

insisted that authority had never been better regulated, liberty and law more secure, or commerce and the arts more thriving than they were in contemporary Britain. Although he deplored the vast system of public credit that had grown up since the Glorious Revolution, he defended the use of patronage by Walpole as a necessary device to enable the executive to provide individual security, public order, sanctity of contracts, and direction in a government in which liberty held the preponderance of latent power. Hume also challenged the convention, only recently re-emphasized by Montesquieu, that republican government was unsuitable for large states. In an insight that James Madison subsequently used to good effect in *The Federalist Papers*, Hume argued that factionalism, which, rather than corruption, he saw as the principal danger to popular governments, was less likely to be a problem in larger federally-organized states. Indeed, in another dictum that served as an inspiration to the American Founders, Hume announced that it was possible, as he put it, to reduce politics to a science. Through the careful use of experience he believed that men might construct political institutions in such a way as to guard against tendencies that had proved disruptive to the happiness of political society.

The doctrine of social and economic progress articulated by Hume subsequently became the organizing principle of Scottish philosophical history as it was developed after 1750 by an impressive group of historians and social analysts in a series of important and influential works. The most significant of these were Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations** (Edinburgh, 1776); William Robertson (1721–93), *History of Scotland** (London, 1759), *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V** (London, 1769), and *History of America* (London, 1777); Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), *Essay on the History of Civil Society** (Edinburgh, 1767); and John Millar (1735–1801) *Observations Concerning the Distinctions of Ranks and Society** (London, 1771) and *An Historical View of the English Government* (London, 1787). Other significant contributors were Sir John Dalrymple (1726–1810), *Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property in Great Britain** (London, 1757); Lord Kames, *Historical Law-Tracts** (Edinburgh, 1785) and *Sketches of the History of Man** (Edinburgh, 1774); Gilbert Stuart, (1742–86), *View of Society in Europe, in Its Progress from Rudeness to Refinement** (Edinburgh, 1778); James Dunbar (d. 1798), *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Uncultivated Ages** (London, 1780); John Logan (1748–88), *Elements of the Philosophy of History* (Edinburgh, 1781); and William Falconer

(1744–1824), *Remarks on the Influence of Climate, Situation, Nature of Country Population, &c. upon Mankind** (London, 1781). Except for Falconer, an Englishman, all these authors were Scots.

To a far greater extent even than the work of Smith's fellow Scot Sir James Stewart, whose *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy** (London, 1767) influenced Alexander Hamilton's national fiscal program during the early 1790s and was sympathetic to government regulation of the economy, Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was widely read by the leaders of the American republic and has long been admired for its detailed and profound analysis of the workings of the commercial economy. But it is equally important for its systematic elaboration of a theory of the progress of societies from rudeness to refinement. Where Montesquieu had earlier related differences among societies in manners and institutions to the mode of subsistence and Hume had explicitly contrasted commercial societies with those at less advanced stages of economic development, Smith used the comparative method to argue that societies had a "natural history" and that men moved through time in groups according to a universal process that varied mainly only according to limits of place.

As articulated by Smith and employed, sometimes in somewhat different forms, by most of his contemporary practitioners of the new philosophical or, as some called it, conjectural history, this theory described the development of man not, as had Locke and other natural-law theorists, as a movement from a state of nature to a state of society, but as a progress through time and space in four sequential stages—respectively the ages of hunters, shepherds, agriculture, and commerce—and sought to uncover the laws that governed this process and the range of possible variations. At each of these stages, according to the conjectural historians, the mode of production was the primary determinant of the character of social institutions, manners, styles of life, and personality, and the direction of movement was towards the division and specialization of labor, an intensification of exchange in goods and services, and an indefinite multiplication of goods. The desire for material improvement—the propensity of individuals, in emulation of those above them in society, to want to better themselves and to accumulate property and the social esteem and prestige conferred by that property—was the driving force in this process. For the philosophical historians, as for Mandeville, social progress was thus an unintended consequence of millions of individual acts of self-interest, and they believed that the most rapid rate of material improvement occurred in situations in