ISSN 1755-9928 (Print)
ISSN 2753-3298 (Online)

Journal of
Scottish Thought

Research Articles

The Aesthetics of Political Economy: The Case of Francis Hutcheson

Author: Michael Brown

Volume 7, Issue 1
Pp: 136-147
2016
Published on: 1st Jan 2016

1495
ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Aesthetics of Political Economy: The Case of Francis Hutcheson

Michael Brown

There is a well-worn path which historians walk when retracing the steps taken to reach the high ground of Classical political economy. It is one which begins in the valleys of political arithmetic accompanied by William Petty, rises through the sloped forests of imperial mercantilism in which Thomas Mun dwells, and breathes the heady air of the Scottish Enlightenment on reaching the pinnacle with Adam Smith. What marks out this pathway is a continuous reliance on numbers as a guiderail. Starting with the calculations of Richard Gough in *The History of Myddle*, this parochialism gives way rapidly to the urbanity of Daniel Defoe's morbid tabulation of death in *A Journal of the Plague Year*.[1] The national issue is raised in the historical comparisons offered by David Hume when dealing with the 'populousness of ancient nations'.[2] And an international purview is provided whilst condemning modern republicanism through Burke's tabulations in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.[3] The British eighteenth-century imaginary can be thought of as obsessed with calculation.[4]

If Mary Poovey has located the source of this imaginative turn in an epistemological need for certainty within a post-providential world and Ian Hacking has postulated that what fires the creative energy is the mathematics of probability, both influential renditions of this culture of the number

1 Richard Gough, *The History of Myddle* (London, 1981); Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (London, 2003).

2 David Hume, 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' in idem, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, 1987), 377–464; for an extended treatment of this work see M. A. Box and Michael Silverthorne, 'The "Most Curious & Important of All Questions of Erudition": Hume's Assessment of the Populousness of Ancient Nations' in Mark G. Spencer (ed.), *David Hume: Historical Thinker, Historical Writer* (Philadelphia, 2013), 225–54.

3 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: A Critical Edition*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Stanford, 2001); F. P. Lock, *Edmund Burke, Volume II: 1784–1797* (Oxford, 2006), 305–8.

4 F. P. Lock, *The Rhetoric of Numbers in Gibbon's History* (Lanham, 2012).

are informed by the intersection with the cultural history of science.[5] They are of a piece with the work of Steven Shapin for example in *A Social History of Truth*, or Shapin and Simon Schaffer in *Leviathan and the Air Pump* in their concern for how scientific knowledge depends on the credibility of the observer and the socially constructed nature of the conclusions drawn.[6]

In so much as this broadly revisionist project has adjusted our understanding, and provided a liberal (sometimes neo-liberal) account of the development of the social science of political economy, then it has served its own self-ascribed purpose. While the achieved ambition was to write over an older Marxist leaning account, it may in doing so have occluded another viewpoint, or chosen one road up the mountain over another, to return to my opening conceit. What this essay suggests is the existence of another rather untidy, indeterminate route to the summit; one which involves some courage to mark out the path and some scrambling through the brambles. To begin it will point to one landmark on this provisional map.

The embarkation point for this journey is found by noticing how the narrative of the emergence of political economy as related to an imaginative concern for numbers sometimes integrates an aborted experiment of the Irish-Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746).[7] In his first substantial publication, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), he attempted to create a kind of mathematics of ethical response – reductively expressed as series of equations in the treatise on virtue.[8] This constitutes an early attempt to articulate morality through numbers, and has been used by Mary Poovey, for instance, to locate Hutcheson in her story about enumeration.[9] Yet it is also of some significance that Hutcheson's definition of beauty as 'uniformity amidst variety' sat alongside his ethical arguments, offering a sustained if implicit analogy that replaces a concern with numbers in the imaginative origins of political economy with an aesthetic

5 Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago, 1998); Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge, 2006).

6 Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, 1995); Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, 1985).

7 The best biographical study remains W. R. Scott, *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* (1900: Bristol, 1992).

8 Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (1725; Indianapolis, 2004), 128–31.

9 Poovey, *History of the Modern Fact*, 182–92.

concern.[10] To understand the relevance of this decision it is necessary to move away from Scotland (for a time and go instead to Dublin, where the *Inquiry* was written), and into the social world of Francis Hutcheson.

Teaching at a dissenting academy in the city in the 1720s, Hutcheson was to develop his intellectual reputation through the publication of two major works of moral theory – *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* of 1725 and an *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions* of 1728. He also engaged in some occasional writing in the pages of the *Dublin Weekly Journal*, a newspaper-cum-literary periodical edited by his friend and fellow Presbyterian James Arbuckle (c.1700–42). Arbuckle was a minor poet – he wrote a rather elegant celebration of Glasgow where he had been a student, *Glotta* – and thought himself to be a literary critic, notably falling foul of Jonathan Swift. The 'Hibernicus Letters' Arbuckle penned for the *Dublin Weekly Journal* contained a number of his translations of Horace.[11]

While Richard Holmes has done sterling work in recuperating Arbuckle's literary endeavours, identifying some poetic works as his and revealing much of the skill and craft that lay behind his compositions, as well as the political and social pressures under which he composed, the merit or demerit of Arbuckle's creative output is not the central concern here.[12] Rather it is the fact of his persistent engagement with questions of beauty. Running from April 1725 to March 1727, the 'Hibernicus Letters' contained a sustained if episodic meditation on aesthetics. As Holmes has calculated, its pages hold some 'twenty original poems [which] evidence the liveliness of contemporary Dublin literary culture. The number of original poems published in Dublin in the years 1725 to 1727' – Holmes goes on to assert – 'is approximately the same as in London (Edinburgh was almost a poetic desert by comparison).'[13] This literary underworld, so well depicted in a neglected PhD by Bryan Coleburne was the environment that produced Swift (who did not have to be in London to understand the landscape of the *Dunciad*) and Arbuckle, and which Hutcheson also inhabited.[14]

10 Hutcheson, *An Inquiry*, 28.

11 Both *Glotta* and a number of these translations are included in Richard Holmes (ed.), *James Arbuckle: Selected Works* (Lewisburg, 2014).

12 See for instance, Richard Holmes, 'James Arbuckle and Dean Swift: Cultural Politics in the Irish Confessional State', *Irish Studies Review*, 16 (2008), 431–44; idem, 'James Arbuckle: A Whig Critic of Irish Penal Laws?' in John Bergin, Eoin Magennis, Lesa Ní Mhunghaile and Patrick Walsh (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Penal Laws: Eighteenth-Century Ireland Special Issue 1* (2011), 93–112.

13 Holmes, *James Arbuckle,* xxiv.

14 Bryan Coleburne, 'Jonathan Swift and the Dunces of Dublin', PhD thesis (National University of Ireland, Dublin, 1982).

In this context two things become apparent about Hutcheson's early work. First, his treatise on beauty was of a piece with the social circle in which he moved. Arbuckle cast a shadow over that essay as much as did his patron Robert Molesworth (1656–1725), whose development of a garden at his north Dublin estate of Brackenstown (which Swift visited) I have used elsewhere as a foil with which to read Hutcheson's aesthetic theory.[15] Second, when Hutcheson came to write for Arbuckle's vehicle – a fact acknowledged in the concluding essay to the sequence – he chose to attack Thomas Hobbes on the issue of laughter and, crucially, Bernard Mandeville on egoism.

Mandeville (1670–1733), a Dutch medic living in London whose *Fable of the Bees* (1704 and onward) scandalised early Hanoverian society, was a proponent of Hobbes.[16] He argued notoriously that private vices were constitutive of social goods in generating demand for products, creating employment and supporting the wealth and wellbeing of the community. Selfishness, sanctimony, lust, and greed were all defended as necessary stimulants to a successful society. And he made the case primarily in a poem.

'The Grumbling Hive: Or Knaves Turn'd Honest' is a very fine example of early eighteenth-century doggerel. In clunky couplets it recounts the tale of a flourishing bee hive petitioning the Gods for virtue. Granted this wish, social collapse ensues, for the moral is, as Mandeville renders it in the culmination to the composition:

> So Vice is beneficial found,
> When it's by Justice lopt and bound;
> Nay, where the people would be great,
> As necessary to the state
> As Hunger is to make 'em eat.
> Bare Vertue can't make Nations live
> In Splendour; they that would revive
> A Golden Age, must be as free
> For Acorns, as for Honesty.[17]

15 Michael Brown, *Francis Hutcheson in Dublin, 1719–1730: the Crucible of his Thought* (Dublin, 2002), 40–50.

16 From a large literature see M. M. Goldsmith, *Private Vices, Public Benefits. The Social and Political Thought of Bernard Mandeville* (Cambridge, 1985); E. G. Hundert, *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* (Cambridge, 1994); T. A. Horne, *The Social Thought of Bernard Mandeville: Virtue and Commerce in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1978).

17 Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, ed. F. B. Kaye (2 vols; Indianapolis, 1988), I, 37.

Hutcheson accosted Mandeville in three issues of the *Dublin Weekly Journal*. While attention has rightly been cast on the moral arguments which Hutcheson deploys – at least in my own treatment of the matter in *Francis Hutcheson in Dublin* – it is perhaps worth noticing here how the essays are also, however loosely, a form of literary criticism.[18] Moreover, the policy of attacking the morals of a literary work, and not its aesthetic effect (the man and not the ball perhaps) was not unusual or reprehensible in the period. Indeed, Arbuckle and Swift became entangled in a literary joust in which both men attacked the other's moral probity in increasingly venomous satiric poems.[19] And as I have suggested elsewhere the political tussle between Old and New Whig was productive of *ad hominin* attacks precisely because the issue in question was how to behave in a commercialising, post-revolutionary society.[20] Hutcheson's rebuttal of Mandeville is, comparatively, a rather tepid affair, working over the definition of luxury. Mandeville sets up as a straw man, namely the Stoic, Old Whig position that luxury is identical to conspicuous consumption. This allows him to argue for a rehabilitation of consumption on Epicurean principles, by seeing it as charged with social energy. Hutcheson rejects this as a false dichotomy. He instead proposes that luxury is not inherent in all consumption, but rather is a relative concept. He defines luxury as over-consumption. 'Intemperance is the use of meat and drink which is pernicious to the health and vigour of any person in the discharge of the offices of life', he writes,

> Luxury is the using more curious and expensive habitation, dress, table, equipage, than the person's wealth will bear, so as to discharge his duty to his family, his friends, his country or the indigent … There is no sort of food, architecture, dress or furniture, the use of which can be called evil of itself. Intemperance and luxury are plainly terms relative to the bodily constitution and wealth of the person.[21]

Mandeville is therefore as intellectually duplicitous as his Epicureanism is morally suspect. Hutcheson rehabilitates society while retaining the morally righteous rejection of luxury. He literally has his cake and eats it.

18 Brown, *Francis Hutcheson in Dublin*, 97–122.

19 Michael Brown, 'A Biter Bitten: Ireland and the Rude Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 45 (2012), 393–407.

20 Michael Brown, 'Jonathan Swift, the Earl of Wharton and the Problem of Whig Regeneration', *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture*, 39 (2015), 83–99.

21 Francis Hutcheson, *Reflections upon Laughter and Remarks upon the Fable of the Bees* (Glasgow, 1750), 56.

If Hutcheson's rejection of Mandeville constitutes a piece of overtly moral literary criticism, his own literary output, particularly the *Inquiry*, was equally structured to parallel aesthetic and moral concerns. Indeed, the whole edifice is founded on a sustained analogy between the sense of beauty and the moral sense: both are conceived of by Hutcheson to be pre-rational, immediate and judgemental. Moreover, this conception also sites Hutcheson within Dublin intellectual circles which were experimenting with what David Berman has called theological representationalism, whereby comprehension of God is reached by developing analogies to man's positive attributes.[22] Indeed Hutcheson's capstone to his treatise on morals, in which God is depicted, is a remarkable piece of writing in this vein and worth quoting at length here:

> It has often been taken for granted in these papers, 'that the deity is morally good'; though the reasoning is not at all built upon this supposition. If we enquire into the reason of the great agreement of mankind in this opinion, we shall perhaps find no demonstrative arguments à priori, from the idea of an independent being, to prove his goodness. But there is abundant probability, deduced from the whole frame of nature, which seems as far as we know, plainly contrived for the good of the whole; and the casual evils seem the necessary concomitants of some mechanism designed for vastly prepollent good. Nay, this very moral sense, implanted in rational agents, to delight in and admire whatever actions flow from a study of the good in others, is one of the strongest evidences of goodness in the author of nature.[23]

Hutcheson's motivation in developing this analogy between aesthetics and morality was to recuperate the ontological condition of humanity, challenged as it was by the pessimism of the Presbyterian assumption of total depravity (enunciated in the Synod of Dort and restated in the Westminster Confession of Faith), and by the Hobbist Epicureanism which was considered fashionable amongst the *avant garde* of Dublin in the 1720s. In the 'Hibernicus Letters' Hutcheson noticed how the fashionable coffee house, Lucas's, on Cork Hill, was used by 'free wits', fops attracted to a disreputable materialism made fashionable by Mandeville.[24]

---

22 David Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy* (London, 2006).

23 Hutcheson, *An Inquiry*, 196–7.

24 Hutcheson, *Remarks*, 119.

While himself a signatory (twice) to the Westminster Confession, Hutcheson was quickly in trouble when arriving in more conservative Glasgow for his teachings on moral capability. He was wrongly thought to favour the freethinking religiosity of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), whose work he appropriated but actively Christianised in so doing.[25] However the author, Hugh Heugh, himself the son of a traditional Presbyterian minister John Huegh, was more accurate in deeming that Hutcheson did not share 'an estimation of mankind as vitiated by original sin and incapable of attaining moral knowledge without recourse to Scripture.'[26] Rather Hutcheson ascribed to humanity an ability to improve through the exercise of volition which contradicted Heugh's emphasis on 'the Corruption of our natures' which left people 'utterly indisposed, disabled and opposite to all Good'.[27] That indeed was an essential predicate for his work as an educator both in Dublin and subsequently at the University of Glasgow where he was to become a renown professor of moral philosophy. While the polemical purpose of the *Inquiry* was thus unmistakably moral, Hutcheson's conceptualisation of aesthetics was also freighted with political intention and social vision. In the treatise devoted to a consideration of the concept of beauty, and as noted above, he argued that its origin lay in the viewer's identification of 'uniformity amidst variety'. Far from being a simple exposition of the classical unities, Hutcheson suggested that their melody was only apparent when set in relief against the surrounding cacophony. Indeed, a surfeit of order was just as damaging to an aesthetic experience as was the lack of a controlling artificer. Availing of a mathematical vocabulary he explained how:

> what we call Beautiful in Objects, to speak in the Mathematical Style, seems to be in a compound Ratio of Uniformity and Variety: so that

25 James Moore, 'Presbyterianism and the Right of Private Judgement: Church Government in Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Francis Hutcheson' in Ruth Evelyn Savage (ed.), *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 141–68. On Shaftesbury see Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

26 Daniel Carey, 'Francis Hutcheson's Philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment: Reception, Reputation and Legacy' in Aaron Garrett and James A. Harris (eds.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century: Volume 1: Morals, Politics, Art, Religion* (Oxford, 2015), 61.

27 [Hugh Heugh], *Shaftsbury's Ghost Conjur'd* (Glasgow, 1738), 22.

> where the Uniformity of Bodys *[sic]* is equal, the Beauty is as the Variety; and where the Variety is equal, the Beauty is as the Uniformity.[28]

The moral parallel for this was developed in the second treatise in the book, on virtue, which contended that humans had an internal, pre-rational sense that responded to displays of benevolence independent of the interest which we have in the action's success or failure. Again Hutcheson deployed a mathematical register to explain himself, devising a series of equations to compute the moment of good in relation to the benevolence of the actor, the self-interest they have in the determination and the ability of the person to intervene.[29] In both cases, beauty and virtue, then, the values were thought to be both universal and situated, emerging from the motivation of the actor and the context of that action.

Politically it is worth recognising how Hutcheson shared with Arbuckle an open admiration for the Whig politician and writer Joseph Addison (1672–1719). Whereas Arbuckle composed an elegy on his death, Hutcheson cited the 'ingenious Mr Addison in his treatise of the Pleasures of the Imagination', published in *The Spectator* in 1712.[30] Written immediately after Addison's sojourn in Dublin as personal secretary to the lord lieutenant Thomas, Earl of Wharton (who gained Swift's immense contempt as a personification of modern Whig culture), *The Spectator* was, as Brian Cowan has elucidated, a Whig vehicle which aimed to alter the literary culture of England. It seemed to undermine the Tory hegemony that had been established in the general election of 1710 and which had ignominiously returned Addison's friends to the opposition benches.[31] In other words, by citing Addison Hutcheson was positioning his work within a literary discourse of modern commercial whiggery that, in Irish terms, was concerned with domestic improvement and the reform of English legislation that hampered local trade.[32] These measures included the Woollen

28 Hutcheson, *An Inquiry*, 29.

29 Ibid., 128–31.

30 James Arbuckle, *An Epistle to Thomas, the Rt Hon Earl of Hadington on the Death of Joseph Addison Esq* (Glasgow, 1719); Hutcheson, *Reflections upon Laughter*, 16; and Joseph Addison, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator* (5 vols; Oxford, 1965), issue numbers 411–421: III, 535–82.

31 Brian Cowan, 'Mr Spectator and the Coffeehouse Public Sphere', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 37 (2004), 345–66.

32 The connection between these two aspects of the programme is well drawn in Gordon Rees, 'Sir Richard Cox 1702–66: Patriotism and Improvement in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 29 (2014), 47–62. On Irish improvers see Toby Barnard, *Improving Ireland? Projectors, Prophets and Profiteers, 1641–1786* (Dublin,

Act that imposed restrictions on Irish exports, the Declaratory Act that limited the power of the Dublin parliament to that of a dependent kingdom, and the passing of bills supporting the introduction of the controversial Wood's halfpence that was intended to alleviate the problems generated by a lack of small specie circulating in the Irish economy. If attention amongst literary critics has fallen on Swift's creative responses to these developments across the 1720s – *A Proposal for the Universal Use of Irish Manufactures* (1720), the *Drapier's Letters* (1724–5) and the terrifying *Modest Proposal* (1729) – it should be recognised that his a-typicality was not just a product of his genius.[33] Rather Swift was expressive of an Old Whig politics that envisioned economic wealth as founded in land; his contemporaries were oftentimes developing a modern Whig view in which trade was foundational.[34] If Robert Molesworth, Swift's dedicatee and Hutcheson's patron, havered between the two stances, Thomas Prior on absenteeism, David Bindon on the circulation of money and Arthur Dobbs on trade spoke to Ireland's position in a commercial whig imaginative universe.[35]

Hutcheson's definition of luxury as a relative concept was, as we have noticed, akin to his reorientation of virtue towards social exchange. His definition of beauty in the *Inquiry* as the recognition by an observer of what he terms 'uniformity amidst variety' carries a similar intellectual freight. It depends upon the capacity of an individual to recognise patterning in diverse circumstances, to identify order in apparent chaos, to see logic and structure in apparently disparate events, actions and things. If this is true of the natural world, in which the mind of God is revealed, it is true secondarily in the world of artifice humanity creates for itself. Hutcheson cites gardens, architecture and fashion as venues in which order emerges from diversity; it may also be said, by analogy, of social laws. On this basis, Hutcheson can compose

2008).

33 The literature is immense but for a reading of this material through the lens of the financial revolution see Sean D. Moore, *Swift, the Book and the Irish Financial Revolution: Satire and Sovereignty in Colonial Ireland* (Baltimore, 2010).

34 On Swift as an Old or True Whig see Alan Downie, *Jonathan Swift: Political Writer* (London, 1984).

35 For a summary of this literature see Patrick Kelly, 'The Politics of Political Economy in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Ireland' in S. J. Connolly (ed.), *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), 105–29. See also James Livesey, 'A Kingdom of Cosmopolitan Improvers: The Dublin Society, 1731–1798' in Jani Marjanen and Koen Stapelbroek (eds.), *The Rise of Economic Societies in the Eighteenth Century: Patriotic Reform in Europe and North America* (Houndsmills, 2012), 52–72. The latter argues for the centrality of agriculture to the economic imagination of this generation of writers (particularly see ibid., 64–5).

music from the cacophony of passions, the concern of his second Dublin treatise the *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations of the Moral Sense* (1728). Therein he established moral hierarchy of the passions, moving out from the individual needs and want, and towards universal benevolence, or a desire for the good of all mankind.[36] Moreover, the capacity for individuals to identify patterns or 'uniformity' in the chaos of experience – 'amidst variety' – underpinned Hutcheson's rendering of a system of political economy found in his *Short Introduction of Moral Philosophy* (1747).

Published during Hutcheson's tenure in Glasgow, where he had been appointed to the University's chair in moral philosophy in 1730, the *Short Introduction* was a student compend, an *aide de memoire* for his class and a primer for his lecture series. The final section was concerned with what he termed economics and politics, being those 'adventitious states, founded upon some human deed or institution'.[37] Economics was, in this usage, concerned with domestic arrangements, which he subdivided into the duties which existed between marital partners; parents and children; and masters and servants. This preceded his consideration of political structures. However, under the rubric of natural law, and thus underscoring his view that it was inherent to the condition of mankind, he elsewhere considered at length the rights and duties pertaining to commerce and the value or price of goods.

Hutcheson here perceived in the development of society an intrinsic need for the division of labour and for collaboration. He reflected that:

> the common interest of all constantly requires an intercourse of offices, and the joint labours of many, and that when mankind grows numerous, all necessaries and conveniences will be much better supplied to all, when each chooses an art to himself, by practice acquires dexterity in it, and thus provides himself great plenty of such goods as that art produces, to be exchanged in commerce for the goods produced in a like manner by other artisans; than if each one by turns practised every necessary art, without ever acquiring dexterity in them.[38]

The management of this commercial interdependence required the development of legal understandings of contract – the imposition of a political

36 See Brown, *Francis Hutcheson in Dublin*, for a reading of this text.

37 Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Glasgow, 1747), 255.

38 Ibid., 163.

uniformity to manage the economic variety. Hutcheson ascribed therefore a vital role to contract law in the development of civility, declaring

> in an intercourse of services, in commerce and in joint labour, our sentiments, inclinations and designs must be mutually made known … Contracts are an absolute necessity in life, and so is the maintaining of faith in them … There must be conferences and bargains about them, that the parties may agree about their mutual performances … The perfidious for his part breaks all social commerce among men.[39]

Contract law was the mechanism whereby uniformity was fashioned from the diverse economic wants, desires and needs of the community, and social intercourse was managed to allow the division of labour to effectively operate. In rehearsing the political economy of labour, therefore, Hutcheson sought to identify beauty.

Similarly, with regard to price, and in accordance with his treatment of luxury as relative, Hutcheson emphasised the relationship between supply and demand in determining the value ascribed to a good: 'The ground of all price must be some fitness in the things to yield some use or pleasure in life. But this being presupposed the price of things will be in a compound proportion of the demand for them and the difficulty in acquiring them.'[40] The measure of this relationship was to be taken by ascribing a monetary value to the object; here Hutcheson underscores the continuing vitality of the Irish school of economic thought that fretted over this issue in the 1720s. For Hutcheson, possibly writing in that decade as the origins of the *Short Introduction* may lie in the preparatory work he conducted for Dublin dissenters readying to leave for Glasgow University, the value of money was not intrinsic. Rather money itself had a price that was determined by its supply – 'the real value of these metals, and of money too, like that of all other goods, is lessened as they are more plentiful and increase when they grow scarcer, though the pieces keep the same names.'[41] So too the valuation of gold and silver might alter against each other. However international trade was dependent on the shared acceptance of specie as a viable measure – one that was chosen from their characteristics of scarcity, portability, durability and divisibility.[42] Hutcheson wrote:

39 Ibid., 177–8.
40 Ibid., 209.
41 Ibid., 211–12.
42 Ibid., 211.

> No state which holds any commerce with neighbours, can alter the value of their own [money] in proportion to that of goods … After the legal settlement of the denomination of coins, and many contracts and legal obligations settled in these legal sum denominations, a decree of state raising the value of the pieces will be fraud on all the creditors.[43]

Commerce then was a system in which diversity was given order by law: various modes of production could trade through the use of a 'universal' system of value, money, and with the backing of a legal order that upheld the contracts made and the obligations incurred. Political economy turned the desires of a society into the orderly pursuit of satisfaction. It transmuted base desire into social wellbeing as Mandeville suggested, but did so by recognising 'uniformity amidst variety'. The system of political economy was a thing of beauty.

Certainly Hume and ultimately Smith were to reposition economics as artificial or 'adventitious' and not as Hutcheson had it as part of the 'natural' order. Yet their predecessor's concern for seeing in the chaos of human activity a kind of order – 'uniformity amidst variety' – informed the development of Scottish political economy by giving to it a concern for systemisation and beauty. Less a machine than a natural organism, Hutcheson conceived of the political economy as the natural product of humanity's interdependence, its social character and its need for moral co-operation. His writing infused in the Scottish Enlightenment a sustained interest in what has been nicely described by Leslie Ellen Brown as 'the interplay of the beautiful and the good'.[44] This interplay found particular application in the emergent domain of political economy, itself a study of social interaction, individual desire and moral ambition. Far from the 'dismal science' it may have become under the austere hand of Thomas Malthus, in the hands of the sprites of the Scottish Enlightenment it was a panacea: an intoxicating recipe for progress, improvement, wealth, health, civilisation and human flourishing.

University of Aberdeen

43 Ibid., 212.

44 Leslie Ellen Brown, *Artful Virtue: The Interplay of the Beautiful and the Good in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Farnham, 2015).