and later Principal of Glasgow University, were highly acclaimed as philosophers who brought great distinction to Scotland. They stimulated not only their own colleagues and students at Glasgow, but at the other Scottish universities as well. Their reputation rested, however, on the deployment of Kant and Hegel to articulate an idealist philosophy, that, though it paid scant attention to Reid, was widely welcomed as both novel and invigorating. Meantime, on the other side of the country, Bain, in a quite different style, was doing something whose innovative character was also heralded. Both, it seemed, had relinquished ‘national tradition’ as far as philosophy goes.

Writing in the *Princeton Review* of 1882, James McCosh expressly notes the fact. ‘In the land of its birth’ he says ‘[the Scottish philosophy] is not particularly strong at this present moment, being opposed by the materialism of Bain and the Hegelianism of Merton College Oxford, and Prof Edward Caird of Glasgow’. It has ‘two genuine representatives’ he goes on to observe, ‘Prof. Calderwood and Prof. Flint of the University of Edinburgh’ (McCosh 1882: 327), though he could well have added John Veitch, Caird’s colleague (and combatant) in the Logic Chair at Glasgow. These names mean almost nothing now, though they were gifted men who did successfully continue the transmission of important elements of the older philosophical tradition to new generations. Henry Calderwood was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1868 until his death in 1897. He published several books that attracted widespread attention. In addition to his early work criticizing Hamilton (noted earlier and considered at greater length in Chapter 3), he contributed to the debate about evolution, wrote a textbook in ethics that was widely used by colleges in America, and was author of the (posthumously published) study of Hume that appeared in the *Famous Scots*, a series that included Fraser’s life of Reid. Calderwood’s book on Hume was significant for its sympathetic treatment by a source (Free Presbyterianism) that hitherto had been generally hostile.

Robert Flint was appointed Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews in succession to J. F. Ferrier and, somewhat surprisingly to many, in preference to T. H. Green. In 1868 he lost out to Calderwood in the competition for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh, but shortly after was appointed to the Chair of Divinity there. Flint was an immensely popular lecturer, and notable for his innovative work in the philosophy of history, work that culminated in his study of Vico. R. M. Wenley (who succeeded John Dewey as Professor of Philosophy at Michigan), though not one of his students, got to know him well and wrote a perceptive assessment of his philosophical achievements and limitations that does not altogether coincide with

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6 Caird’s *Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant*, first published in 1877, has just four brief references to Reid in 670 pages of text.

7 Among his most gifted students was James Seth, brother of Andrew, who relinquished his professorship at Cornell to become Calderwood’s successor in the Edinburgh Chair.
McCosh’s assessment. But there can be little dispute that McCosh was correct in his observation that the tradition had reached a watershed, a fact that the very existence of Seth’s Balfour Lectures confirms.

The idealism of Caird and those who followed him (the subject of Chapter 7) is perhaps the more important development to trace. This is partly because Bain’s psychology invites, or at least licenses, the abandonment of philosophy *simpliciter*, and indeed over the succeeding decades, psychology, long taught under the auspices of Logic, became a separate subject in the Scottish university curriculum, finally attaining departmental status in its own right. Bain did not hope or expect that psychology would replace philosophy; indeed, the journal *Mind* that he founded expressly aimed to encourage new work in both, as its subtitle—‘a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy’—indicates. From one point of view, too, the investigations he so successfully advanced were more continuous with what had gone before than was the Hegelianism of Caird. Associationism, it is plausible to hold, constituted a return to, and a refinement of, Hume through the work of Mill and Bain (as Chapter 5 contends). From another point of view, however, such a return does signal the end of the Scottish philosophy. Seth’s subtitle reveals this—‘A comparison of the Scottish and German answers to Hume’. Hume’s associationist psychology cannot constitute the heart of Scottish philosophy, precisely because ‘the Scottish philosophy’ assumed its most sophisticated form as an answer to Hume. Accordingly, the vindication of Hume’s philosophy, albeit refined and amended by Mill’s logic and Bain’s physiological psychology, must warrant the abandonment of the tradition of which Reid was a leading exponent, as indeed it seems to have done in psychological circles.

It is rather less clear, however, whether (as McCosh implies) the inspiration that the new idealists took from Hegel also had to result in an abandonment of the tradition. That there was antagonism between the old and the new is evident. It could hardly be plainer than in D. G. Ritchie’s review of John Veitch’s *Knowing and Being*. Published in 1889, this was the text of Veitch’s Glasgow lectures, in which he attacked the ‘Neo-Kantians’. As Hamilton’s most enthusiastic torchbearer, Veitch unmistakably represented the ‘old’ generation of Scottish philosophy, while Ritchie, author of one of the *Essays in Philosophical Criticism*, was no less unmistakably among the most brilliant of the new. ‘Prof Veitch’, he writes, ‘obviously cannot find any ground common to himself and the thinkers he is criticizing. And I . . . really cannot find any common ground with a Professor of Logic who will not allow the use of the term *Prius* in any but the temporal sense’ (Ritchie 1889: 575). Could there be a clearer declaration of the complete rupture between Scottish philosophy as transmitted by Hamilton and the philosophy that had come to be current among the philosophers of Scotland thirty years later?

Yet the matter is not quite as straightforward as the exchange between Veitch and Ritchie might suggest. A middle ground is to be found in the person of Andrew

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1 Wenley’s assessment appears as a chapter in Macmillan (1914).
Seth. Seth, it has been noted previously, was both a contributing editor to *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* and the author of a volume on the Scottish philosophy which gives an airing to Reid that is both critical and sympathetic (a ‘kindly rehabilitation’, Ritchie called it). His subsequent volume of Balfour Lectures, entitled *Hegelianism and Personality*, may be said to do the same on the other side, since it is both sympathetic to and critical of the new Scottish Idealists (‘the most unkindest cut of all’, Ritchie calls it, because ‘an attack by a friend of idealism’). In fact, Ritchie in his review of Veitch remarks that ‘all that I could say by way of argument against the main contentions of this volume I have already said in a review of Prof. Seth’s *Hegelianism and Personality*’ (Ritchie 1889: 575). In other words, Seth’s second set of Balfour Lectures occupies an interesting middle ground; it is composed of arguments which, though framed from within the idealist camp, are of a type that Veitch might nevertheless have called upon.

If, as McCosh contended, ‘sober Realism’ is the mark of Scottish philosophy, since Seth never ceased to be an idealist, he could hardly count as its representative. Yet it may still be argued that he endorsed a conception of philosophy deeply consonant with that of Hutcheson, Ferguson, Reid, and Hamilton. Seth was an idealist in just this sense; he thought that all forms of materialism (including most versions of ‘naturalism’) are radically defective considered as philosophy. His ‘official’ conception of what philosophy is, and what makes it worth studying and teaching, is stated plainly in ‘The Present Position of the Philosophical Sciences’, an inaugural lecture delivered on his appointment to the Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at Edinburgh in succession to Alexander Campbell Fraser.

Much current thought is *naturalistic* at heart—that is to say, it makes human nature only a part of nature in general, and seeks, therefore, to explain away the most fundamental characteristics of intelligence and moral life. Against this naturalistic current, philosophy must be unflinchingly *humanistic*, anthropocentric. (Seth Pringle-Pattison 1902: 42, emphasis original)

This remark comes towards the end of a lecture in which he identifies three areas of inquiry that fall to the occupant of the chair—logic, psychology, and metaphysics. It is the last of these that he describes as ‘philosophy in the strict sense’, and what the reference to ‘human nature’ and the emphasis on the ‘humanistic’ makes plain is that for Seth, ‘metaphysics’ no less than ‘moral philosophy’ falls within what the Enlightenment philosophers called ‘moral science’. The lecture was subsequently included in *Man’s Place in the Cosmos*, a collection whose title captures exactly what Seth thought to be the question that it was the special province of philosophy ‘in the strict sense’ to address. This is, of course, an ‘ultimate’ question of just the kind that Bain recommended we leave to one side. Since it is difficult to see that any results we might obtain from experimental psychology, however firmly grounded, could illuminate it, Bain’s recommendation in effect amounts to the abandonment of philosophy.

Seven years later, Andrew Seth’s brother James marked his accession to the Chair of Moral Philosophy with an inaugural lecture on ‘Scottish Moral Philosophy’,
subsequently published by the *Philosophical Review*, the journal he had edited when at Cornell. In it he reviews the tradition of ethical enquiry that finds its origins in Hutcheson. But he concludes as follows.

[T]he contribution of the Scottish School to Moral Philosophy is not exhausted by its answer to the technically ethical question. Scottish philosophy itself is, even in its metaphysical aspects, primarily and characteristically ethical in its method and its point of view. The method and the point of view of Common Sense is essentially an appeal to the moral consciousness as an all-important and incorruptible witness to truth. It was in the defence of moral reality that Reid, like Kant, rebelled against the sceptical philosophy of Hume. He and his successors deliberately adopted the ethical point of view as metaphysically valid, and refused to accept a metaphysical system which was inadequate to the interpretation of moral experience. They found in man a higher term of philosophical explanation than in external nature, and they insisted upon construing the universe in terms of man rather than in terms of nature. Reid’s own interest in this spiritual significance of his Common Sense principle seems to have deepened in his later years, and the intrepid philosophical genius of Sir William Hamilton did much to develop that significance. But it was reserved for Hamilton’s pupil and successor, whom I am proud to claim as my own master in metaphysics, Professor Campbell Fraser, to show us the larger meaning of the Philosophy of Common Sense, in view of contemporary issues and alternatives of thought. In his recent Gifford Lectures on *The Philosophy of Theism*, and, the other day, in his study of *Reid*, Professor Fraser has given to a wider public the lesson of the unwisdom of resisting ‘the final venture of the heart and conscience in the interpretation of the world and of human life’. (Seth 1898: 581–2)

At the start of the lecture, James Seth speaks in similarly appreciative terms of Calderwood. Seven years before, Andrew Seth had acknowledged his debt to Fraser in very similar terms. Their respective inaugural lectures show that both men understand themselves to have inherited a conception of the subject which they wholeheartedly endorse—‘metaphysics as moral philosophy’ we might call it.

‘Metaphysics as moral philosophy’ captures another important feature of Scottish philosophy—its ambition to speak in a culturally significant voice beyond the classroom. According to Andrew Seth, this is one of its most distinguishing features. Observing the absence of philosophical ‘specialists’, he remarks that what Scottish philosophy has lost in scientific precision may have been compensated for, in part, by the greater influence which it has exerted upon the body of the people—an influence which has made it a factor, so to speak, in the national life . . . Hegel’s philosophy has had a wide . . . influence in moulding many departments of thought, but as *philosophy*, it has never lived in Germany beyond the confines of the schools. (Seth 1882: 129–30)

The ambition for philosophy in Scotland ‘to live beyond the schools’ received a powerful boost in 1885 when Lord Adam Gifford left a very substantial sum of money to each of the four Scottish universities to organize lectures that would make serious philosophical thought on the topics of ‘natural theology’ accessible to as wide a public as possible. The Gifford Lectures began in 1888, and though they were delivered
by scholars of international repute, in many years they were given by the professors of philosophy in Scotland. In the early decades these included Alexander Campbell Fraser, Edward Caird, W. R. Sorley, and Andrew Seth, all of whom gave lectures which admirably fit the description ‘metaphysics as moral philosophy’.

The appointment of the Seth brothers to the two Edinburgh philosophy chairs, and the early Gifford Lectures, provide solid evidence that, for all the tensions and vacillations of philosophical debate in Scotland over the preceding hundred years, the Scottish philosophical tradition could still be regarded as firmly in place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its remaining so, however, was not just a matter of intellectual conviction or pedagogical practice. From the beginning, the teaching and study of ‘metaphysics as moral philosophy’ had depended on an institutional framework that was vital to its continuance. By the turn of the new century that framework was undergoing important changes.

1.6 The Twentieth Century

In the concluding chapter of *Scottish Philosophy in its National Development* Henry Laurie observes that, ‘[a]s the years have rolled on, the philosophy of Scotland and that of England have tended more and more to merge into one’. Amongst others, Laurie has J. S. Mill and Alexander Bain in mind as thinkers equally schooled in Scottish philosophy on the one hand, and ‘the empiricism which has been prevalent in England’ on the other. ‘In such circumstances’ he says ‘the task of retaining any effectual distinction between the later thought of Scotland and of England may well be abandoned as impracticable’ (Laurie 1902: 332–3).

Laurie cites ‘greater intercourse’ as a significant factor. Communication and exchange between Scotland and England were hugely facilitated by the immense improvement in transport that the nineteenth century witnessed. In 1753, the first year in which a stagecoach service operated between Edinburgh and London, the journey time was two weeks. A little over a hundred years later, the Flying Scotsman, an express train service established in 1862, completed the same journey in ten and a half hours. Improvements of this magnitude had dramatic effects on the educational and intellectual dimensions of social life. The age of the stagecoach, one might say, necessarily made Scotland a distinct intellectual environment, while the railway gradually incorporated it into a wider academic world.

One effect of this greater intercourse may be said to be of special consequence. The continuity of Scottish philosophy until the second half of the nineteenth century owed much to the relation of teacher to student over successive generations. It is remarkable, in fact, how many of the occupants of the chairs of philosophy in Scotland succeeded their teachers, and were in turn succeeded by their students. By the turn of the twentieth century this had changed, so that Scottish chairs increasingly came to be occupied by philosophers whose whole education was in England. A. E. Taylor is a good example. Taylor held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews from 1908
to 1924, and then at the University of Edinburgh from 1924 to 1941. He thus spent over thirty years at the ancient Scottish universities. But he was educated in classics at New College, Oxford, strongly influenced by the British Idealism of F. H. Bradley (to whom he dedicated his first major book), and had taught in England and Canada for sixteen years before arriving in Scotland.

Conversely, unlike the long line of Snell Exhibitioners at Oxford that included Adam Smith, William Hamilton, and Edward Caird, Scottish-educated philosophers increasingly left Scotland’s universities for England and did not return, or only for a short spell. W. R. Sorley is a notable example. His biography, up to a certain point, is typical of the kind of person who had regularly taken up the mantle of one of the historic chairs. Son of a Presbyterian minister, he studied under A. C. Fraser at Edinburgh (alongside James Seth) and proved a brilliant student. He won a Shaw Philosophical Fellowship to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was elected a Fellow in 1883. Ten years later, he returned to Scotland where he held the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Aberdeen for a relatively short time (1894–1900) before succeeding Henry Sidgwick at Cambridge. And there he remained for the rest of his life. Sorley’s Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen (1913–15) show him to have been part of the tradition I have called ‘metaphysics as moral philosophy’, but he taught outside a context that would have enabled him to hand it on.

Even if he had remained in Scotland, that context was disintegrating, not simply because of changing social and economic conditions, but as a result of parliamentary reforms to the universities of Scotland. The first and in some ways most important of these was the Universities Act of 1858. This reform was prompted by widespread acknowledgement both within Scotland and beyond that the Scottish universities were in serious need of revitalization. Though something of a compromise between traditionalists and modernizers, this was accomplished, for the most part, at the level of governance and organization. It left the traditional structure and curriculum of the Faculty of Arts largely in place, with modernizing additions. The reform of 1892, by contrast, was much more directly concerned with ‘modernizing’ the curriculum. It set in train the introduction of wide-ranging studies in foreign languages and literatures, in mathematics, and in the natural sciences. The spirit of the 1858 reform still focused on the liberal education of individuals. The reform of 1889 looked to the general benefits that universities might bring to society at large. Its spirit, accordingly, was a much more utilitarian one.

Reflecting on this difference, Alexander Campbell Fraser, who was prompted by the immanence of the 1892 reforms to retire from the Edinburgh Chair of Logic (he had in any case reached the age of 71), recalled Francis Bacon’s remark that ‘if any man thinks Philosophy and Universality to be idle studies, he doth not consider that all professions are from thence served and supplied’ (Fraser 1904: 225). However salutary this warning, there is little doubt that from this point on the central place of philosophy in the Scottish university curriculum declined. Eventually, in a break with a 500-year practice, philosophy lost its place as a required part of the studies of every student in Arts.
This was a slow process. It took more than fifty years, in fact, but it was the inevitable result of curricular changes in which, more and more, philosophy in the Scottish universities came to be just one subject among many. Once again the owl of Minerva took its flight, this time in George Elder Davie’s book *The Democratic Intellect*, first published in 1961. By Davie’s account, the changes in the status of philosophy that the nineteenth century witnessed had a threefold source—educational reforms emanating from London, the Disruption in the Church of Scotland that took place in 1843, and the tensions within Scottish philosophy itself. One critical moment, for Davie, is the contest for the Edinburgh Chair in succession to Sir William Hamilton, which subsequently led to a ‘thirty years war’ in which the competing factions within Scottish philosophy were driven further and further apart.

Davie’s book—originally intended as merely a preface to his study of *The Scotch Metaphysics*, itself finally published forty years later—attracted great attention and was hugely influential in the enthusiasm that it subsequently created for Scotland’s educational past. It appeared just as another great period of change was beginning—the expansion of the universities into a centrally funded, UK-wide ‘system’ of higher education that oversaw the creation of many new purpose-built universities and colleges, and vastly increased the numbers of British students and graduates. The cogency, and the accuracy, of Davie’s book was widely contested, and its somewhat ‘romantic’ vision of the former role of philosophy in Scottish universities and Scottish cultural life was subjected to searching criticism. The decades that have passed since its publication allow a more measured estimation of the causes and significance of the changes by which Davie was so stirred (the subject of Chapter 10), but it seems incontestable that he was right at least in this regard: by mid-twentieth century, the centrality of philosophy within Scotland’s universities, and thus its place within the education of the Scottish ‘clerisy’ (to use Coleridge’s useful term), was at best a shadow of what it had been 100 years before.

Ostensibly, the explanation of this change is Davie’s principal focus, but throughout his book explanation is intertwined with evaluation. Was the decline of philosophy and the rise of technology and the sciences a social and educational loss or gain? There is not much doubt that from Davie’s point of view it was a loss, and, as such, a defeat for the traditional educational practices and intellectual ideals of Scotland. It is hard to think, however, that his thesis, right or wrong, is of much moment now. Even in 1961 too much had changed. Yet there are two related questions that there is still a point in asking. Did anything of the ‘metaphysics as moral philosophy’ conception survive? And does it constitute a viable alternative, and salutary corrective, to other styles and conceptions of philosophy that have more currency?

Once more, the second of these questions will be left to the concluding chapter of this book. In exploration of the first, there is another interesting author to be turned to: John Macmurray (the subject matter of Chapter 11).
1.7 John Macmurray

In several ways John Macmurray exemplifies the background typical of Scottish philosophers throughout the nineteenth century. Born in 1891, he was raised in a strict Presbyterian family, educated in Aberdeen, and then at the University of Glasgow where he graduated with first class honours in 1913. He followed the time-honoured path as a Snell Exhibitioner to Balliol College Oxford, where his tutor—A. D. Lindsay—was a Scot of similar background and abilities who had graduated from Glasgow and studied at Edinburgh.

Lindsay returned to Glasgow briefly as Professor of Moral Philosophy from 1922 to 1924. Macmurray’s connection with the universities of Scotland was rather longer, but similarly tangential. He spent twenty-five years teaching philosophy in Manchester, South Africa, Oxford, and London before becoming Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh in succession to A. E. Taylor, a position he held from 1944 to 1958. He published widely, and was a popular broadcaster, but his most substantial philosophical works were the Gifford Lectures he delivered in Glasgow between 1952 and 1954.

In these lectures, as in other places, the philosophical position Macmurray adopts and defends can properly be called ‘humanistic’, one that rejects all forms of physical and organic reduction. In the introduction to his first set of Gifford Lectures he writes: ‘the thesis I have tried to maintain is this: All meaningful knowledge is for the sake of action, and all meaningful action for the sake of friendship’ (Macmurray 1957: 15). His elaboration and defence of this thesis can properly be described as an exploration of human nature in which he relies upon the facts of experience. Moreover, though early in his career he published papers in professional journals, in these lectures, in his university classes, and in his broadcasts, he distanced himself from the ‘academic’ philosophy that was now the stock in trade of most of his colleagues, both in London and in Edinburgh.\(^9\)

In 1933, Macmurray published a book entitled *Interpreting the Universe*. The title’s similarity to Andrew Seth’s *Man’s Place in the Cosmos* published thirty-six years previously is striking. But there is no connecting reference. In the same way, though the books he published while in Edinburgh may be said to be exercises in the philosophy of human nature, they contain no reference to Smith, Ferguson, Reid, Stewart, or Hamilton. His London lectures on *Reason and Emotion*, republished in retirement, make no reference to Bain. The single exception is Hume, but Hume appears alongside Descartes and Kant as he might in a philosophy book from almost any tradition.

In short, though Macmurray may be said to philosophize in the same spirit as Campbell Fraser and the Seths, he is not, as they were, engaged in serious dialogue

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\(^9\) Macmurray opposed and lamented the appointment of A. J. Ayer as his successor as the Grote Professor of Mind and Logic at University College London.
with the historical community of Scottish philosophers. We may, if we wish, ally him with that company arguing *via negativa* (as it were) that Macmurray stood apart from the scientific empiricism and linguistic analysis that came to dominate the philosophy departments of Scotland, as they did across the UK at large. But this falls substantially short of full inclusion. At best, Macmurray stood for a style of thought to which the tradition of Scottish philosophy had once given powerful and illuminating expression, sufficient to make its influence reverberate across the world. By Macmurray’s time, however, that tradition was well and truly history.

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2

Revolting against Reid
The Philosophy of Thomas Brown

Thomas Dixon

2.1 Thomas Brown’s Place in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy

Thomas Brown was one of the most influential and widely read British philosophers of the first half of the nineteenth century. As Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh from 1810 until his early death in 1820, Brown delivered a series of lectures on the philosophy of the human mind which, in their published form, went through numerous editions, winning him a reputation for metaphysical brilliance on both sides of the Atlantic. His thought provided a bridge between the Scottish school of ‘Common Sense’ associated with Thomas Reid, and the later positivism of John Stuart Mill and others. Brown shared with his Common Sense predecessors the view that certain beliefs, such as the belief in an external world and in causation, were primary and irresistible intuitions. In other ways, however, Brown’s thought had more in common with eighteenth-century sceptics and empiricists, including such figures as David Hume and Etienne de Condillac. As James Mackintosh put it, much of Brown’s philosophy constituted ‘an open revolt against the authority of Reid’ (Mackintosh 1837: 345). Writing in 1900, Leslie Stephen suggested that Brown was ‘the last in the genuine line of Scottish common-sense philosophers’ and that his thought illustrated the gravitation of that school towards ‘pure empiricism’ (Leslie 1900: 285).

Thomas Brown made significant contributions to several areas of philosophy. In the philosophy of perception he emphasized the importance of the ‘muscle sense’ in bringing about beliefs in external objects. In the philosophy of the human mind,