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Dugald Stewart and the Problem of Teaching Politics in the 1790s[1]

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I A Conundrum in Correspondence

In the surviving correspondence of Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh from 1785 to 1810, there exists a strange conundrum. It is created by two communications that point in contradictory directions. The first is an exchange with a friend he first encountered during the academic year 1771–2, which he spent as a student at the University of Glasgow. The second was generated by a contretemps between Stewart and a Lord of Session. The puzzle these two bouts of letter writing embody illuminates and complicates our understanding of three interrelated stories: the political development of Dugald Stewart; the possibilities for free expression in the 1790s; and, finally, the fate of the Scottish Enlightenment itself.

Six months younger than Stewart, his college friend William Drennan was a founder member of the United Irishmen.[2] While he had avoided direct involvement in the rising of 1798, he had already stood trial for his radical opinions in 1794.[3] Yet, after the year in Glasgow, Drennan and Stewart clearly maintained a friendship that involved some sympathy in political opinions. As early as January 1778, Drennan approvingly recounted to his sister and confidant, Martha McTier of how he found, upon visiting Edinburgh:

> Nothing is going on here at present but raising regiments, to be devoted to destruction in America. Every order of men from the highest to the

[1] I wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Early versions of this paper were delivered to a Conference on 'Scotland, Ireland and the Romantic Aesthetic', University of Aberdeen, 7 July 2002 and a Conference on 'Enlightenment, Law and Lawyers: Scottish Enlightenment Legal Thought and its International Impact', School of Law, University of Glasgow, 23 May 2002.

[2] On Drennan, see Ian McBride, 'William Drennan and the Dissenting Tradition' in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin, 1993), 49–61.

[3] See John Larkin (ed.), *The Trial of William Drennan* (Dublin, 1991).

> lowest are emptying their pockets (and what more could be asked from Scotchmen?) in the support of the war . . . The greatest part of the professors have given ten guineas, Stewart but two.[4]

While the relationship was to be sporadic, it was no less intimate for that. On 22 November 1813, three years after Stewart had retired from active teaching, his second wife Helen D'Arcy Stewart wrote from Kinneil House to Drennan of how Stewart had an 'unconquerable' dislike for correspondence, and 'wears himself out with writing . . . [being] constantly occupied with the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Human Mind*', which appeared the next year.[5] None the less, she assured Drennan that 'no day passes in which he does not reproach himself bitterly for his silence to you'.[6] D'Arcy Stewart told Drennan of how 'we are always planning a visit to Ireland' (a journey they never took) and that 'all that you did and said and thought at Glasgow together will serve us with this evening's chat'.[7] However, this was far more than a mere reminiscence. That D'Arcy Stewart assured Drennan that Stewart recalled a meeting of minds, as well as more traditional student pleasures, is indicative of Stewart's attitude.

A letter from 31 December 1807 furthers this picture of fraternal feeling. D'Arcy Stewart wrote to Drennan of how 'it is above seventeen years since I became his [Dugald's] wife, and your name, your verses, all you ever did or said, I feel as well acquainted with as if you were my brother'.[8] Stewart himself reiterated his wife's sentiments in a letter dated 20 September 1808, telling of how 'we have a project of proceeding as far as Port Patrick in the hope of meeting with you and Mrs Drennan and of spending some days *emptying our minds* to each other'.[9] In the meantime, Stewart offered to send Drennan 'a collection of all that I have hitherto published and shall be anxious to know how far our philosophical views coincide'.[10] More remarkable still was D'Arcy Stewart's recollection in December 1807 of how it was 'with . . . anxiety and agony we at one time felt for your much-injured country . . . It was one of

[4] William Drennan to Martha McTier, 20 January 1778 in Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan-McTier Letters: Volume I: 1776–1793* (Dublin, 1998), 32–3.

[5] Helen D'Arcy Stewart to William Drennan, Kinneil House, 22 November 1813, EUL, Dc.1.100 f1A.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., f2A.

[8] Helen D'Arcy Stewart to William Drennan, 31? December 1807?, EUL, Dc.1.100, f3B.

[9] Dugald Stewart to William Drennan, EUL, Dc.1.100, f6B.

[10] Ibid., f7A.

the strongest claims on Mr Stewart's heart that *your* happiness was involved in its welfare or misery'.[11]

It is this expression of sympathy with the fate of the United Irish rebellion and its actors that stands in apparent contrast to a second brief exchange of letters which Stewart conducted in 1794 with a Lord of Session, William Craig. Craig was an occasional contributor to both the *Mirror* and the *Lounger* periodicals and a regular visitor to the Stewart household. Stewart had asked Craig to investigate a new coolness in the manner of a colleague on the bench, Alexander Abercromby. Craig reported back on that the professor's suspicions were well founded:

> Without being able to give precisely the words of the gentleman whom it was your wish I speak to, I find his impressions are of the following nature. That when he first read a certain chapter in a certain book, he considered it as an attempt to introduce the opinions of some late philosophers into Great Britain, and what was still more, to point a practical application of them to the political institutions and government of this country. That even allowing the principles in that chapter, however erroneous, to be written with the most innocent intention at the time, that after the massacres in France, and the dreadful actings such principles had produced, and after the consequences of them had been expressed in such horrible and bloody characters, it could not only not be innocent to maintain those opinions, but that that conduct could not be innocent which did not disavow them; and endeavour to correct their pernicious operation in the most explicit manner . . . Having read the chapter alluded to, *after* the massacre of Paris, he flattered himself, from the high opinion he entertained of your character, that you would embrace the earliest opportunity of retracting in an open and manly manner, every sentiment you had ever entertained, and every word you had ever uttered, in favour of doctrines which had led to so giant a mischief; and above all, he trusted that you would have exerted all your talents, to impress upon the minds of our youth, a love and a veneration for the British constitution, upon the preservation of which it is now too evident, that not the public welfare alone, but the safety and happiness of every individual in his little domestic circle necessarily depends. Disappointed in those hopes, and knowing with absolute certainty that there exists at this moment a party among us, who wait

[11] Helen D'Arcy Stewart to William Drennan, 31? Dec. 1807?, EUL, Dc.1.100, f3B.

> only for a favourable opportunity to repeat here the same scenes of horror which have been acted in France, he owns he cannot esteem any man, be his talents what they may, who in any shape whatever gives the smallest countenance to opinions which, in *these times*, and under the *circumstances* in which we are now unhappily placed, tend directly to destroy the peace and happiness of society, and to deprive us of everything that is valuable and dear to us in life.[12]

In the subsequent literature, Stewart's desire to placate Abercromby by allaying his fear that he harboured radical sympathies has been read as tantamount to abject apology for a slight political offence. Thus, for example, in a highly dismissive passage concerning Stewart, Bruce Lenman has written of Stewart that,

> [d]espite his lack of philosophical originality . . . [he was] a very important figure, for this eloquent charismatic teacher was not only the supreme exponent of the Scots' 'Common Sense' school of philosophy stretching back in impeccable social respectability to Thomas Reid, but also a convinced Whig. If he was the most cautious of Whigs, capable of a cringing apology to a Noble Lord for having inadvertently mentioned an infidel French philosopher like Condorcet in one of his writings without explicitly condemning him, that too merely enhanced the influence of a man whose books were accepted at once, in the United States of America as much as in Britain, as an authoritative summary of the philosophical school which had given the lie to the atheistic Hume.[13]

So too, for Richard Sher the common sense philosophy Stewart espoused was of a piece with the turn towards intellectual caution and the end of the high phase of the Scottish Enlightenment. In the hands of Thomas Reid and even more glaringly, James Beattie, it was to Sher 'a sort of Aberdonian aberration', only gaining social and intellectual respectability with 'the common sense revolution of 1785'.[14] That year saw the first substantial work by Reid

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[12] William Craig to Dugald Stewart, Edinburgh, 15 February 1794, quoted in John Veitch, 'Memoir of Dugald Stewart' in William Hamilton (ed.), *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart* (11 vols., Bristol, 1994), x, lxxi–lxxii.

[13] Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment and Industrialisation: Scotland 1746–1832* (London, 1981), 110.

[14] Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of*

published for more than two decades, the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, and, crucially, the appointment of Stewart to the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh. Stewart, Sher further asserts, transformed the intellectual reputation of the school of thought by inculcating a pragmatic acceptance of the social order and limiting intellectual and cultural investigation. To Sher, Stewart's

> moral philosophy lectures . . . were explicitly designed to highlight, clarify, refine and systemise – but not vulgarise – Reid's complex metaphysical investigations and to render them applicable to the practical business of life . . . By the time that book [*Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Volume One*] appeared [in 1792] the Edinburgh intellectual establishment had been won over to the Reid-Stewart camp – just in time to do battle against the perceived onslaught of French revolutionary ideas.[15]

In other words, the progressive liberal Enlightenment Sher depicts within his book, which treats of the generation from 1745 to 1785, is abandoned with the rise of the drab common sense philosophy. And it is Stewart's domestication of Reid's 'complex metaphysical investigations' that prepares the ground for the historiographical commonplace that Scotland was a stable bastion of British loyalism in the 1790s.[16] In this pessimistic reading, the Scottish Enlightenment's final legacy was to import a kind of hard-headed economic Whiggery to the Liberal party in the early 1800s through the pages of the *Edinburgh* Review – a periodical significantly founded, edited, and shaped by students of Stewart.[17]

This assessment seems final, setting up Stewart as the harbinger of a pedantic political orthodoxy of British loyalism and anti-French commitment. Yet in that, it propels the correspondence with Drennan into interpretative

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Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1985), 312.

[15] Ibid., 312–3.

[16] The most influential statement of this thesis is T. M. Devine, 'The Failure of Radical Reform in Scotland in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Social and Economic Context' in T. M. Devine (ed.), *Conflict and Stability in Scottish Society, 1700–1850* (Edinburgh, 1990), 51–64.

[17] On this see Donald Winch, 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his Pupils' in John Burrow, Stephan Collini and Donald Winch, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* (Cambridge, 1983), 24–61; Anand C. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society* (London, 1986), 20–8.

prominence. Which Stewart was the authentic one – the intellectual radical or the cringing Whig? Or might both these personas be accurate and authentic? Were Abercromby's suspicions well founded? And what then does Stewart's retreat in the face of criticism reveal about the context in which he worked?

What is proposed here is three-fold. First of all, this paper will document the development and trajectory of Stewart's political development, using his negotiation of the 1790s as a case study of Enlightenment politics in the decade. This will identify the pressures under which he operated, highlighting how he responded to the radicalisation of the atmosphere by renegotiating and, on occasion, recanting some of its beliefs. Secondly, this biography of belief will highlight how the different modes of communication enabled some vestiges of radical sympathy to survive despite the necessity of providing a suitably loyal veneer on political expression. What follows is therefore structured to illustrate how different modes of communication – the published book, the lecture and the letter – enabled the articulation of differing political attitudes. Thirdly, and finally, the case of Stewart will lead to a wider proposition concerning the fate of the Scottish Enlightenment.

II Who was Dugald Stewart?

The literary flirtation with Condorcet does seem at odds with the characterisation of Stewart that has been handed down to us.[18] Born on 22 November 1753, he was educated at the High School in Edinburgh from 176–5, before taking his degree at the city's university. He also took the opportunity to attend a course at the University of Glasgow, where he heard the celebrated Thomas Reid (1710–96) discourse on morals. Upon his return to Edinburgh in the autumn of 1772, Stewart replaced his ailing father in the Mathematics classroom, showing sufficient aptitude to have the professorship conferred formally in 1775. In 1778, he was also engaged in teaching moral philosophy upon the temporary removal of Adam Ferguson and was again seconded to teach moral philosophy in the 1784–5 session. With the resignation of Adam Ferguson in the early months of 1785, Stewart was installed in the chair.[19]

[18] The fullest account of Stewart's life and works is Gordon Macintyre, *Dugald Stewart: The Pride and Ornament of Scotland* (Brighton, 2003).

[19] This chronology is suggested by the marginalia to Stewart's copy of Ferguson's *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1773). These are dated from November 1784. See EUL JA 4001.

A successful and popular teacher, Stewart's class size grew steadily during his tenure, until his powers waned through old age and ill health.[20] Many of the sons of the gentry were under his direction, including such notables as Henry Peter, Lord Brougham (1778–1868), Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), Lord John Russell (1792–1878), Sir Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquis of Lansdowne (1780–1863) and the novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832). In this, as Arthur Herman has noted, Stewart was a central figure in the creation of the British political élite of the early nineteenth century.[21]

In a series of writings, Stewart expounded a form of 'common sense' philosophy. Although he disliked the term, he defined 'common sense' as something which 'seems nearly equivalent to what we in Scotland call *mother-erwit*, that degree of sagacity derived partly from natural constitution, but chiefly from personal experience, by which one is able to conduct one's self with propriety in the affairs of common life'.[22] 'Common sense', or the ordinary responses of humans to social circumstances, provided people with the knowledge they needed to live successfully and virtuously. These responses also gave philosophers the empirical evidence required to reveal the workings of the mind, thereby revealing the 'science of man'. Stewart argued that through a process of intensive introspection, the philosopher was able to determine the essential truths, necessary for the minds of men to operate. Philosophy only failed in its duty when the philosophical urge to understand exceeded the boundaries imposed by empirical observation.

Crucially, for Stewart, the world was made up of more than the sum of individual experiences, leaving mysterious aspects of the workings of the universe which could only be taken on faith. The danger with this was that common sense philosophy could be read as an argument for the unthinking acceptance of the appearance of things. Uncritical in its vulgar manifestation, common sense philosophy could be used as a social salve, an intellectual justification of unchanging social hierarchy and an unenlightened defence of popular myths and superstitions. The question remains as to why the astute and sensitive Stewart mentioned Condorcet? Have we here

[20] See Richard B. Sher, 'Professors of Virtue, The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century' in M.A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1990), 123.

[21] Arthur Hermann, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Scots' Invention of the Modern World* (London, 2002), 227–46.

[22] James Bridges, 'Notes from Mr Stewart's Lectures on Moral Philosophy read in the University of Edinburgh', Winter 1801–2, EUL, Dc.8.143, 70.

uncovered something more revealing than a political blunder on the part of an unworldly academic? It is time to examine the source of Abercromby's consternation.

III The Published Works: Stewart as a Conformist

In the *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, the contentions reference to Condorcet's thought arises in a section of the *Elements* concerned with 'The Use and Abuse of General Principles in Politics'. In treating of political economy, Stewart attempted to dissuade his readers of a series of misconceptions concerning its validity as an intellectual discipline. He argued 'that the object of the economical system ought by no means to be confused (as I believe it commonly is in this country) with that of Utopian plans of government, which have, at different times, been offered to the world'.[23] It was, he asserted, safely grounded in an understanding of the power of nature over nurture and in the limitations of human action. Recognising this refuted

> another mistaken idea . . . that it is founded entirely upon theory, and unsupported by facts. This may be the case with respect to some of its doctrines; but in general it may be safely affirmed, that they rest on a broader basis of facts than any other political speculations which have been yet offered to the world; for they are founded, not on a few examples collected from the small number of governments of which we possess an accurate knowledge, but on those laws of human nature, and those maxims of common sense, which are daily verified in the intercourse of private life.[24]

Stewart then remarked further that 'there is yet another mistake (of still greater consequence than any of those I have mentioned)'. This concerned the political implications of the economical system. He had already observed that, unlike the faith in the transforming power granted to education by the Utopians, the economists realised that education was best suited to reconcil-

[23] Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* in Hamilton, *Works of Stewart*, ii, 232. For an uncontroversial use of Condorcet's writings in Stewart see ibid., 473.

[24] Ibid., 234.

ing people to the political system. This helped Stewart defend the economists from the accusation that 'it was meant to exhibit a political order, which is really attainable in the present state of Europe' and, consequently, that the economists were covertly forwarding a revolutionary programme.[25] In fact, Stewart protested,

> its principles appear highly favourable to the tranquillity of society, inasmuch as, by inspiring us with a confidence in the triumph which truth and liberty must infallibly gain in the end over error and injustice, it has a tendency to discourage every plan of innovation which is to be supported by violence and bloodshed.[26]

It was in proof of this position that he quoted a lengthy passage from Condorcet: '"If we attack oppressors before we have taught the oppressed," says one of the ablest of its present supporters', which Stewart identified as Condorcet in a footnote,

> we shall risk the loss of liberty, and rouse them to oppress the progress of reason. History affords proofs of this truth. How often, in spite of all the efforts of the friends of freedom, has the event of a single battle reduced nations to the slavery of ages!
>
> And what is the kind of liberty enjoyed by those nations which have recovered it by force of arms, and not the influence of philosophy? Have not most of them confounded the forms of republicanism with the enjoyment of right, and the despotism of numbers with liberty? How many laws, contrary to the rights of nature, have dishonoured the code of every people which has recovered its freedom during those ages in which reason was still in its infancy!
>
> Why not profit by this fatal experience, and wisely wait the progress of knowledge, in order to obtain freedom more effectual, more substantial and more peaceful? Why pursue it by blood and inevitable confusion, and trust that to chance which time must certainly, and without bloodshed, bestow? A fortunate struggle may, indeed, relieve us of many grievances under which we labour at present; but if we wish to secure the perfection and permanence of freedom, we must patiently wait the period when men, emancipated from their prejudices, and

[25] Ibid., 235.
[26] Ibid., 236.

> guided by philosophy, shall be rendered worthy of liberty, by comprehending its claims.[27]

Ultimately, Stewart bowed to the pressure somewhat. In the second edition of the *Elements*, published in 1802, the offending passage was reprinted; yet it had appended to it a footnote in which Stewart distanced himself from Condorcet by reiterating the central plank of his defence in the correspondence with Craig:

> To some of my readers it may appear trifling to remark, that in availing myself of an occasional coincidence of sentiment with a contemporary author, I would not be understood to become responsible for the consistency of his personal conduct with his philosophical principles, nor to subscribe to any one of his opinions, but those which I have expressed my assent by incorporating them with my own composition.[28]

Despite Stewart's apparent recantation, it should be noted that the tone of this footnote suggests he still thought Abercromby's political sensibilities rather too developed for the full discussion of his reservations to be merited. In this, he may have had just cause for his views. In Henry Mackenzie's encomium, read to the Royal Society of Edinburgh shortly after Abercromby's death, Mackenzie, himself a cultural advocate for and agent of the Dundas administration, hinted that the stress of adjudicating over criminal law in a period of political unrest might have contributed to Abercromby's untimely demise:

> The anxiety and application he bestowed on the duties of a very laborious profession might contribute to exhaust the strength of his constitution; and if mental affections are to be allowed such force, the uneasiness which for some years he experienced on the subject of public affairs, and the political state of his country, might impair and weaken his health and spirits. Deeply impressed himself with the excellence of the British constitution, and of the happiness derived from it, he saw with horror and indignation (at a period considerably earlier than that which excited the apprehensions of most other people) the efforts of desperate

[27] Ibid., 236–7.
[28] Ibid., 237.

> and designing men to overturn it; he lamented the delusion of those who were misled to join them; and he trembled for the effects of that delusion in estimable and benevolent but visionary minds, who might indulge the pride of political theory and speculation, to the danger, as he conceived, of all good order and regular government, of all social happiness and social virtue.[29]

Into this last category, the 'benevolent but visionary minds', Stewart clearly fell.

Whatever the case of Abercromby's character, Stewart's retraction is of a piece with the trajectory of his other published writings during the decade of the 1790s. For example, in 1793, in the midst of a period of increasing political tension in Scotland, Stewart published *Outlines of Moral Philosophy*, a synoptic account of his lecture course, highlighting central tenets and enabling him to expand upon and illustrate those ideas to which the students now had access. The text provided a standard and authorised account of his philosophical system, a secure and stable foundation for their learning. It also provided a guarantee to anxious observers, parents or public officials, that the tenets inculcated in Stewart's class were at once mundane and politically orthodox. Those who sought subversion were being told to look elsewhere.[30]

Yet, intriguingly, Stewart pointedly refused to do anything more than supply the most cursory of headings in his treatment of political philosophy. In the preface he claimed that this was inspired by his desire to rework the course by removing politics from the course and expand its treatment into a distinct course:

> The branch of moral philosophy which relates to the principles of politics, being less abstract than the others, I have contented myself with a simple enumeration of the most important articles treated of in the third

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[29] Henry Mackenzie, 'Account of the Life of Lord Abercromby from the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh', 132–3. On Mackenzie's counter-revolutionary work for Dundas see David J. Brown, 'The Government Response to Scottish Radicalism, 1792–1802' in Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2005), 104; Andrew Noble and Patrick Scott Hogg (eds), *The Canongate Burns: The Complete Poms and Songs of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 2001), xlviii–l.

[30] This is in line with my assessment of the series of public lectures Stewart delivered to the Royal Society of Edinburgh on the Scottish literati, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid and William Robertson, as a defence of his moral philosophy course. See Michael Brown, 'Creating the Canon: Dugald Stewart's Construction of the Scottish Enlightenment', *History of Universities*, xvi/i (2000), 135–54.

> part of my course. It is scarcely necessary for me to mention that, in this enumeration, I have not aimed at anything approaching to systematical arrangement; and that, in illustrating the titles it contains, I am obliged, by the term prescribed to my academical labours, to confine myself to very general sketches. As soon as my other engagements allow me sufficient leisure for such an undertaking, I shall attempt a separate course of lectures on this very extensive and difficult topic.[31]

The suspicion remains, however, that the decision to leave the political section of the *Outlines* as perfunctory as possible was also politically expedient given the trouble he was in over his reference to Condorcet a year earlier.[32] This suspicion gains weight from the evidence concerning how Stewart updated the *Outlines* in 1801. This chore was ostensibly undertaken in the light of his decision finally to offer a distinct course on political economy, separate from moral philosophy, in the autumn of 1800. In a postscript to the preface added to the 1801 edition he revealed his relief at having finally made good his promise of eight years previous. 'Having of late', he remarked,

> carried into execution (at least in part) the design announced in the foregoing preface, by way of an annual course in political economy, I have omitted, in this edition of my *Outlines*, the articles which I formerly enumerated under that general title; substituting in their stead a few others, calculated to illustrate the peculiar and intimate connection between this department of politics and the more appropriate objects of ethics. The observations which these articles are meant to introduce may be useful, at the same time, in preparing the minds of students for disquisitions, the details of which can scarcely appear to appear uninviting to those who are not aware of the important conclusions to which they are subservient.[33]

Yet, despite this appeal to pedagogy to justify his actions, Stewart made significant alterations in the positive content of the course that went beyond the removal of the material pertinent to the political economy course. The

[31] Dugald Stewart, *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1793), vii.

[32] This is further confirmed if we credit Anand Chitnis's observation that, 'after 1790, Stewart always read his lectures from a script rather than extempore from notes so as to minimise the political risks he ran' (Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, 25)..

[33] Dugald Stewart, *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1801), viii–ix.

headings that the *Outlines* offered under the rubric of political philosophy were now increasingly historical in their content. Instead of the sections 'of population', 'of national wealth' and 'of the instruction of the lower orders and of the prevention and punishment of crimes', Stewart now discoursed under rubric like 'the writings of Grotius and his successors on natural jurisprudence and their influence in suggesting the modern speculations concerning political economy', and 'the connection between just views of political economy and the intellectual and moral improvement of mankind'.[34]

This tendency to place more emphasis on the historical development of political thinking would appear to be of a piece with Stewart's work on the series of biographies of Scottish literati, which he undertook from 1793 to 1802; with the greatly de-politicised biography of Thomas Reid coming out in that last year. As Paul Wood has detailed, Reid was therein portrayed as an a-political philosopher; self-consciously withdrawn from the cut and thrust of active life.[35] Stewart himself made the connection between this image of the scholarly don and the political heat of the period in which the portrait was drawn. 'The life of which I am now to present to the Royal Society a short account', Stewart opined,

> although it fixes an era in the history of modern philosophy, was uncommonly barren of those incidents which furnish materials for a biography. It was spent in the obscurity of a learned retreat, remote from the pursuits of ambition and with little solicitude about literary fame,—unembellished even by that epistolary intercourse with the world, which has formed the relaxation of many studious men, and in which they have themselves transmitted to posterity the most faithful and pleasing portraits of their own characters. After the agitation, however, of the political convulsions, which Europe has witnessed for a course of years, the simple record of such a life may derive an interest even from its uniformity, and, when contrasted with the events of the passing scene, may lead the thoughts to some views of human nature, on which it is not ungrateful to repose.[36]

[34] Dugald Stewart, *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1793), 300; Dugald Stewart, *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 1801), 322.

[35] Paul Wood, 'The Hagiography of Common Sense: Dugald Stewart's *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid*' in A. J. Holland (ed.), *Philosophy, Its History and Historiography* (Lancaster, 1983), 305–22.

[36] Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid* in Hamilton, *Works of Stewart*, x, 245.

Yet, for all that the passage brought to mind an ivory-tower academic, unsullied by the political realities beyond, when it came to the classes Stewart taught, the environment he here eschewed infiltrated and informed his work as a teacher in interesting ways. In particular, he was to use the occasional aspect of the lecture as a cover to disseminate more radical ideas than he could safely espouse in print.

IV The Lectures: Stewart as a Subversive

To map the evolution of Stewart's political understanding is a complex task. Unfortunately, his son, Colonel Matthew Stewart, significantly hampered us by destroying many of Stewart's private papers. Included in the blaze was '*The Philosophy of Man as a Member of a Political Association* (Incomplete)'.[37] One can only speculate as to the contents of this text, and the intentions of his son in deciding upon this act of destruction. According to Matthew Stewart, the motives were pecuniary:

> Finding myself getting on in life, and despairing of finding a sale for it at its real value, I have destroyed the whole of it. To this step I was much induced by finding my locks repeatedly picked during my absence from home, some of my papers carried off, and some of the others evidently read, if not copied from, by persons of whom I could procure no trace, and in the pursuit or conviction of whom, I could never obtain any efficient assistance from the judicial functionaries.[38]

It may be to over-interpret Colonel Stewart's actions to suggest that this passage also suggests other possible motivations. He might have been prompted to destroy the documents for fear that their content might prove deleterious to his father's reputation. Fear of their unauthorised publication certainly surfaces in his explanation.[39] Equally, mental instability may have played a

[37] *Notes and Queries*, xi (1855), 261. Also put to the flame were Stewart's most complete manuscript of the lectures on political economy and 'one hundred and seventy pages of the continuation of the *Dissertation prefixed to the Encyclopædia Britannica*' (Ibid., 261).

[38] Ibid., 261. In a footnote to this passage added by the recipient Mr Henry Foss observed that 'I believe there was not any foundation for the Colonel's suspicions respecting his locks having been picked' (Ibid., 261).

[39] Ironically, Dugald Stewart bemoaned Adam Smith's destruction of his own papers. He argued this act constituted an 'irreparable injury to letters' motivated by 'an

part.[40] His fear that his house was being broken into by government authorities suggests that paranoia was overcoming common sense.[41]

Despite the missing documents, two things help us in our attempts to uncover Stewart's political affiliations. First, as part of his teaching of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, he concluded his course with a consideration of political philosophy. Secondly, the attempt to puzzle out the narrative of Stewart's teachings is aided by the survival of a number of the notebooks students transcribed in his class, which date from throughout his period in the chair.

The earliest of the notebooks dates from the year that Stewart first replaced Adam Ferguson in the task of moral philosopher. Across the course of the academic year 1778–9, Stewart drew heavily on his predecessor's lectures, the headings of which Ferguson had published in 1773 as the *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*.[42] Stewart's copy of this text includes a minimal amount of marginalia from the 1784 session, but its content – dates of lectures, emendations to the phrasing and the occasional additional topic heading, all indicate that Stewart was grounding his course in that of Ferguson.[43] Stewart's treatment of politics offered a scheme which ran from jurisprudence, through property, contracts, domestic slavery, laws of defence, casuistry, politics, population, riches, political law, liberty, penal law and national happiness. Similarly, Ferguson offered a diet that moved from jurisprudence through property, contracts, defence, casuistry, politics and national happiness.

Notably, while those headings used solely by Stewart – domestic slavery, liberty and penal law – are all suggestive of a more radical political flavour, he left to one side such offerings as 'the distribution of office fitted to the constitution' and the 'importance of political institutions' as well as shortening

excessive solicitude in the author about his posthumous reputation' (Stewart, *Life of Smith* in Hamilton *Works of Stewart*, x, 74). On Smith's concern for posterity, see Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge, 1996), 35-56.

[40] On Matthew Stewart's illness see Macintyre, *Dugald Stewart*, 215–16, 230–3.

[41] Further evidence of Matthew Stewart's paranoia in this regard can be seen in his admission that the tenth destroyed item he lists is 'A work on which I have been labouring for the last four years and of which I had completed as much as would have printed 2000 quarto pages. It was very nearly finished; and was in my humble appreciation of more real literary value than all the rest I have destroyed. I long since (in consequence of finding my locks picked and my papers read), destroyed all that I had put on paper on government, legislation and political economy, which were for many years almost my exclusive study' (*Notes and Queries*, xi (1855), 262).

[42] Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (London, 1994).

[43] EUL JA 4001.

Ferguson's extensive discussion of virtue and duty under the general heading of casuistry. The content of Stewart's meditations was predominately descriptive, with the mechanics of political association being outlined, and the thinking of a number of pre-eminent thinkers being summarised.[44] Even when it came to treating of his predecessor's work, it was the descriptive side of Ferguson, the reader of travelogues and writer of conjectural history, and not the prescriptive moralist, who exerted his audience to avoid luxury and celebrated military valour, Stewart dwelt upon.[45]

More important for our concerns here are the records the student Josias Walker kept of Stewart's sallies into current affairs. Most current of all was the American crisis, then in progress, and one can only be startled, given the current picture of Stewart's political hue, to find him vociferous and enthusiastic about the progress of the rebellion. In a series of digressions from the central thrust of his text, Stewart became dramatically prescriptive. Under the rubric of contracts, for example, he noted how: 'At the origin of political societies, the people stipulate, on the one hand, to yield obedience to one individual and he stipulates, on the other, to preserve as far as lies in his power, their rights and privileges'.[46] This led him to assert that

> the sovereign, as an individual, in no other instance, possesses a right to the obedience of his subjects, but only from this, that society has transferred to him the power competent to them for preserving regularity and order in the state, so that it is absurd to say the right of a sovereign is at all founded either on original compact or virtual consent.[47]

In opening up the thorny question of the origin and extent of a sovereign's power Stewart was consciously entering a long running debate within political thought. However, this debate had more than theoretical interest. It was a debate with direct and obvious implications in the wake of both the 1745

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[44] Among the central figures from which Stewart drew were Montesquieu and David Hume.

[45] On Ferguson, see amongst much else: Lisa Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht, 2006); Christopher J. Finlay, 'Rhetoric and Citizenship in Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*', *History of Political Thought*, 27 (2006), 27–49.

[46] Josias Walker, 'Abbreviations from Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Delivered by Dugald Stewart, professor of Mathematics, vol. 2, 1778/9', EUL, Gen.2023, 350–1.

[47] Ibid., 352.

Jacobite Rising and the recent convulsions in the colonies.[48] That Stewart was fully aware of the immediate context in which he was speaking was made apparent when he explained that, to his mind:

> when we have a persuasion that the present state of government is inconsistent with the natural liberty of men and that society would be better by being thrown into anarchy it is not only lawful, but it is incumbent on us to resist the reigning power. Perhaps the rebellion of our own American colonies is the only instance where people have taken arms merely on speculative grounds.[49]

He ended this observation by stating his optimism in the rationality of political activism. In his view, 'There is very little danger that men should err on the side of rebellion without a just cause'.[50] He was therefore using the office Ferguson's engagement with the American colonists afforded him to support the revolutionaries.

Stewart did not end his controversial remarks there. Instead he tempted controversy by linking the cause of the American separatists with the actions of the celebrated parliamentary upheavals of the seventeenth century. He argued that the historical legitimacy offered to the early events could not be discarded in casting judgement over the actions of the latter. However, in doing so, Stewart apparently could not resist courting further outrage, by fusing the Whiggish article of faith, that 1688 represented a victory for British liberty, with the far more contentious assertion that the Interregnum period of Cromwellian dominion was also justifiable in the circumstances. For Stewart, history told of how, 'One of our tyrannical monarchs was slain by his subjects; another, on account of his stretch of power, was deprived of his crown. It is the Revolution from which we may date the era of British liberty'.[51]

Stewart elucidated this reading of history by dwelling on the shared thematic of Stuart absolutist pretensions:

> During the reign of James I of England, it was a fashionable doctrine to say that the power of the king was immediately derived from God and that to God alone he was answerable for the discharge of his duty. This

[48] On the importance of the Jacobite Rising of 1745 in shaping the political views of the Moderate party see Sher, *Church and University*, 37–44.

[49] Walker, 'Abbreviations, 1778/9', 353.

[50] Ibid., 354.

[51] Ibid., 355–6.

> childish opinion runs through all the writings of that truly contemptible monarch. Such doctrines are too absurd to be believed by any but those who think that the deity intended that the subjects of a state should be transferred from king to king as the cattle of a farm from proprietor to proprietor. But it is our fate to live in an age when the rights of men are better known. To the allowance of resisting despotic kings we owe our freedom.[52]

This served not only to fuse 1649 with 1688 but also placed Stewart within the fold of the Whig party in its resistance to the, albeit by 1778 impotent, Jacobite threat. Moreover, it linked 1688 to the American colonies' assertion that their British liberties were being intruded upon by Westminster's brand of parliamentary absolutism. The implication was clear: to resist Stuart claims to absolute power was to side with the American Revolution.

Instead of the absolute pretensions of either monarch or parliament, Stewart offered a contractual theory of the state, in which the association of governed and government served the interest of both parties. Either side could, however, renege on the contract through deserting their responsibilities in favour of greater power. As these remarks came within a lecture series, Stewart used the analogy of the teacher-student relationship when trying to explain to his students the form of enlightened, disinterested leadership he looked for in politicians. For Stewart, political leadership 'rather resembles the right of a tutor to command his pupils for the good of the latter'.[53] In the context of the upheavals in the British Empire, Stewart's radical vision of the state as a continuing contractual association linked him with rebellion. He was not to shake off this inclination in the years that followed.

By 1789–90, the political ebullience evident in his earlier remarks on America had given way to apparent enthusiasm for the English constitution.

> In the theory of our constitution, the three powers which comprise the legislature are always supposed different from one another and in constitutional language it is understood that the king may put a negative upon any bill he thinks proper, but this in practice can't be done now where the parliament agrees to or wishes a particular law.[54]

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[52] Ibid., 354–5.

[53] Ibid., 353.

[54] Anonymous, 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy delivered by Professor Dugald Stewart Session 1789–90', EUL Gen.1987–9, 1989, n.p.

Stewart's political affiliations were by no means so simplistically patriotic however, and Stewart was faced with the question of how to handle political philosophy in the light of the events across the Channel. By the time he turned from teaching epistemology and ethics to political philosophy, it was already early 1790 and the French crisis had taken a distinctly violent turn. By the spring of 1790 Paris had already seen the October days and the rise of popular unrest. Within the context of the lecture course, Stewart was far from wholly complimentary about the British system. He drew a crucial distinction between the constitution as it was to be understood ideally, and the actuality of its application. In fact, he identified a crucial development in the eighteenth century that confused any simple loyalism. As the anonymous student noted:

> The above are the notes from Mr Stewart's lectures in which he gives us the theoretical view of our constitution to be found in the works of De Lolme, Blackstone and other speculative politicians, which notes however are not regular or full as these authors have treated the subject at such length. But the above is only the theory, as it by no means applies to our government as presently constituted.[55]

As he then rhetorically inquired: 'What then do we mean by our constitution, or is it merely a chimera?'[56]

In raising this question Stewart was following Hume and Montesquieu, arguing that the abstract distribution of power was complicated by the empirical evolution of power brokerage. Crucial for Stewart was the rise in the power exercised by the House of Commons, which had grown dramatically since the seventeenth century. As he explained to his students:

> Our constitution does exist compounded of three parts and these all influence one another, but this is done in a different manner from

[55] Anonymous, 'Lectures by Dugald Stewart', n.p. The reference to De Lolme is to Jean Louis de Lolme (1740–1806), self-proclaimed 'citizen of Geneva' (perhaps an echo of Rousseau) who published *Constituion de l'Angleterre ou État du gouvernement anglais comparé avec la forme républicaine et avec les autres monarchies de l'Europe*, translated into English as *Constitution of England: or an Account of the English Government in which it is Compared both with the Republican Form and the other Monarchies in Europe* (1775). Stewart owned a copy of the 1777 edition. This work is also referenced, and quoted, in Adam Ferguson's pamphlet on Price: *Remarks on Dr Price's Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty &c.* (London, 1776), 53–4. I would like to thank Dr Seán Patrick Donlan for this reference.

[56] Anonymous, 'Lectures by Dugald Stewart', n.p.

> that which is described above. They are all connected in the House of Commons, which is the great theatre of business and where they operate effectively though imperceptibly and silently.[57]

The division and separation of powers into legislative, judicial and executive was meaningless when influence over the Commons determined the effective shape of legislation. Thus, it was incumbent on the other powers to enforce their will through influence, patronage or, to be even more provocative, corruption:

> The king's influence in this House is supported from the seats in Parliament, which he has it in his power to bestow from his patronage. The great and wealthy peers of this kingdom have influence here from their family connections and the patronage which they have, and the aristocratical [sic.] ideas preferred by many of the members themselves who are men of great wealth lend also to support the aristocracy.[58]

This development had undermined the independence of the Commons itself and had radically altered its internal composition. As Stewart remarked:

> The aristocracy, then, is not to be found in this House [of Lords]. Let us on the other hand attend to the House of Commons. This has also undergone a very great change since former times. In it are now to be found the most wealthy subjects and men of the most ancient families. It consists of men of large fortune and the eldest sons of dukes are admitted members of it because they in the eye of the law are reckoned only Commoners. There are also in it a few wealthy merchants, some aspiring lawyers, some of the younger sons of noble families and a few men of splendid abilities.[59]

Stewart was thereby comparing the operation of the constitution with a theoretical ideal, wherein the balance of powers between executive, judiciary and legislature equated to the offices of monarch, peerage and commoner. But the actual constitution was subverted by influence and patronage.

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

Faced with external threat, such internal criticism could seem subtly subversive. However, this was not Stewart's announced intention. In what seems to be a self-conscious turnabout, he proposed that the rise of the Commons to political pre-eminence and the concomitant search for influence over that chamber by the other elements of the constitution was not a negative development. Rather,

> This is much more preferable as it prevents those harsh shocks, which would be the direct consequence of the use of the checks which have been specified. England has from its insular situation a particular safeguard of her liberties. The executive power has no such strength to oppress the subject as it would have were it necessary to keep always on foot large standing armies to defend the nation against foreign enemies. Our country is chiefly defended by our fleet and the armies therefore which we keep need be but small.[60]

Stewart's conclusion that the rise of the House of Commons to a position of centrality within the system might protect the state from the kind of shocks to the system that destroyed their French neighbour may be read in a number of ways. It may quite simply be an attempt to hide his political loyalties, even in the classroom. In this, he is laying claim to loyalism, even while undermining its justification. Less suspiciously, we might understand Stewart to have been arguing in favour of creating a parliamentary system in which all the interests of the nation come together in a unicameral system and argue their case, as had occurred in France with the creation of a National Assembly. In this, the French were more than catching up with British developments; they were overtaking them, if only in the realm of constitutional theory. Vitally, this reading precludes the necessity of a revolution in Britain as it had in practice developed a similar unicameral system. This second reading rests upon Stewart understanding the British constitution as intrinsically reformist in character. It sees Stewart less as the advocate of real Whiggery, although his fear of standing armies echoes that political rhetoric, or as a proponent of contractarianism as he was in 1778; rather he here propounds an gradualist theory of political change.

Whichever way we read the conclusion of the 1790 lectures, by 1793 the compromise between French radicalism and British constitutionalism was no longer available to Stewart. January saw the epochal event of the execu-

[60] Anonymous, 'Lectures by Dugald Stewart', n.p.

tion of Louis XVI, an event that had a seismic effect on public opinion.[61] Development in Scotland equally precluded temporising. Harvests had failed in 1792, as they were to do again in 1795 and 1796, creating the impetus for a radicalisation of political opinion.[62] Even before this, January 1792 saw the foundation of the London Corresponding Society and, in June of that year, a wave of popular unrest. This reached its zenith in Edinburgh on 4–6 June, with an extensive riot spawned from celebrations of the King's birthday. The crowd targeted the Lord Advocate, Robert Dundas, surrounding his house in George Square. The discontent spread to Aberdeen, Dundee, Lanark, Peebles and Perth with effigies of the loathed Dundas being publicly burnt.[63] The reforming movement, the Friends of the People in Scotland, was founded on 26 July 1792. The first National Convention was held in Edinburgh on 11–13 December; itself occurring on the cusp of a second wave of unrest which saw Trees of Liberty planted in Perth, Aberdeen and Dundee, as well as a number of smaller hamlets and villages. Although the Friends were publicly moderate in their demands for reform of the voting system, elements were more volatile. These found expression at the Convention, with the temperamental Thomas Muir taking the lead. He read out an address from the United Irish movement, in all probability drafted by Stewart's college friend, William Drennan. Above all, the opening paragraph caused consternation:

> We [the United Irish movement in Dublin] take the liberty of addressing you in the spirit of civic union, in the fellowship of a just and common cause. We greatly rejoice that the spirit of freedom moves over the face of Scotland; that light seems to break from the chaos of her internal government; and that a country so respectable for attainments in science, in arts, and in arms, for men of literary eminence, for the intelligence and morality of her people, now acts from a conviction of a union between virtue, letters and liberty, and now rises to distinction; not by a calm, contented, secret wish for a reform in parliament, but by openly, actively and urgently *willing* it, with the unity and energy of

[61] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796* (Oxford, 2000), assesses the impact of this event in Britain.

[62] The best overview of the 1790s political scene in Scotland in print remains Henry W. Meikle, *Scotland and the French Revolution* (1912; London, 1969). See also, John D. Brims, 'The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution, Ph.D. (University of Edinburgh, 1983).

[63] On the wave of rioting in Scotland sparked by events in Edinburgh, see Bob Harris, 'Political Protests in the Year of Liberty, 1792' in Bob Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 49–78.

> an embodied nation. We rejoice that you do not consider yourselves as merged and melted down into another country, but that in this great national question you are still Scotland – the land where Buchanan wrote, and Fletcher spoke and Wallace fought.[64]

In the wake of the Convention, the authorities sanctioned a policing crackdown of which Muir was an early victim. He was arrested on 2 January 1793 and charged with reading this address (a charge he admitted while denying it was criminal in intent), with making seditious and inflammatory speeches and with circulating Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (both of which he denied). A bill favouring County Reform was defeated in the House of Commons the following month, but this only aided the radical cause. Those who were sympathetic to reform were forced to accept that the Pittite administration had little or no desire to meet their demands, and many were driven to the conclusion that only a more forceful expression of discontent would alter the government's mind. By the time of the second National Convention, held in Edinburgh at the end April 1793, there were some 116 delegates representing twenty-eight towns and villages. There had only been twelve represented at the first convention. Nor did this radical mobilisation did go unnoticed in more conservative circles. The foundation of the Friends was countered by the creation of the Goldsmith Hall Association; an ultra-loyalist organisation, the declared intention of which was the defence of the established constitution.

The tension was heightened further by the trials of the radicals subsequently known as the 'Scottish Martyrs'. They began by dealing with Muir, the case occurring in Edinburgh on 30 and 31 August 1793. Many of the city's notables expressed serious reservations concerning the trial's procedure. Lord Cockburn, for example, remarked 'this is one of the cases the memory whereof never perisheth. History cannot let its injustice alone'.[65] But despite these sentiments, Muir was found guilty on all counts and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years.[66] Further trials followed in September

[64] [William Drennan], 'Address from the Society of United Irishmen in Dublin, 1792' in Elaine McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1994), 248. The full text is reproduced in Ibid., 248–52. On the response to this address and the manner in which it opened fissures over the nationalist-unionist divide within the reform movement, see John D. Brims, 'The Scottish "Jacobins", Scottish Nationalism and the British Union' in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286–1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), 247–65.

[65] Henry Cockburn quoted by Ken Logue, 'Thomas Muir' in Gordon Menzies (ed.), *History is my Witness* (London, 1976), 25.

[66] On Muir's highly picaresque subsequent career see Marjorie Masson and J. F. Jameson,

1793 and into January and March of 1794, with Thomas F. Palmer, William Skirving, and the English representatives at the Scottish convention, Maurice Margarot and Joseph Gerrald, all following Muir into banishment. These trials marked a tragic watershed in the development of radical politics in Scotland.[67]

In the lectures of the academic session 1793–4, Stewart abandoned the distinction between theory and practice that characterised his earlier reflections. The student Archibald Bell only recorded a brisk and uncontroversial analysis of the working of the British constitution (it should be noted that only in this set of notes was the constitution referred to as British rather than English).[68] Although again acknowledging his debt to Montesquieu, Stewart's rhetoric now implied that even a celebrated French thinker, and an enlightened author, thought the British constitution exemplary. It was a model upon which French politics could and should draw:

> Indeed, one is at a loss to discover the tendency and scope of this celebrated author's [Montesquieu] observations upon the government of his own country. Sometimes he seems to be actuated by a sincere admiration and respect for it, acquired probably by early education and prejudice. And sometimes one would imagine that he meant to suggest to his countrymen the idea of a better, by his describing many of its defects, suggesting amendments and contrasting it with the numerous excellencies of the British constitution. [69]

If even the French thought well of the British constitution, the subtext might read, the British authorities need not fear revolution. In this vein, Stewart offered an analysis of the French Revolution as a consequence of a specifically

'The Odyssey of Thomas Muir', *The American Historical Review*, xxix (1923), 49–72.

[67] As W. Hamish Fraser has written: 'The authorities' response was devastatingly harsh. There was a series of arrests of reformers in the Spring of 1793, and when that failed to deter continuing demands for reform, leading activists, Muir, [Thomas Fyshe] Palmer and [William] Skirving, together with London reformers who had ventured north of the border, [Maurice] Margarot and [Joseph] Gerrald, were despatched to Australia. The tiny group of insurrectionists around Robert Watt was easily broken up and imitators were further deterred by his public hanging. The political reform movement was effectively nipped in the bud'. W. Hamish Fraser, 'Patterns of Protest' in T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (eds), *People and Society in Scotland, Volume One: 1760–1830* (Edinburgh, 1988), 284–5.

[68] Arch Bell, 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy delivered in the University of Edinburgh by Professor Dugald Stewart in the years 1793–4', EUL Dc.4.97, 350.

[69] Ibid., 348.

French variant of absolutist politics confronting French mores of liberality. 'The authority of the king of France', he announced, 'is not restrained by law more than the most absolute despotism, but merely by the particular customs, manners, institutions and fortuitous circumstances of the country which form but a weak bulwark against the encroachments of arbitrary power'.[70] Whether this amounted to an argument for the irrationality of British Jacobinism or against the state repression of political expression fuelled by a silly fear of revolution is again a matter for interpretation.

The second possibility is given credibility by Stewart's reaction to the suspension of Habeas Corpus in April and May 1794. In the weeks that the Habeas Corpus law was being debated, Stewart deferred the normal course of his observations on the workings of the constitution to reflect upon the importance of that law in sustaining the liberty of the British subject. He saw three central planks in the constitutional defence of the subject's happiness: 'first, the right of private property, secondly, the right of personal security and thirdly, the right of personal liberty'.[71] Of this final element, he observed that 'the great preservative of it in England is the famous Habeas Corpus Act passed in the 31st year of the reign of Charles II'. In a footnote he then cited the equivalent Scottish legislation, namely, 'the Act for preventing wrongous imprisonment . . . 1700 c6'.[72]

This was not the first time that Stewart had noted the importance of the law. In 1790, in the midst of the initial crisis created by the French Revolution, Stewart had pronounced that: 'The Habeas Corpus Act is most important to the liberties of England'.[73] He even fired a warning shot across the bows of the political nation, recalling that while:

> On great emergencies the Habeas Corpus Act may be suspended, as the laws of Rome were by the appointment of a dictator; but our constitution is superior to Rome in this respect: that the king's ministers are accountable when that Act has been suspended by the sovereign whereas the Roman dictators were never accountable.[74]

This rhetorical tactic, celebrating the constitution in a manner that implied the

[70] Ibid., 348.
[71] Ibid., 357.
[72] Ibid., 359.
[73] Anonymous, 'Lectures on Moral Philosophy delivered by Professor Dugald Stewart Session 1789–90', EUL Gen.1987–9, 1989, n.p.
[74] Ibid.

validity of radical opinion, was a central ploy in Stewart's avoidance of political censure.

Despite this precedent, the political circumstance at the time of speaking in 1794 ensured that Stewart was taking a serious risk in placing such importance on the existence of a Habeas Corpus Act. More than that, he did not limit himself to describing the Act's operations, quoting Blackstone as he did, but availed of the moment to offer some observations on its suspension. He informed his students that:

> This act can never be suspended except in cases of the most urgent necessity by a solemn act of the legislative body, which sometimes, for a very limited space, permits the executive power to imprison suspected persons at will, and without assigning any reason for so doing. This measure is similar to the 'Senatus consultum ultima necessitatis' of the Romans, which preceded the election of a dictator and is adopted with similar caution.[75]

These remarks were given a more acceptable gloss when Stewart again cited Blackstone, this time on the dangers implicit in suspension of the Act. Stewart noted that '"the experiment ought only to be tried," says Blackstone, "in cases of extreme emergency, and in these the nation only parts with its liberty for a while in order to preserve it for ever".'[76]

In the eyes of the authorities, however, that emergency was already upon the state. In October 1795 Treason and Sedition Acts were passed and a further crackdown on reforming organisations followed. As John Brims has stated:

> The prompt and hard-headed response of the authorities, in forcibly dispersing the [British] Convention, arresting its leaders, partly suspending the operation of the Act anent Wrongous Imprisonment of 1701, and encouraging the loyalist well-to-do to form Volunteer Companies in defence of the constitution, produced its intended result. A dispirited, harassed and apparently divided Scottish radical movement broke up in disarray. The extension to Scotland of the infamously repressive 'Two Acts' of 1795, which greatly expanded the scope of the treason laws and placed draconian restrictions on the right of political assembly, was therefore not only politically unnecessary but also dangerous in that it

[75] Bell, 'Moral Philosophy', 360

[76] Ibid., 360.

> virtually forced any future revival of radical activity in Scotland to be directed along revolutionary lines. And so it fell out.[77]

It was not until 1797 that the government became aware of a renewed threat of subversion, when they identified the emergence of United Scotsmen.[78] Yet, although tremors from the French Revolution had shaken British politics as far back as 1789, it was in Ireland that the political ground really shook.

Although the United Irishman had gone underground in the wake of their suppression in 1794, they had radicalised in the darkness. Re-emerging into the political daylight on the morning of 23 May 1798, the mail-coaches running out of Dublin were halted as a signal to countryside cells that the long-impending rising had begun.[79] Although the assault on Dublin was an aborted failure, the rebellion in the southeast of the country was born vigorous and violent. To British observers it was clear that the United Irish rising indicated how Jacobinism was rupturing the fabric of loyalism. The bloody turmoil of the uprising, and the late intervention of a French invasion force, highlighted the threat Jacobinism posed to the security and prosperity of the ruling élite, and although the rising was repressed, the impact of that summer of discontent and disaffection was profound, leading to the collapse of the Irish executive and the Anglo-Irish Union of 1800.[80]

Throughout this most tempestuous of periods, a student named J. Small was attending Stewart's classes. Small attended three successive sessions, those of 1796–7, 1797–8 and 1798–9, and kept lengthy notes on what he heard. It would seem that Stewart was unusually reticent on matters of political import. The notes under the heading 'Of the English Constitution' are extremely short and record Stewart as observing that: 'It is unnecessary here to discuss this subject as it has been treated at so great a length by Montesquieu, Blackstone

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[77] Brims, 'The Scottish "Jacobins"' in Mason, *Scotland and England*, 260.

[78] For a brisk assessment of the United Scotsmen, vis-à-vis their Irish counterparts, see Elaine W. McFarland, 'Scottish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Thistle and the Shamrock' in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (eds), *Eighteenth-Century Scotland: New Perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), 287–92.

[79] For a recent and comprehensive survey of the event and the scholarship which now surrounds it, see Thomas Bartlett, David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan (eds), *1798: A Bicentennial Perspective* (Dublin, 2003).

[80] For two rather different attempts to connect the Anglo-Irish Union of 1800 with the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707 see Alexander Murdoch, 'Henry Dundas, Scotland and the Union with Ireland, 1792–1801' in Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 125–39 and Michael Brown, '*The Injured lady* and her British Problem' in Michael Brown, Patrick M. Geoghegan and James Kelly (eds), *The Irish Act of Union, 1800: Bicentennial Essays* (Dublin, 2003), 37–49.

and De Lolme'. Stewart was thus falling back upon the published authorities, venturing only to proclaim 'the English constitution is unquestionably entitled to a preference to all that have been realised among mankind. It has given birth to wise systems of political economy'.[81]

This lacuna fits the pattern of Stewart's increasing need for caution in expressing radical ideas. In the most intemperate of political climates, he was forced into a diplomatic silence, merely pointing to the most orthodox of authorities before quickly proceeding to the safer ground of political economy. Indeed, this increase in prudence was implicit in his decision to offer a series of lectures on political economy in the academic year 1800–1, the political implications of which he explained to his class some three years later. As he told George Strickland's class in 1804:

> It occurred to me during the political changes in Europe that the lectures in which we are about to be engaged would form a useful addition to the studies of this place. The subject has for some years engaged a considerable share of my attention, not only as a branch prescribed to me by my academical duty, but as being peculiarly adopted to the days in which we live.[82]

In the notes taken in the academic session 1801–2, James Bridges supplied further evidence of this trend towards political discretion. Typically, where Stewart did risk a controversial assertion, he placed it carefully within the context of a critique of a French thinker. Thus, Stewart assailed Montesquieu for collapsing the distinction between a limited monarchy and an absolute one. Organising governments into the categories democracy, aristocracy and monarchy, rather than Montesquieu's division into republic, monarchy and despotism, he remarked: 'Montesquieu here distinguishes monarchy from despotism, and the distinction is solid and important. It may, however, bear dispute whether limited monarchy (which is Montesquieu's meaning in the word monarchy) should have a place among the simple forms of government'.[83] The consequence of such punctilious rearrangement was dramatic. As Stewart explained, in his subsequent lectures he 'shall employ the word monar-

[81] J. Small, 'Class of Moral Philosophy, 1796/7, 1797/8, 1798/9', EUL MS Dc.8.143, 157.

[82] George Strickland, 'Notes on Political Economy from Professor Stewart's Lectures at Edinburgh, November 1803–April 1804', NLS MS 3771, 4.

[83] James Bridges, 'Notes from Mr Stewart's Lectures on Moral Philosophy read in the University of Edinburgh, Winter 1801–02', EUL Dc.8.143, 387.

chy to express *despotic* monarchy'.[84] He remained, in other words, sympathetic towards the French Revolution.

Stewart protested, however, that rather than favouring the regicide and the republic, he supported the mixed constitution that he saw in operation in Britain, claiming for it 'a preference over all the governments which have yet been realised in the history of mankind'.[85] His rationale for this assessment was, paradoxically, offered in an extended criticism of the idea of the division of powers found in Montesquieu's celebration of the English constitution. For Stewart, the constitution was to be celebrated not on theoretical grounds but on practical ones, for an error 'seems to arise from too literal an interpretation of the theory of our government'.[86] Indeed, were Montesquieu's division of powers fully effective it would have fallen foul of the fate its critics proposed for it:

> Several foreign political writers [urge] that this division must be a mere nullity or that it must expose the political system to perpetual shocks and convulsions. To those who live under this government and have an opportunity of seeing the futility of this objection [however] it would be unnecessary to enter into a formal examination.[87]

Instead of a formal division of powers, Stewart again suggested that the constitution operated through a system of informal influence upon the House of Commons:

> in the House of Commons, there are individuals of the eldest families in the country. We there find men who are superior to some of the members of the House of Peers . . . a few of the most eminent merchants, a few lords, a great many sons and younger brothers of peers, many country gentlemen of independent fortune, a few individuals of splendid abilities who are introduced through the influence of the king or of the great families. Thus, the king and the peers must possess a great degree of indirect influence.[88]

The double meaning of this defence of patronage and hidden influence was made immediately clear in a revealing analysis. For Stewart, 'if . . . the king

[84] Ibid., 387.
[85] Ibid., 416.
[86] Ibid., 412.
[87] Ibid., 412.
[88] Ibid., 415.

and peers had no influence over them, the government would be a democracy'.[89] Britain therefore was already close to the desired outcome of the French revolutionary activists.

By this stage, the revolution itself had lost much of its radical impetus and Britain was readjusting its internal relations in response to the threat posed by the United Britons in their various manifestations. On 1 January 1801, the parliamentary unification of Britain and Ireland came into force, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. In such a context, this kind of political analysis, celebrating the English constitution for failing to live up to its ideals was about as polemical as a public figure such as Stewart might attempt. However, by the session of 1806–7, when John Borthwick was attending the class and taking copious notes in his untidy hand, Stewart was apparently feeling more secure in his treatment of politics. Borthwick certainly believed that his task of transcribing the notes was of value and, significantly, he drew the reader's attention in particular to the political observations concluding the course:

> I have the vanity to hope that here and there throughout the following manuscript (especially after page 282) [the section of political society starts on page 283] many hints at least will be found, which tho' incompetent to familiarise him with the subject, will afford suggestions for the establishment of speculations concerning it.[90]

In this section Stewart provided a series of observations on the peculiar advantages of the English constitution. He once again denied that the English constitution was non-existent, comparing it to the rules of grammar in the English language: although the rules might change over time through common usage, this did not imply that there were no rules. Linguistic chaos was as improbable as political anarchy.

Most substantially, Stewart used this series of lectures to reflect on the nature of the social stability underpinning the English political system. By this time, he was sounding increasingly conservative in his treatment of politics and society. He recognised the importance of rank and station and contended that 'that intimate and regular connection which subsists between the different ranks in society in England constitutes another excellence of

[89] Ibid., 416.

[90] John Borthwick, 'Notes from a Course of Lectures on Moral Philosophy delivered by Dugald Stewart', EUL Gen.843, inside cover.

the constitution'.[91] This was more than a sociological observation, for he pronounced that this social stability was in large part a product of the legal circumstances surrounding nobility:

> As we remarked before, it is only the single representative of a peerage that is in the eye of the law considered noble. In the course of a few generations the descendants of the other parts of the family are soon lost in the body of the people and form a link betwixt these two parts of the inhabitants. In some other countries all the branches of the family are supposed noble, which forms an insurmountable barrier between the two classes.[92]

Stewart was here critiquing the French system of nobility, and by implication, pronouncing in favour of the English alternative. Yet, he was also subtly justifying the French Revolution. The nobility there had produced social division and political disaffection. Though well disguised, there still existed a radical hue to his thought.

The echo of his youthful enthusiasm was also to be heard in Stewart's observation on the legacy that England had granted to its former colonies in America. 'Some of the new states beyond the Atlantic', he remarked, 'have shown great wisdom and sagacity in forming their new constitutions. The legislators have made some good observations on the English constitution from which they have certainly borrowed a great deal'.[93] Here, once again, a statement apparently in line with orthodox celebration of the English system might be read differently, offering support to revolutionary ambitions. That the United States had made actual the ideals of the English constitution was one of the stock arguments of the defenders of the American Revolution.

Stewart was careful not to leave the matter there, arguing that the English system was the actualisation of an ideal, for as he extolled it: 'it is the first [constitution] which has realised the theoretical government of the most sagacious of the ancient philosophers'.[94] He concluded his treatment in a similar vein, offering a grand peroration on the value of the political system then found in Britain. 'It was an observation of Mr Hume fifty years ago', Stewart recalled,

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[91] Ibid., 438.
[92] Ibid., 438–9.
[93] Ibid., 339.
[94] Ibid., 428–9.

> and we may now repeat it with that confidence that experience warrants, that the rigours of monarchy, the deceit and oppression of aristocracy, the tumult and violence of democracy have not been felt, but under the mild, uniform and equitable act of our great constitutional machine, learning, arts, and general improvement have astonishingly flourished and agriculture, commerce and manufacture have been practised and advanced with unparalleled success.[95]

It would seem then that Stewart was, over the course of the 1790s, systematically retreating from his youthful enthusiasm for radical politics. It was a stately withdrawal, temporising and qualifying his opinions, omitting and avoiding ignitable issues. Even now some of his original attitudes could be found hidden in the thicket of orthodox opinion. The advocate of regicide in the 1770s and the sympathiser of the French Revolution in the 1790s, had, by the early 1800s, become an able defender of the status quo, a soft-spoken adherent to the British system of government.

In this, Stewart would appear to be in line, not with the idea of a stable, homogenous, and undiluted Scottish loyalty to king and country, but with Mark Philp's identification of the frailty of political radicalism.[96] This offers us a reading of an increasingly reactionary Stewart, withdrawing his favour from the French Revolution as it radicalised, committed regicide and resisted Britain at war. Yet, even this picture requires revision however, for as Annabel Patterson has rightly recognised,

> people whose lives have been dominated by principle will often, at some stage, make moves that show them to be captives of self-interest in one of its most naked forms . . . But imperfect agents of principle do not render principle itself non-existent or nonviable. On the contrary, their behaviour tends to clarify principle's longevity and rigour.[97]

So it is with Stewart.

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[95] Ibid., 441–2.

[96] Mark Philp, 'The Fragmented Ideology of Reform' in idem (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991), 50–78.

[97] Annabel Patterson, *Nobody's Perfect: A New Whig Interpretation of History* (Yale, 2002), 18–19.

V The Correspondence: Stewart as a Radical

All this caution was not without its purpose. While as Anand Chitnis recognises, 'Stewart's politics were openly Whig', the expression of this view needed to be carefully controlled if his more radical instincts were not to lead him into trouble.[98] Indeed, as evidence from the student notebooks from the period indicates, this caution was not complete, and Stewart occasionally alluded to his sympathies for the radical cause in the semi-formal environment of the classroom. This was even more obviously the case when it came to the private realm of personal correspondence.

This is hinted at in the account we have of Mathew Stewart's destructive bonfire of his father's papers. Among the documents engulfed by the flames was

> an account of the life and writings of Dugald Stewart, together with all his correspondence. Among others with Madame de Staël, La Fayette, Jefferson and many other literary and well-known characters, French and English; with anecdotes from his journals kept during his residence in Paris, before and at the commencement of the Revolution, and during his visits to that city with Lord Lauderdale, during the Fox administration.[99]

As this suggests, Stewart was both in contact with a number of central political figures in the era, and a witness in the early 1790s to a number of crucial events in Paris, which he regularly visited during the summer months. For example, he spent the summer and early autumn of 1789 in Paris, where he kept the august company of Thomas Jefferson, for Jefferson later reminisced how, 'it is now thirty-five years since I had the great pleasure of becoming acquainted with you in Paris, and since we saw together Louis XVI led in triumph by his people through the streets of his capital' – a reference to the October days.[100]

From Paris, Stewart reported to his Scottish friends on the tempestuous turn in political events with a mixture of anxiety and enthusiasm.[101] On 10

[98] Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment and Early Victorian English Society*, 23.

[99] *Notes and Queries*, xi (1855), 261–2.

[100] Thomas Jefferson to Dugald Stewart, Monticello, 26 April 1824. It would appear that the two men engaged in a correspondence of some duration, as in *Notes and Queries*, ix (1855), his son listed Jefferson among the authors whose letters he had destroyed. See also Hamilton, *Works of Stewart*, viii, xi.

[101] On this trip see Macintyre, *Dugald Stewart*, 71–4.

May 1789, he wrote to Archibald Alison, author of the celebrated *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), of his concern at

> the injudicious choice which the *Tiers Etat* have in general made of their deputies. By far the majority of them are lawyers, who are by no means respected by the people of rank in this country, and who are certainly of all men the least qualified for new-modelling a constitution. Besides these, however, there are a few very respectable men of letters, and a considerable number of the most enlightened and liberal among the nobility.[102]

Ironically, given the trouble mention of the man was later to cause Stewart, he here told Alison of his regret that 'the marquis de Condorcet was not returned by the noblesse, and it is doubtful whether he will be able to obtain a seat at all'.[103]

By 27 November 1791 Stewart was informing Alison that 'the affairs of France . . . are going on more and more every day to my satisfaction'. He explained how a peculiarly French set of circumstances had produced the Revolution, and that it now demanded patience and understanding from foreign observers. In a passage echoing the theories of Montesquieu, Stewart relayed to Alison how he believed that

> in a country where the manners have been formed under an arbitrary government, and where some time must elapse before the ideas of the people are completely changed, I am not certain if it is not fortunate, on the whole, to secure to the executive power such a weight as may consolidate the different parts of so vast a system, and may preserve the people in that tranquillity which is necessary to enable the constitution to produce its full effects on their industry and their morals.

However, he was still able to assert, in the face of the gathering evidence, that 'The little disorders which may now and then occur in a country, where things in general are in so good a train, are of very inconsiderable importance'.[104]

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[102] Dugald Stewart to Archibald Alison, Paris, 10 May 1789 quoted in Veitch, 'Memoir', cxxiv.

[103] Ibid., cxxv. Condorcet was successful in his attempt to gain a seat.

[104] Dugald Stewart to Archibald Alison, Edinburgh, 27 November 1791, in Veitch, 'Memoir', cxxxiii. This might with profit be contrasted with his above-quoted remarks in the *Elements* distancing himself from the use of political violence. It

In January 1793, the same month as Thomas Muir's arrest and the execution of Louis XVI, Stewart wrote to Alison, congratulating him on the birth of a son. He admitted that, 'I don't know what duties your church imposes on a godfather, but I promise to do all I can to make him a philosopher and an economist; and I engage, as soon as he begins to snuff (which I suppose he will do in a dozen years hence), to make him the present of a very handsome box which I received lately, with the *Rights of Man* inscribed on the lid'.[105] Just the month before Stewart wrote these words to Alison, in December 1792, the trial of Thomas Paine for seditious writings was opened in London.[106] In this context, Stewart's remark to Alison was a politically dangerous rhetorical flourish.

War with revolutionary France now loomed, polarising opinion further; a prospect, Stewart admitted to Alison, in January that left him fearful:

> I tremble at the thought of war, because it appears to me to be risking the prosperity and tranquillity of this country on the throw of a die. If we engage in it, it will open a new source of political events, the final issue of which is beyond all calculation; but I think, in general, we may venture to predict, that it will not be agreeable to the wishes of those who are most anxious to promote it. Is it not melancholy that the occurrences of the last twenty years should have taught statesmen so little wisdom? The infatuation of this part of the country is beyond all belief. A few weeks have turned the tide most effectually, and all freedom, both of speech and of the press, is for a time suspended . . . The late shocking barbarities at Paris have furnished the means of inflaming the popular passions; but if order were established in that country, or if the events of the next campaign should be as contrary to their expectations as those of the last I am afraid to look forward to the consequences.[107]

The anxiety that this letter reveals helps us to comprehend the context in which we must read Stewart's demure surrender to Abercromby, when challenged

would seem that even in the *Elements* of 1792, although it got him in trouble, Stewart was differentiating between his private opinions and his public expressions.

[105] Dugald Stewart to Archibald Alison, January 1793, in Veitch, 'Memoir', cxxxv.

[106] An account of the trial and the political pressure on Paine that prompted his embarkation to France can be found in John Keane, *Tom Paine: A Political Life* (London, 1995), 334–48.

[107] Dugald Stewart to Archibald Alison, Paris, January 1793, in Veitch, 'Memoir', cxxxvi.

over his citation of Condorcet.[108] The political circumstances were rapidly conspiring to make even the slightest whisper of political disaffection the cause of profound suspicion. In that light, what is striking about Stewart's reply to Craig's missive is less the tactical retreat, which has resulted in the caricature of Stewart as a 'cringing' Whig, than the way in which the letter was cast so as to offer a wary defence of his political probity. Writing from Stewartfield, he began with a guarded *mea culpa*:

> That I differed widely from some of my friends, in rejoicing at the prospect of an extension of our own political happiness to other nations, I am not ashamed to acknowledge; but the chapter your Lordship alludes to bears ample testimony in my favour, that even in the most despotic governments in Europe, I was aware of the mischiefs to be apprehended from the spirit of innovation and from sudden changes in established institutions.[109]

Stewart's admission of support for the early days of the French Revolution was cleverly constructed to inoculate him from the charge of political heresy, for even Henry Dundas had welcomed the onset of turmoil in what was, after all, Britain's traditional enemy.[110] Next, Stewart offered a disavowal of Condorcet, distancing himself from the Frenchman, without however relinquishing the principles they had both espoused:

> I shall ever regret that I dishonoured some of my pages by mentioning with respect the name of Condorcet; but when my papers were sent to the press, he was quite unknown in any public capacity, and he enjoyed the friendship of the most respectable men in Europe. The passage I

[108] Stewart was not alone in worrying about the toxic political atmosphere developing in Scotland in the 1790s. His colleague at Edinburgh University, Andrew Dalzel, wrote to William Adam in July 1794 of how, 'such an infatuation prevails here among most of those whom one used to look upon as sensible people, that every thing coming from a member of opposition in parliament though abounding in the most forcible arguments, is reprobated with a degree of keenness that amounts to absolute frenzy. I believe the delusion and absurdity of the higher ranks of society here has proceeded much farther than it has done in England'. Cited in Emma Vincent MacLeod, 'The Scottish Opposition Whigs and the French Revolution' in Harris (ed.), *Scotland in the Age of the French Revolution*, 83.

[109] Dugald Stewart to William Craig, 20 February 1794, quoted in Veitch, 'Memoir', lxxiii.

[110] See Michael Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh, 1992), particularly 155–206.

> have quoted from him (considered in its reference to the old French government) breathes a spirit of moderation, which, if it had proceeded from any other pen, would be read not only with censure, but with high approbation. It is for this passage alone I am responsible, and not for anything else in his writings – far less in his subsequent conduct.[111]

Stewart then referred Craig and Abercromby to the fourth section of his *Life and Writings of Adam Smith*, claiming it was inspired by the need 'to guard against the possibility of such misapprehension'.[112] Therein Stewart had written of how Smith's 'doctrine concerning the freedom of trade and of industry coincides remarkably with that which we find in the writings of the French economists'.[113] At the time of penning this passage, he was concerned with proving Smith's originality. Thus he continued:

> But it surely cannot be pretended by the warmest admirers of that system, that any one of its numerous expositors has approached to Mr Smith in the precision and perspicuity with which he has stated it, or in the scientific and luminous manner in which he has deduced it from elementary principles. The awkwardness of their technical language, and the paradoxical form in which they have chosen to present some of their opinions, are acknowledged even by those who are most willing to do justice to their merits.[114]

Now, this assertion helped Stewart give a conservative gloss on his espousal of ideas associated with the French school, by offering them a stalwart British comparison.[115]

Finally, Stewart proclaimed himself to be at the forefront of the counter-revolutionary movement in Britain, claiming the position of prophet of the disasters emanating in France from the adoption of pernicious ideas. As he reminded Craig,

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[111] Stewart to Craig, 20 February 1794, quoted in Veitch, 'Memoir', lxxiv.

[112] Ibid., lxxiii.

[113] Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith* in Hamilton *Works of Stewart*, x, 65.

[114] Ibid., 65.

[115] The conflict over Smith's political legacy in the 1790s is treated in Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge MA, 2002), 52-66, where the conundrum of separating Smith's concentration on economic liberty from its concomitant political manifestation is understood to have vexed interpreters, including Stewart. On Stewart in particular, see ibid., 57–9.

> as to the French philosophers in general, and the tendency of their sceptical doctrines to corrupt the morals, and to poison the happiness of mankind, your Lordship will do me the justice to acknowledge that I opposed them with zeal, at a time when the profession of scepticism was not quite so unfashionable as it is at present. Whoever may be called upon to retract their former admiration of these principles (which have indeed *led to a giant mischief*) I am certainly not among the number . . . I shall only add, that ever since I was Professor of Moral Philosophy, I have concluded my course with a set of lectures on the English constitution, the peculiar excellencies of which I have always enlarged upon them in the warmest and most enthusiastic terms.[116]

This is disingenuous, at least in relation to the context of the lectures, and in that it is suggestive of the pressure Abercromby placed upon Stewart. Caution was required when treating with a man who was increasingly to be understood as a political opponent.

It is this then that makes sense of our original conundrum. While Stewart was a fellow traveller with the radical ideas of the 1790s, the political climate in Scotland was not so conducive to these ideas, leaving him in a very exposed situation. Only occasionally, in correspondence with trusted confreres such as Alison or, much later, with William Drennan, might Stewart's sympathetic interest in the possibility of political revolution be aired. In effect, the evidence amassed here questions the traditional picture of Stewart as a cautious and cringing Whig. Instead, what it finds is a man who was oftentimes forced to temporise because of the precarious position he held in Scottish intellectual society. It is certainly true that Stewart was being deceptive in his response to Alexander Abercromby's allegations, when he told Craig that:

> In treating of this subject [the excellencies of the English constitution], I have been so uniformly impressed with a sense of the importance of my situation, that among all the interesting questions which have, during the last nine years [since 1785], divided our political parties, I have not introduced the slightest reference to any of them excepting in the single instance of the African trade, on which I formerly expressed myself with some warmth;—and even these expressions I dropped from my course, as soon as it became a matter of public discussion.[117]

[116] Stewart to Craig, 20 February 1794, quoted in Veitch, 'Memoir', lxxiii–lxxiv.

[117] Ibid., lxxiv. This is a reference to the Abolition Movement.

In fact, Stewart was covertly expounding on political developments throughout his term of office. And, as the letter from Helen D'Arcy Stewart to Drennan makes plain, when people in the British Isles embarked on revolutionary action, he was a covert supporter.

When assessing Stewart's political opinions it is necessary to consistently distinguish between the public statements of a printed book, the semi-private utterances of the lecture hall, and the even less guarded reflections found in his private correspondence. As the correspondence with Drennan and Abercromby indicates, if Stewart was to negotiate the choppy waters of Scottish political life in the final decades of the century, he had to remain conscious of and responsive to the demands of his different personae. Identifying the private political commitments of any figure is nigh on impossible, and with the context of the revolutionary wars blurring the issue further, prudence should remain a watchword. However, the evidence does suggest that Stewart was not the 'cautious Whig' of Bruce Lenman's portrayal. Certainly, while Stewart protested that 'I have long enjoyed, and that I continue to enjoy, every testimony of approbation which the public can give', that was not how Lord Cockburn recalled the situation.[118] While admitting that 'we had wonderfully few proper Jacobins; that is, persons who seriously wished to introduce a republic in this country, on the French precedent,' Cockburn recognised that 'there were plenty of people who were *called* Jacobins; because this soon became the common nickname which was given, not only to those who had admired the dawn of the French liberation, but to those who were known to have any taste for any internal reform of our own'.[119] Furthermore, 'such real *Whigs* were [also] extremely few' for 'self-interest had converted some, and terror more'.[120] Yet, of these, 'Stewart in particular, though too spotless and too retired to be openly denounced, was an object of secret alarm'.[121]

VI Conclusions

What then does the case of Dugald Stewart tell us about the wider context in which he operated? First, the clarity of Stewart's public fate needs to be tinged with an awareness that political affiliations did not necessarily dissolve under

[118] Ibid.
[119] Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time* (Edinburgh, 1971), 80–1.
[120] Ibid., 83.
[121] Ibid., 85.

the psychic pressure of the circumstances of the 1790s. Rather, they oftentimes went underground, finding expression in less formal and stable landscapes than that afforded by the print culture of the day. In the case of Stewart we can clearly document an awareness of the differing possibilities afforded by the printed book, the semi-formal lecture and private correspondence. What was acceptable in one format could not be uttered in another. This is what Stewart's correspondence with Drennan clearly indicates: a sympathy that chimed with occasional remarks in the lecture hall could not find its way into print, yet was expressed in the realm of a private letter.

Secondly, and following on from this first point, it becomes apparent by looking at Stewart's case that the limitations inherent in differing modes of communication in the period impinge on our understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment and its fate. In as much as the Enlightenment is commensurate with the free and transparent public expression of ideas – and the unhindered debate of culture and politics in an accessible public sphere – the Enlightenment was increasingly undermined by the restrictions placed upon discussion in the 1790s.[122] The desirability of political consensus in opposing the French Revolution and its ideals imposed a kind of mental censorship upon the expression of political ideas. And when, as was the case with Stewart's citation of Condorcet, an author overstepped the mark, social censure (if not formal punishment) followed. The correspondence with Craig thus becomes emblematic of a collapse in the cultural norms that underpinned the development of the Scottish Enlightenment in the wake of the Jacobite Rising of 1745. The crisis of the 1790s, it is here proposed, destroyed the climate of trust that enabled the culture of unhindered discussion, which was itself intrinsic to the flourishing of the Scottish Enlightenment. So too, counter-intuitively, the exchange with Drennan supports this thesis, for, set in its proper context, it shows how private sentiments became increasingly disconnected from public utterances. And without the ability to argue openly about political life free from the threat of public punishment or private contempt, the Scottish Enlightenment was fated to fade. One of the unintended consequences of the crisis of the 1790s, therefore, was the end of the Scottish Enlightenment.

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[122] This Kantian definition of Enlightenment informs the highly influential study, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1992). See also, from a vast literature, James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001).