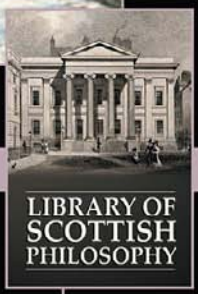
Dugald Stewart

Selected Philosophical Writings

Edited by Emanuele Levi Mortera



Contents

DUGALD STEWART
Selected Philosophical Writings

Edited and Introduced by Emanuele Levi Mortera

Originally published in the UK by Imprint Academic
PO Box 200, Exeter EX5 5YX, UK

Originally published in the USA by Imprint Academic
Philosophy Documentation Center
PO Box 7147, Charlottesville, VA 22906-7147, USA

Digital version converted and published in 2012 by
Andrews UK Limited
www.andrewsuk.com

Series Editor's Note

The principal purpose of volumes in this series is not to provide scholars with accurate editions, but to make the writings of Scottish philosophers accessible to a new generation of modern readers. In accordance with this purpose, certain changes have been made to the original texts:

- Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
- In some cases, the selected passages have been given new titles.
- Some original footnotes and references have not been included.
- Some extracts have been shortened from their original length.
- Quotations from Gre

her.

Care has been taken to ensure that in no instance do these amendments truncate the argument or alter the meaning intended by the original author. For readers who want to consult the original texts, bibliographical details are provided for each extract.

The Library of Scottish Philosophy was launched at the Third International Reid Symposium on Scottish Philosophy in July 2004 with an initial six volumes. Attractively produced and competitively priced, these appeared just fifteen months after the original suggestion of such a series. This remarkable achievement owes a great deal to the work and commitment of the editors of the individual volumes, but it was only possible because of the energy and enthusiasm of the publisher, Keith Sutherland, and the outstanding work of Jon Cameron, Editorial and Administrative Assistant to the Centre for the Study of Scottish Philosophy.

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for generous financial support for the Library of Scottish Philosophy in general, and to George Stevenson for a subvention for this volume in particular. Acknowledgement is also made to the University of Aberdeen Special Libraries and

Collections for the engravings for the cover of this volume of the Edinburgh Faculty of Advocates and of Leith Harbour from *Modern Athens* (1829).

Gordon Graham,
Aberdeen, July 2004

Introduction

When in 1772, at only 19, Dugald Stewart was appointed assistant professor to his father Matthew in the chair of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh, he began a career which would confirm him, in subsequent years, as one of the most influential academics in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European 'Republic of Letters.' Both Stewart's contemporaries and modern scholars have recognised the impact his influential figure had over many young minds. Indeed, in accordance with the broad educational perspective that characterised the intellectual context of his age, Stewart was persuaded that only through an intellectual and liberal education could one become 'happy as an individual, and an agreeable, a respectable, and a useful member of society.'[1] Stewart spent the majority of his life between the walls of a college: he was professor of mathematics from 1772 to 1785 and then, as successor to Adam Ferguson, professor of moral philosophy until 1810 when he retired from University. The last twenty years of his life, until his death in 1828, he dedicated to writing the greater part of his published works. But Stewart was also a restless man who moved houses many times, travelled incessantly throughout Great Britain, visited France four times, and encountered the same difficulties that any family man would. He was a loyal Whig in politics and, for this reason, was accused of sympathising with the French Revolution, an accusation which caused him trouble both in his professional and private life.[2] His actual life, therefore, does not correspond to

1. *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 1, in *Coll. W.*, II, p. 61.

2. For Stewart's life see Gordon Macintyre's beautiful sketch *Dugald Stewart. The Pride and Ornament of Scotland*, Brighton-Portland, Sussex Academic Press, 2003. The classical source remains J. Veitch, *Memoir of Dugald Stewart*, in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart* (*Coll. W.*), ed W. Hamilton, Edinburgh, 1854–60, X, pp. vii-clxxvii.

the traditional and rather limited image of a "good professor" which has often been handed down.

Stewart was one of the leading figures of the Scottish Common Sense school, a name by which we are used to identifying the philosophical tradition headed by Thomas Reid and comprising philosophers such as James Beattie, Thomas Brown, William Hamilton and James Ferrier. The philosophy of common sense represents the first systematic answer to scepticism arising from the 'way of ideas'; an answer that appeals to universal and intuitive principles of knowledge independent of experience. In the nineteenth century John Stuart Mill referred to this philosophical tradition as the 'intuitionist school,' particularly in order to launch his attack on its religious and moral implications, but also including under this title thinkers such as William Whewell. Yet, while the common sense philosophers shared a common commitment to the solution of certain crucial philosophical problems in the development of the philosophical debate, each furnished different and unique answers to those problems. Because of this differentiation the philosophy of common sense cannot be considered a monolithic phenomenon in the history of ideas.

A useful exposition of Stewart's thought can be found in his *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*, written as a textbook for his students and published in 1793. Here, he offers a synthetic description of the method and purposes of what he calls philosophy of the human mind. According to Stewart, this is the new metaphysics, designed to replace the old metaphysics of causes and occult qualities and to investigate, instead, the general laws of human nature according to the inductive criteria of experimental philosophy. Moreover, Stewart singles out the proper subjects of moral philosophy, distinguishing between the study of man's intellectual and moral powers, and the study of man as a member of a political body. The first of this three-part system is dedicated to the analysis of the faculties of the human mind, to the principles of knowledge and types of evidence, to themes connected with language, taste, and the differences between humans and animals. The second and longest part is dedicated

to ethics, and the third, though only hinted at, to the principles of politics. Stewart wrote extensively on the first part in the three volumes of his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792, 1814, 1827), and on the second in the two volumes of his *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* (1828). The third part appeared posthumously in two volumes of *Lectures on Political Economy* (1856), collected by Sir William Hamilton and based on Stewart's University lectures given between 1800 and 1809. His *Philosophical Essays* (1810) may be considered an independent but fundamental work concerning metaphysics and aesthetics. His biographical sketches of Adam Smith (1793), William Robertson (1796) and Thomas Reid (1803), the three parts of his *Dissertation: exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy since the Revival of Letters in Europe* (1815, 1821 and, posthumously, 1854,) and a few other less known works are not to be properly considered a part of his philosophical 'system', notwithstanding their influence on the subsequent European circulation of ideas.

However, it is the philosophy of mind, as the science of first principles, that must precede all the other sciences, included Moral philosophy. Many of the topics Stewart himself singles out as the proper objects of moral philosophy, really should belong to the philosophy of mind in general, notwithstanding the traditional wide range of subjects which moral philosophy covered at the time in which Stewart wrote. It is thus necessary to distinguish between moral philosophy—the counterpart of natural philosophy and one of the core disciplines of the university curriculum of the time—and the philosophy of mind as a kind of 'meta-science' to which all the other branches of philosophy should refer.

The selection here presented departs in some ways from Stewart's own division of the subject, which would have been the most reasonable choice to follow. Instead, this sequence aims to reflect the logical priority of each discipline, a priority which Stewart himself seems to give in the internal development of his 'system'.

I

The great object of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment was the construction of a science of man, aimed at tracing the general principles or laws of human nature according to the criteria of experimental philosophy. The most renowned attempt of this kind is to be found in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, where the study of human nature is considered preliminary to that of other sciences, and is compared to a citadel to be conquered in order to attain a general and clearer view of them[3]. Neither Thomas Reid, the most profound of Hume's opponents, nor Reid's most brilliant pupil, Stewart, had ever thought to call Hume's claim into question. Rather, Stewart significantly elaborates this claim through an eloquent geographical metaphor:

> When our views are limited to one particular science…the course of our studies resembles the progress of a traveller through an unexplored country…whose opportunities of information must necessarily be limited to the objects which accidentally present themselves to his notice. It is the philosophy of the mind alone which, by furnishing us with a general map of the field of human knowledge, can enable us to proceed with steadiness, and in a useful direction; and… can conduct us to those eminences from whence the eye may wander over the vast and unexplored regions of science.[4]

According to Stewart, the development of the philosophy of mind depends chiefly on a proper method of inquiry which, laying aside the analogy of matter, should be grounded in reflection on and introspection of the operations of mind. Stewart does not deny a relation between mind and matter, but the task of the philosopher is not to discover the mechanisms of this connection so much as to establish the laws by which the mind is regulated. Therefore, the

3. D. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge & P.H. Nidditch, Oxford, Clarendon, 1978, p. xvi.
4. *Elements*, 1, in *Coll. W.*, II, p. 79.

physical and the moral worlds, though separate, must be studied by the same method of inquiry, based on the criteria of inductive logic (selection 1). From the methodological point of view, Stewart was a follower more of Newton than of Bacon; he praised the first for his great synthesis and blamed the latter—though sincerely respecting his venerated name—for the insufficiency of the heuristic power of his logic. Moreover, he was aware of the necessity of a new systematisation of the criteria of inductive logic in order to make them applicable beyond the compass of Natural philosophy (selections 2 and 3). Indeed, his work on logic furnished more than a hint to later nineteenth-century authors on this subject, such as Richard Whately, William Whewell and John Stuart Mill.

As already noted, the philosophers of common sense aimed at the construction of an alternative theory of knowledge to that of the 'way of ideas.' It can be said that Stewart's position on this problem stems basically from a reinterpretation of Locke through the inevitable—but not uncritical—influence of Reid: He sought a mediation between Locke's empiricist heritage and the tradition of moral sense, reinterpreted in the light of Reid and Newton. Stewart was less worried by Locke's own doctrine on the origin of knowledge than by the materialistic interpretations which other philosophers, especially the French *philosophes*, had given. His strategy consists in restoring the balance between ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection, so as to render the former the *occasions* which 'awaken the mind to a consciousness of its own existence, [giving] rise to the exercise of its various faculties.' The qualities of matter are the unknown causes of sensations, which are the known effects that lead to consciousness in a sentient being endowed with operating faculties. It is the exercise of these faculties that produces simple ideas or notions, such as number, duration, cause and effect, personal identity. This re-interpretation allowed Stewart to combine the independence of Lockean ideas of reflection, the Reidian distinction between qualities and sensations, and the metaphysical distinction between mind and matter (selection 5).

Similarly, Stewart agrees with Hume's analysis of causation, while insisting on the fundamental distinction to be made between physical and efficient causes (selection 6). Only the former, as constant conjunctions, may be admitted in physical inquiries, while the latter, as necessary connections, naturally lead the mind to think of, and believe in an efficient power. This power is, according to Stewart, the efficient and intelligent cause whose continuous intervention in the physical world ensures the continuity of general laws of nature, thus allowing the philosopher to infer the benevolent design by which the universe is governed from the evidence of its physical effects (selection 10). Stewart's apparent Newtonian bent, is accompanied by a significant re-evaluation of the heuristic role of final causes in philosophical inquiry at the level both of natural and of moral philosophy; this latter is a relevant and influential aspect of his thought, but is not reflected in this selection.

II

Stewart's theory of the origins of knowledge is directly connected with the problem of its conditions and the intellectual 'tools' by which it is acquired. It concerns, on the one hand, a re-assessment of the metaphysical status of the so-called 'principles of common sense' (an expression which Stewart rejected in its entirety) as well as an analysis of the intellectual faculties. The investigation of the conditions of knowledge takes as its starting point a clarification concerning the distinction between mathematical axioms and mathematical definition. According to Stewart, mathematical definition bears an analogy to the first principles of other sciences, from which a chain of deductive reasoning may be derived. Definitions or principles have to be accurately distinguished from *axioms* or elementary truths, from which no deductive reasoning may proceed but which form 'the *vincula* which give coherence to all the particular links of the chain'. In geometry these 'vincula' correspond to the first nine of the mathematical axioms prefixed to Euclid's *Elements*, while, in the philosophy of the human mind, Stewart lists as examples the belief in personal identity, the belief in

the existence of an external world, and the belief in the continuance of the laws of nature. These are the *Fundamental laws of human belief*, the pre-conditions of every act of belief and reasoning which are endowed with a '*metaphysical* or *transcendental*' nature. The necessity of rendering the first principles of knowledge universal and a priori stemmed also from a terminological confusion which Stewart found in the works of Newton and Reid. In calling his laws of motion 'axioms', Newton had indeed neglected their original nature as experimental-inductive truths, while Reid, following Newton in this conflation of language, endowed the first principles of truth with the same nature as the Newtonian laws of motion. It is precisely in order to avoid this confusion that Stewart underlined the metaphysical import of the 'laws of belief', reinforcing their intuitive and *a priori* nature. And he thought that the term 'common sense', employed in a technical and philosophical meaning, had relinquished its original and proper signification of 'mother-wit', thereby giving rise to conflicting opinions on its real import (selections 4 and 7).

In his *Philosophical Essays* (1810) Stewart had already faced the problem of the 'laws of belief', though without the mathematical premises which appear in the second volume of his *Elements* (1814). In the former work he resorts to his theory of 'occasions' in order to show the connexion between the sensible impression and the 'awakened' simple notion; thus, for example, personal identity is always accompanied by the subject's consciousness, and yet personal identity presupposes a prior exercise of memory and the idea of time (selection 8). Stewart then 'refines' Reid's theory of original principles, resolving the belief in the independent and permanent existence of external objects in another 'original law': the belief in the continuity of the laws of nature. Finally, he puts forward an original theory concerning the qualities of matter. He introduces the notion of 'mathematical affections of matter,' peculiar kinds of primary qualities, such as extension and figure, which are endowed with universal certainty; Stewart maintains that it is these affections that suggest the very notions of space and time, and that is why

they appear to be universal and formal conditions of knowledge. In treating these subjects, Stewart had in mind not only Locke and Reid but also Kant, whom he explicitly quotes. Although he did not read Kant's works directly, there is no doubt that he took Kant's philosophy into consideration more than might appear at first glance (selection 9).[5]

Regarding the second issue formerly mentioned, the analysis of the intellectual faculties attempts to mediate empiricist and intuitionist elements. Stewart aimed to construct a 'rational logic' understood not only as a 'map' of the intellectual and active powers of the mind, but one that would make explicit the cognitive processes that produce knowledge and at the same time reveal the conditions or fundamental laws by which this knowledge is constructed. This kind of logic represents a re-assessment of Reid's doctrines while drawing on other authors—particularly Locke, Hume, Smith—traditionally considered far from, if not antithetical to the philosophical perspective of common sense. In this sense, the distinction Stewart makes between operations of the mind which are intuitive, and those which are seemingly intuitive but are in fact the effect of extremely rapid cognitive processes is crucial. The latter, though at first glance appearing to be natural 'automatisms,' are actually determined by the combined action of elementary faculties such as attention, memory and the association of ideas, all of which contribute to the 'construction' of the perceived object (selections 11 and 13.) The association of ideas, in particular, is the leading faculty to which the attention of the educator must be addressed. Stewart here shows a great awareness of the power of association in moulding character and habit. According to him 'association…

5. A rather Kantian interpretation of Stewart's thought on these arguments is given in Jonathan Friday's excellent article *Dugald Stewart on Reid, Kant and the Refutation of Idealism*, in 'British Journal for the History of Philosophy,' 13 (2), 2005, pp. 263–86. Even in its comment on the term 'common sense' Stewart probably wished indirectly to answer to Kant's criticism of Scottish philosophers, stated in his *Prolegomena*.

furnishes the chief instrument of education; insomuch that whoever has the regulation of the associations of another from early infancy, is, to a great degree, the arbiter of his happiness or misery.'[6] The same sentence could have well been written by a philosopher of the associationist school, but for Stewart, the reduction of the complex phenomena of the human mind to a single explanatory principle would have been an unpardonable methodological error. Consequently, in Stewart the plasticity of the mind as that envisaged by the associationist philosophers, is seriously limited, notwithstanding his faith in the idea of a general improvement of mankind. Stewart's rather non-orthodox tendency emerges finally in the long analysis of the faculty of abstraction. Here, he maintains a decidedly nominalistic position according to which the functions of abstraction and generalization, operating upon artificial signs, ground the possibility of formulating logical processes of reasoning, and consequently of establishing general principles that can guide the *praxis* of each discipline. In Stewart's view, the idea of artificial language as an instrument of thought, though it has its limitations, satisfies two main goals: providing one of the highest *desiderata* in every science, a universal, philosophical and 'technical' language (as for example that of algebra); and explaining that the improvement of mind and the progress of society would be impossible without artificial language (selection 12).

III

Stewart's most interesting contribution, as far as concerns both the internal development of the Common Sense tradition and the broader history of thought concerns the analysis of the human mind. Specifically, it entails inquiry into the limits and conditions of knowledge, and investigates the application of the experimental method to the philosophy of the human mind. His works on ethics reveals a more traditional and 'conservative' treatment of the major themes of morals, in which the 'method' of common sense finds its best application. The four books of the *Philosophy of the Active and*

6. *Elements*, 1, in *Coll. W.*, II, note R, p. 499.

Moral Powers of Man published in 1828 reproduce 'nearly in the same words' what Stewart had already succinctly put forth in the second part of his *Outlines*. In this latter work, published during the most turbulent years of the French Revolution, he had adopted a very prudent line of thought, since he was responsible for the education of students from all over Europe and America. Of his concern for his students, he writes,

> the danger with which I conceived the youth of this country to be threatened, by that inundation of sceptical or rather atheistical publications which were then imported from the Continent, was immensely increased by the enthusiasm which, at the dawn of the French Revolution, was naturally excited in young and generous minds.[7]

It is significant that, if a prudent and well-balanced exposition of the principles of morals and natural religion was justified during the years of the Revolution, more than thirty years later Stewart did not find it necessary to change his view on the subject. He remained mindful of that potentially dangerous connection between 'an enlightened zeal for political liberty and the reckless boldness of the uncompromised free-thinkers.' However, it must be said that the spirit of religious belief which permeates the whole of Stewart's work on Morals is not a mere effect of political prudence, but was inspired by sincere devotion to those fundamental principles which, enjoined directly by the Deity, must inform conduct. Hence—and notwithstanding an actual departure from Reid in some core points and in the arrangement of the material—Stewart's primary commitment is to demonstrating the universality of the moral faculty and the reality and immutability of moral distinctions (selection 15) He also aims to preserve the relation between motive and action in favour of man's free agency and against necessity (selection 16) and to show that respecting one's duty is the most

7. *The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man*, Preface, in *Coll. W.*, VI, p. 111.

direct way to happiness. In this sense, the study of natural religion has to be considered a branch of our 'duty which respect[s] the Deity'. Stewart's *a posteriori* demonstration of benevolent design in the universe deserves particular attention. It touches on significant issues concerning power and efficient causes, the problems raised in Hume's *Dialogues* on the legitimacy of design, and the essential agreement between the study of natural religion and the procedures of scientific inquiry (selection 10.)[8]

> The words of Lord Henry Broughman, one of his former pupils, epitomize Stewart's view of natural religion: The highest of all our gratifications in the contemplation of science remains: we are raised by it to an understanding of the infinite wisdom of goodness which the Creator has displayed in all his works. Not a step can we take in any direction without perceiving the most extraordinary traces of design; and the skill everywhere conspicuous, is calculated in so vast a proportion of instances to promote the happiness of living creatures, and especially of ourselves, that we can feel no hesitation in concluding, that, if we knew the whole scheme of Providence, every part would be in harmony with a plan of absolute benevolence.[9]

A similar intellectual and religious bent characterised the Oxbridge scientists and philosophers of the same period, most of whom were not alien to Stewart's teaching. And it was precisely this speculation about design which definitively came to crisis once the implications of Darwin's theory of evolution became clear.

---

8. Stewart's relevance in the history of natural religion is briefly commented by M.A. Stewart, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Religion and Rational Theology*, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. by A. Broadie, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 31–59.
9. Quoted in *Active Powers*, pp. 113–14.

IV

Among the faculties of the mind, Stewart devoted great attention to the powers of language and taste. We already hinted to the importance Stewart assigned to language, a subject developed throughout his work. The themes concerning natural signs and the power of sympathetic imitation appear in the third volume of his *Elements*, published in 1827. Here, Stewart recovers Reid's account of natural signs, though with less emphasis on the Reidian metaphor concerning the grammar of nature, according to which there would be a natural correspondence between outward and inward signs and our capacity for interpreting them. Even though Stewart recognises an instinctive faculty which allows us to connect the most basic natural and artificial signs with what they signify, he also recognizes the role of experience in the interpretation of more complex and articulated signs, for example those related to the manifestation of character (selection 17.) At the same time, he is well aware of the danger of pushing experience too far: the analysis of the power of sympathetic imitation is an occasion to criticise authors such as Joseph Priestley and Erasmus Darwin, who tended to reduce instinct and morals to physiological devices and intellectual mechanisms regulated by the association of ideas. According to Stewart, such a simplification of the complexity of the human mind would reduce man to the level of animals, neglecting that '*physico-moral* sympathy which, through the medium of the body, harmonises different minds with each other' (selection 18.) Rather, the distinction between humans and animals is marked by human use of artificial language, a natural gift (not a divine one), which shows that humankind is the only species capable of improvement.

The ghost of materialism was what finally prompted Stewart to write a long confutation of the etymological theory of the English philologer and radical John Horne-Tooke. Tooke's 'etymological metaphysics' aimed to show that the human mind could be analysed or deconstructed through an etymological approach to language based on the 'atomic' correspondence between words,

things and sensations/ideas. Stewart counters Tooke's linguistic reductionism and his alleged 'science' of etymology, putting great emphasis instead on the contextualisation of words and their slow interpretation by inductive procedures. In pointing out the importance of a synchronic analysis of language, Stewart wanted to reaffirm the activity of the mind in every intellectual process, an activity essentially denied by Tooke's genetic or diachronic analysis. Such an analysis was, in Stewart's view, a further move towards an untenable simplification of the complex laws and mechanisms of mental phenomena (selection 19.)[10]

Stewart's aesthetic theory is less interspersed throughout his work than that of language. Aside from an early chapter dedicated to taste in the first volume of his *Elements*, the greater part of his aesthetic theory is to be found in his *Philosophical Essays*, which offer long and in-depth analysis of beauty, sublime and taste. Taste was one of Stewart's favourite subjects: in the selection presented here, it is remarkable that Stewart appeals to experience in order to account for the origin of the 'compounded power' of the mind, what he calls 'intellectual' taste as distinct from 'moral' taste. This appeal refers to experience understood not as mere sensibility, but as the *occasion* which puts the mind in motion. Thus, on the one hand, Stewart's definition of taste as a '*distinguishing* or *discriminating* perception' shows the psychological and terminological balance between the operations of the senses and those of the intellect (selection 20). On the other hand, although he emphasised the role of the association of ideas as the leading principle in critical theory (as did many of his contemporaries), he clearly limited this faculty just in compliance of that balance. Thus association can explain 'how a thing indifferent in itself may become a source of pleasure, by being connected in the mind with something else which is naturally agreeable,' but 'it presupposes, in every instance, the existence of those notions and those feelings which it is its province to combine.' Notwithstanding

10. I have discussed these themes in my *Dugald Stewart's Theory of Language and Philosophy of Mind*, in 'Journal of Scottish Philosophy', 1, (1), 2003, pp. 35–56.

that association may produce some changes in our judgments in matters of taste, 'it does so by co-operating with some natural principle of the mind, and implies the existence of certain original sources of pleasure and uneasiness.'[11] Stewart's analysis of the power of imagination and his literary digressions are further elements which make his æsthetic theory one of the most rich and interesting subjects within his philosophical speculation.

V

In his university course on political economy, Stewart gave priority to the exposition of the general principles of political economy, and only secondarily to those concerning the theory of government or *politics proper*. He pointed out that the theory of government traditionally addressed the formation of constitutional and legislative contrivances, and attempted to determine the rules of the legislative intervention through a few select examples comparing particular forms of government. Because of their merely empirical nature, these rules should be distinguished from those 'universal principles of justice and expediency which ought, under *every* form of government, to regulate the social order.'[12] Such principles, obtained from the 'examination of human constitution' are the result of 'a more extensive induction than any inference which can be obtained from the history of positive institutions.' Just as the science of rational mechanics starts from first principles established by inductive processes, so the science of politics ought to start from the first principles of the human mind in order to determine the laws which regulate political and social phenomena. Aside from these methodological assumptions, Stewart's science of politics is based on the belief in the existence of a spontaneous natural order which, left to develop freely, gradually achieves the perfection of the social order. On the level of political *praxis*, this very Smithian and Physiocratic idea means that a legislator should comply with the

11. *Elements*, 1, in *Coll. W.*, II, p. 323.
12. *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith,* in *Coll. W.*, X, p. 54.

'order of nature,' removing any hindrances that thwart its free course and should adapt, gradually and prudently, institutional reforms according to the multifarious opinions, habits and circumstances of humankind. Stewart justifies this 'gradualism' in political reform by citing those 'sudden and rush innovations' which had characterised the events of the French Revolution, and which had revealed the danger of any reckless application of unproved general principles to the political context (selection 21.)

Even in defining it as a branch of the science of legislation, Stewart considered political economy to be the main science with the purpose of enlightening the task of the legislator. Political economy need not be confined to the study of wealth and population. Rather, it must inquire into 'the motives which stimulate human industry,' and formulate predictions on the future course of a nation according to them. In Stewart's view, the close connection between political economy and the philosophy of the human mind was immediately evident: if political wisdom is founded on a knowledge of 'the prevailing springs of human action,' this knowledge can be obtained only by a previous determination of 'those moral powers which give motion to the whole,' and which are derived from a proper inquiry into human nature. It is in this framework that Stewart discusses the conditions and limits of the application of the experimental-inductive method to 'human affairs,' though he never systematically addressed the possibility of the construction of a social science. His conviction that political economy cannot be reduced to methods of political arithmetic or economic statistics represents two caveats: an epistemological criticism of the abuse of the role of experience as the sole instrument in social inquiries, and a warning about the difficulties of tracing general and uniform laws from the infinity and variety of human phenomena. To the 'practitioners' of politics Stewart thus opposed a eulogy of Adam Smith, from whom he derives the 'natural facts' based on individual motivation, and the common desire of modern *homo œconomicus* to improve his own material condition. These facts, no doubt, were warranted by a

more secure and wider induction than those set out by the alleged science of the political 'practitioners' (selection 22.)

Stewart's view of politics and society is characterised by a kind of teleological optimism accompanied by a strong idea of progress.[13] The late eighteenth-century ideal of humankind's indefinite perfectibility is connected, in Stewart, with a providential optimism in so far as people are considered to be 'fellow-workers with God in forwarding the gracious purposes of his government.' Stewart insists on scientific and technical progress—and on progress in moral and political science—as well as the achievements that characterised the passage to modern civilisation: the invention of printing and the freedom of the press, new geographical discoveries and the consequent creation of a commercial society. Recalling the Baconian theme of intellectual cooperation and planning, he emphasises the similarity between free trade and the division of labour, along with the free trade of ideas and a division of intellectual labour. According to Stewart, all these facts represent an answer to those pessimistic views that tend to deny the real progress of society. They confirm that people must trust in the improvement of the human condition, since people themselves are the chief actors, even if unconscious ones, in a moral and political order which tends to perfection (selection 23.) According to this view, every historical reconstruction, as conjectural as it might be (selection 24), has the function of re-confirming the 'march of the mind', the metaphor which epitomizes Stewart's whole philosophy.

---

13. See for example D. Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his Pupils', in D. Winch, S. Collini, J. Burrow (eds.), *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth Century Intellectual History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 23–61, and K. Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy. From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Chronology

1753: Born in Edinburgh, 22 November, third son of Matthew Stewart, Professor of Mathematics in the University of Edinburgh and Marjory Stewart of Catrine.

1761–65: Attended the Edinburgh High School.

1765–69: Entered Edinburgh University. Attended courses of Greek, Logic, Natural Philosophy and probably Moral Philosophy with Adam Ferguson.

1769–71: Decided to move to India and to the ecclesiastical career in the Church of England. In 1771 moved to Glasgow to attend Thomas Reid's Moral Philosophy course.

1772: Read some early essays before the 'Literary' and 'Speculative' Societies: *Essay on Dreaming*; *The Causes and Effects of Scepticism*; *Taste*; *The Conduct of Literary Institutions, with a View to Philosophical Improvement*. Appointed assistant professor of mathematics in the University of Edinburgh.

1775: Appointed associate professor of mathematics until 1785. In 1778–79: replaced Ferguson for a whole session.

1783: First journey to France. Married Helen Bannatyne (died in 1787). Birth of his first son Matthew, in 1784.

1785: Appointed professor of Moral Philosophy, succeeding Adam Ferguson.

1788: Second Journey to France.

1789: Third Journey to France. Witnessed some sessions of the General States in Paris (described in some letters to Archibald Alison) and probably the disorders of the Bastille.

1790: Married Helen D'Arcy Cranstoun. Birth of George in 1791 and Maria in 1793.

1792: Published the first volume of the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*.

1793: Published the *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*.

1794: Published the *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith* in the Transactions of the R.S.E. Suspected of sympathising with the French Revolution.

1796: Published the *Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson*.

1799–1800: First separated course of Political Economy.

1801–02: Second edition of the first volume of the *Elements* with some clarifications on his political ideas. Read before the R.S.E. the *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid*, published in 1803.

1805: Published *A Short Statement of Some Important Facts Relative to the Late Election of a Mathematical Professor in the University of Edinburgh*, where he took sides in favour of his friend and colleague John Leslie.

1806: Fourth journey to France accompanying Lord Lauderdale in a diplomatic mission. Named honorary director of the "Edinburgh Gazette"; granted a pension of £300 per annum.

1809: Death of son, George.

1810: Retired from teaching and succeeded by Thomas Brown. Published the *Philosophical Essays* dedicated to Pierre Prévost. Moved to Kinneil House

1811: Edited and published the *Works of Adam Smith*.

1812: Published in the Transactions of the R.S.E. *Some Account of James Mitchell, a Boy Born Deaf and Blind*.

1814: Published the second volume of the *Elements*.

1815: Published the first part of the *Dissertation: Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphisical, Ethical and Political Philosophy since the Revival of Letters in Europe*, as a supplement to the fourth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

1820: At the death of Thomas Brown, refused to occupy again the chair of Moral Philosophy pointing out first Macvey Napier and then William Hamilton as successors. The chair will be taken by John Wilson.

1821: Published the second part of the *Dissertation* as a supplement to the fifth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Partially paralysed by a stroke.

1827: Published the third volume of the *Elements*.

1828: Published the *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* in four books. In consequence of a new ictus died 11 June in Edinburgh at n.5 of Ainslie Place. He is buried in Canongate near Adam Smith. A small monument is erected in his honour in Calton Hill.

1836: Death of Helen D'Arcy.

1846: Death of daughter, Maria.

1851: Death of son, Matthew Stewart. He published in 1828 a biography of his father, but unfortunately, in consequence of a mental disorder, burned many other documents related to him.

1854: William Hamilton began the publication of *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart* (11 vols.) continued by John Veitch. Publication of the third part of the *Dissertation*.

1856: Publication of the *Lectures on Political Economy*.

One: Philosophy of the Human Mind

Selection 1: Nature and Object of the Philosophy of the Human Mind

The prejudice which is commonly entertained against metaphysical speculations, seems to arise chiefly from two causes: First, from an apprehension that the subjects about which they are employed are placed beyond the reach of the human faculties; and, secondly, from a belief that these subjects have no relation to the business of life.

The frivolous and absurd discussions which abound in the writings of most metaphysical authors, afford but too many arguments in justification of these opinions; and if such discussions were to be admitted as a fair specimen of what the human mind is able to accomplish in this department of science, the contempt into which it has fallen of late, might with justice be regarded as no inconsiderable evidence of the progress which true philosophy has made in the present age. Among the various subjects of inquiry, however, which, in consequence of the vague use of language, are comprehended under the general title of Metaphysics, there are some which are essentially distinguished from the rest, both by the degree of evidence which accompanies their principles, and by the relation which they bear to the useful sciences and arts: and it has unfortunately happened, that these have shared in that general discredit into which the other branches of metaphysics have justly fallen. To this circumstance is probably to be ascribed the little progress which has hitherto been made in the PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND; a science so interesting in its nature, and so important in its applications, that it could scarcely have failed, in these inquisitive and enlightened times, to have excited a very general attention, if it had not accidentally been classed, in the public opinion, with the vain and unprofitable disquisitions of the schoolmen.