

farther by insisting that the common sense of plowmen, uncorrupted by the sophisticated musings of philosophers, might even render the moral perceptions of the lowly superior to those of philosophers. This "egalitarian epistemology," which appealed to the anti-authoritarian instincts implicit in patterns of American social relations, was reflected in Reid's discontent with commercial society and his longing, in the manner of the civic humanist tradition, for a return to the virtues of more primitive times.

To an important extent, the works of Reid and Beattie were less a revision of Hutcheson than an attack upon David Hume, whose religious skepticism and "philosophical history" seemed, at least to the more conservative moralists, to constitute a frontal assault upon most of the verities of inherited social and religious thought. Certainly the most sophisticated and impressive thinker to emerge from any part of the eighteenth-century British world, Hume undertook—in his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects** (London, 1753–68) and in his six-volume *History of England** (London, 1754–62)—a systematic analysis of the operation of the new commercial society. That analysis went well beyond Hutcheson in justifying the new commercial order and vindicated it against the charges of contemporary civic-humanist writers like Bolingbroke and Trenchard and Gordon. Where Hutcheson had been anxious about the moral effects of excessive luxury, Hume thought that the social benefits of luxury far outweighed its social costs.

Indeed, Hume employed a historical approach not only to deny that the rise of commercial society and the spread of luxury threatened to corrupt society and endanger liberty but also to argue that they actually contributed to the expansion of liberty and the development of morals. In many respects, Hume departed from the philosophy of Lockean liberalism. He had no use for the artificial constructs of the state of nature and the social contract and insisted upon the primacy of the passions over reason. But he used aspects of the individualist epistemology of Locke, the developmental logic of Defoe's celebration of improvement, and the theories of the social effects of the pursuit of self-interest proposed by Mandeville to argue both that self-interest was the primary animating force in man and that its operation within a commercial society functioned to promote the public welfare in ways that rendered the traditional emphasis upon civic virtue irrelevant. By exciting industry and striving among social classes, the drive for luxury and status, he contended, contributed to develop cities and the arts and sciences; to extend sociability and

refinement; to enlarge the middle classes; to strengthen the respect for law that was so necessary for economic growth and political stability; to expand independence, decrease dependence, and thereby enlarge the potential for participation in public life; to augment both personal liberty and individual virtue; and to enhance the power of the state.

In contrast to earlier stages of political and economic development, the modern age of commerce and refinement, Hume contended, was both the "happiest and most virtuous" period in the history of man. No believer in the alleged superiority of the ancient constitution so much celebrated by the civic humanists, and contemptuous of Whig historians like Rapin, Hume showed in his *History of England* how English liberty had only slowly emerged out of changing social conditions between Magna Charta and the Glorious Revolution and

