

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

# Journal of **Scottish Thought**

Research Articles

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Volume 5, Issue 1

Pp: 121-134

2012

Published on: 1st Jan 2012

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**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

# George Davie and Scottish Idealism

Cairns Craig

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Patrick Geddes appears only briefly in George Davie's influential study of Scottish intellectual history, *The Democratic Intellect* (1961), but the timing of Davie's references to him are significant. He is first introduced at the conclusion of Chapter 1 as an example of how the traditional role of philosophy in the older Scottish curriculum continued to be recognised by certain disciplines, despite the increasing specialisation of the period:

These developing disciplines, after all, tended—above all in Scotland—to connect themselves on the one hand with the study of law (e.g. sociology, general history) and on the other hand with the study of medicine (chemistry, physiology). But the legal and medical studies had already—in the persons of their legendary father-figures—accepted the distinctive rôle in Scotland of the early philosophical training, and tried to turn it to advantage in the special disciplines. Hence it is no surprise that, under the influence of this milieu, subjects which were off-shoots of law or medicine—pre-eminently biology as taught by Sir Patrick Geddes—should carry on till late in the nineteenth century the old philosophical bias.<sup>1</sup>

Geddes represents in this context the Scottish tradition of 'generalism'—a tradition based on the centrality of philosophy to the curricula of the Scottish universities. Geddes then disappears from Davie's narrative until he returns twice in the book's final pages (333, 337) as figuring Scotland's continuing relationship with France (as opposed to the Germanic theories that had been by then adopted by many of the nation's philosophers) and as one of those who still represented an 'epoch when philosophy was not cut off from literature and life'. Geddes, in effect, is one of the last representatives of 'the democratic intellect' that Davie believes to have characterised the Scottish university tradition of the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1961), 24; hereafter cited in the text as *DI*.

Davie's account of that tradition, however, has gone largely uncontested—indeed, largely unexamined—because so few modern scholars of the Scottish tradition in philosophy have engaged with nineteenth-century Scottish thought. This essay attempts to set Davie's argument in its intellectual context, and to describe the philosophical environment in which Geddes and his associates were working as Scottish philosophy developed from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Scottish philosophy was one of the 'circles' in which Geddes moved, as witnessed by the fact that James Seth, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University, and brother of Andrew Seth, the leading 'idealist' among Scottish philosophers in the late nineteenth century, was, as John Scott and Ray Bromley point out in their essay in this issue, one of the board members of the Edinburgh School of Sociology. The history of the failure of this generalist tradition to influence the development of the specialist disciplines of the modern era, which Scott and Bromley chart, is also the story of Davie's book—the story of Scottish philosophy's displacement from its central place in Scottish cultural life with the consequent loss of the generalist perspective of a thinker like Geddes.

## I

In the early 1950s, London publishers Routledge had contracted to publish a study of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy by George Elder Davie: they asked, however, if he could add an introductory chapter outlining the institutional context in which Scottish philosophy had developed – that chapter, nearly a decade later, became *The Democratic Intellect*. Published in 1961, its success so entirely sidelined the study to which it was a prologue that the original book, under the title of *The Scotch Metaphysics: A Century of Enlightenment in Scotland*,<sup>2</sup> was not published till 2001. *The Scotch Metaphysics*, both an earlier and a later book than *The Democratic Intellect*, was focused on a very technical exposition of how Scottish philosophers had attempted to validate our fundamental belief in the reality of an external world by showing that the senses, and particularly the senses of sight and touch, compensate for each other's limitations, and how, from our experience of particular objects, we manage to develop abstract ideas. According to Davie, the reason that this constitutes a particularly 'Scotch metaphysics' is that there is

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<sup>2</sup> George Davie, *The Scotch Metaphysics: A Century of Enlightenment in Scotland* (London, 2001); hereafter cited in the text as *SM*.

... a certain continuity between the work of the quartet of nineteenth-century philosophers I examine, namely Stewart, Brown, Hamilton and Ferrier, and that of the eighteenth-century quartet composed of Hutcheson, Hume, Reid and Smith. The title serves to mark off the debates of these eighteenth and nineteenth-century Scottish philosophers from the debates engaged in by philosophers in England and Ireland. It distinguishes a set of philosophical problems that have less affinity with the latter than with questions being treated then and to be treated later by philosophers on the continent of Europe. (*SM*, 8)

The continuity of this tradition is both made possible and intensified by the ways in which nineteenth-century Scottish philosophers devote much of their intellectual energy to reviewing and promoting their eighteenth-century predecessors: in Dugald Stewart's case through his biographical essays on Adam Smith, William Robertson and Thomas Reid, and the account in his *Dissertation Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy, since the Revival of Letters in Europe*, of 'The Metaphysical Philosophy of Scotland';<sup>3</sup> in Brown's case through his defence of Hume's theory of causality in his *Observations on the Nature and Tendency of the Doctrines of Mr Hume, concerning the relation of cause and effect* (Edinburgh, 1806); and in Hamilton's case by his edition of Reid's works (1849), with its enormous apparatus of supplementary arguments intended to validate and extend Reid's philosophical positions. For Davie, this continuity of metaphysical interests establishes them as participants in a philosophical debate which forms part of a distinctive national culture, but it is a tradition which comes to a sudden end when James Frederick Ferrier 'dissociates himself altogether from the Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense to which these philosophers subscribe in their different ways' (*SM*, 8),<sup>4</sup> bringing about what Davie described in his book on Ferrier of 2003 as *The Blackout of the Scottish Enlightenment*.

That one philosopher's change of view from what Thomas de Quincey had described as 'German philosophy refracted through a Scottish medium'

<sup>3</sup> Dugald Stewart, *Dissertation Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy, since the Revival of Letters in Europe*, Sir William Hamilton (ed.), *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1854).

<sup>4</sup> As indicated in part in footnotes 1 and 2, George Elder Davie's books are cited in the text in the following form: *Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1961), as *DI*; *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* (Edinburgh, 1986), as *CDI*; *The Scottish Enlightenment and Other Essays* (Edinburgh 1991) as *SE*; *The Scotch Metaphysics* (London, 2001) as *SM*; *Ferrier and the Blackout of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2002), as *FB*.

(*SM*, 8) to a Platonism that rejects the Common Sense tradition, before it ‘suddenly collapses into a blackout expressed in a series of contradictions which are never overcome’ (*B*, 70), should have such apocalyptic consequences (was there no other philosopher capable of carrying on the tradition?) is an unlikely historical hypothesis, which is why *The Scotch Metaphysic* required as its prequel *The Democratic Intellect*, for *The Democratic Intellect* situates Ferrier’s personal crisis in the deep divisions in Scottish public life following on the Disruption of the Scottish Church in 1843. The impact of those divisions resulted in a series of appointments to Chairs of Philosophy at the Scottish universities of men valued more for their religious convictions than their philosophical merit, Ferrier himself being denied the Edinburgh chair as a result of challenging the Free Church in his pamphlet *Observations on Church and State* (1848).

Weakened by such religious conflict, Scottish philosophy was unable to resist the curricular changes brought about by the various commissions set up to investigate the Scottish universities in the last third of the nineteenth century, whose outcome was the displacement of philosophy from its previously central role in the education of all Scottish students. With that displacement, the ‘generalist’ emphasis so distinctive of Scottish universities since the eighteenth century is set aside in order to assimilate Scottish education to the ‘specialist’ emphases of the English universities. The dominance of ‘specialism’ not only devalued the discipline of philosophy within the curriculum, it devalued the kind of philosophy typical of the Scottish tradition—the kind which, as the titles of many of the chairs at Scottish universities suggested, encouraged both professors and students to range across disciplines, linking logic, psychology and rhetoric, or moral philosophy and political economy. Increasingly, in Davie’s view, philosophy would itself become a specialism, a specialism whose development would be directed by English rather than Scottish traditions and debates—in the early twentieth-century by Moore and Russell, later by Austin and Ryle. Ferrier’s personal failure to maintain the tradition is simply a harbinger of the general failure of the culture:

The Scottish Universities, in their anxiety to accommodate themselves to the expensive epoch of Durbars and Jubilees, had suddenly turned their backs on the long procession of characteristic personalities, whose memory had hitherto always inspired the continuing adventure of the democratic intellect. An all-embracing oblivion engulfed the

heroes of Scottish learning since Renaissance-Reformation times, and the same neglect which overwhelmed mid-Victorians like Sir William Hamilton and Principal Forbes and Dr. Melvin equally blotted out their eighteenth-century equivalents like Thomas Reid and Colin Maclaurin and Thomas Ruddiman. Thus at the very time when other neighbouring countries were becoming increasingly 'history-minded', the Scots were losing their sense of the past, and their leading institutions, including the Universities, were emphatically resolved—to use a catch phrase fashionable in Scotland of the early twentieth century—'no longer to be prisoners of their own history'. (*DI*, 337)

Despite this doom-laden account, Scottish philosophy proved to be not quite dead. In the 1910s and '20s a series of accidents resulting from the efforts of the recently formed Scottish Education Department to integrate the universities into their newly planned secondary school system allowed philosophy to become once again a compulsory part of the curriculum of the Scottish universities. Not only had philosophy regained some of its previous status, but by 'reversing the anti-intellectual currents which, throughout the rest of Britain, were cutting philosophy off from the other subjects and were getting it to withdraw into itself in a self-complacent exclusiveness', philosophy 'began to reforge its broken links with the sciences, human as well as natural' (*CDI*, 162). In this period, philosophy shared in the general cultural revival that was being promoted as a 'Scottish Renaissance' by C. M. Grieve, acting in the disguise of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, and in this context some Scottish philosophers—most prominently Norman Kemp Smith and John Anderson—proved resistant to the specialised modes of philosophy being promoted in England, and continued to maintain the generalist tradition which was the inheritance of the Scottish institutions.

Their efforts, however, would prove to be in vain. The death of Scottish philosophy might have been postponed but it was merely delayed: with the expansion of the universities after the Second World War, English philosophy swamped Scottish universities and eradicated its traditions, promoting the notion that 'philosophy was the handmaiden of the sciences and not [as Scottish thinkers argued] their metaphysical critic' (*CDI*, 164). Even those Scottish thinkers who maintained the tradition of 'speculative metaphysics' (*CDI*, 260) that had been abandoned in England, were, in the end, defeated by the very spirit they were resisting: when the philosophies of both Kemp Smith and Anderson

fail to achieve a full and systematic development, and peter out in hesitations, silences, and loose ends, it is because, in working out their positions as professional philosophers, they are too much affected by the separatist spirit of which Russell, indeed, was the chief proponent in Britain, but which made its mark on a whole generation of thinkers, whatever their positions. (*CDI*, 240)

The death may have been a slow one, stretching from the Disruption of 1843 to the Robbins Committee on Higher Education in 1963, but it was a death nonetheless. Philosophy in Scotland no longer recognised ‘the Scotch Metaphysic’ as relevant to the discipline that it professed.

## II

Between the crisis of the 1850s and ’60s and the brief revival of the 1920s and 30s, there was, however, another philosophical movement which came to dominate not only the Scottish universities but universities across the British Empire—a movement often described as ‘British Idealism’, whose leading figures are usually listed as being T.H.Green, F.H.Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet. It was a movement, however, with a distinctly Scottish emphasis: as a website devoted to British Idealism notes, the Scots were

at the forefront of introducing Hegel into Britain in the work of Ferrier, Carlyle, Hutchison Stirling and Edward Caird, but they were also distinctive in locating themselves in relation to the Scottish philosophical tradition they sought to extend. The Scottish Idealists, among them Edward Caird, David George Ritchie, Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison, William Mitchell, John Watson, and the Welshman Henry Jones who found his spiritual home in Glasgow, comprised a formidable force and dominated the philosophical professoriate in Britain, Australia and Canada from the late nineteenth century to the years leading up to the First World War. Its main centres were St. Andrews, Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland, Cardiff in Wales, and Oxford in England.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/europ/research/researchcentres/collingwood/idealism/index.html>

This Scottish influence has led some recent historians of philosophy to identify ‘Scottish Idealism’ as a distinctive movement—one shaped, in large measure, by the influence of Edward Caird (1835–1908), who was professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow from 1866 till 1893 and subsequently Master of Balliol College Oxford from 1893 till 1908. Caird, who had taken his first degree at Glasgow and then had studied at Balliol College in Oxford as a Snell Exhibitioner, went on to be a fellow of Merton College (1864–66), where he became a close friend and intellectual ally of T. H. Green. While Green set out to demolish the tradition of British Empiricism by his supposedly devastating critique of David Hume in his introduction to an edition of Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature*, Caird set out to present Kant’s response to Hume and, thereafter, Hegel’s response to Kant, as the only appropriate foundation on which a modern philosophy could be built. Caird was an impressive teacher, with a deep religious commitment, and his philosophical views had a significant impact in Scotland, shaping the work of a generation of Scottish and Scottish-educated thinkers who would dominate philosophy in Scotland up till the First World War: Andrew Seth (later Pringle-Pattison) would become professor at Edinburgh, D. G. Ritchie professor of Logic and Metaphysics at St Andrews, and Henry Jones was Caird’s successor in the Glasgow chair.

Caird’s philosophy was driven by the desire to overcome the breach between the apparently verifiable outcomes of science and humanity’s apparently unverifiable belief in the reality of a spiritual purpose to the universe—between, in other words, a materialism that bred scepticism as to any ultimate truths and an ‘idealism’ whose claims about the spiritual nature of the universe seem to have no purchase on the reality of the modern world. For Caird, ‘idealism’, in his sense of the term, must overcome the opposition of materialism and idealism (as generally understood), an opposition in which idealism is assumed to require, in the commonly accepted reading of Berkeley’s *esse est percipi*, the ultimate unreality of the material world:

So soon as it is understood that the assertion that all objects are relative to the subject, involves the counter-assertion that the subject as such is relative to the object, we seem to be involved in an antinomy between two forms of consciousness, which can neither be reconciled nor separated. We seem, in fact, to be forced alternately to make the subject an adjective or property of the object, and the object an adjective or property of the subject; in other words, to set up two opposite theories, materialism and subjective idealism, each of which has its own



independent value, and neither of which can be put aside in favour of the other.<sup>6</sup>

Modern philosophy, for Caird, had reached an impasse in which materialism and idealism are both equally required to provide an adequate explanation of human experience but in which both cannot at the same time be held to be true:

This balancing or dualistic view is substantially the theory adopted by Clifford and Huxley, and it has been fully worked out by Mr. Spencer. These writers, in short, use the double relativity of consciousness and self-consciousness, or of matter and mind, as the means of escaping both from the objections to materialism, and from the objections to subjective idealism: but what they set up in place of each of these theories is simply the assertion that, from a phenomenal point of view, they are both true, while from the point of view of reality, we cannot establish either of them. Thus there are two independent ways of looking at the world, each of which claims the whole field of existence for itself and is, therefore, absolutely opposed to the other. Each of them, indeed, has its usefulness for certain purposes of science, the one as a principle of physics, and the other as a principle of psychology, but neither can finally vindicate itself as the truth to the exclusion of the other.<sup>7</sup>

Such oppositions are, however, for Caird, the necessary consequence of the fact that our understanding of the world can never be complete—that it can only aspire to be more complete in this generation than it was in the last, and that that aspiration is itself indicative of our underlying faith in the rationality of the world, of an underlying unity between mind and the world which it seeks to know, of a wholeness in which both participate:

In this sense, the work of science, and still more the work of philosophy, must always be a work of faith, meaning by faith, not believing anything merely upon authority, but proceeding upon a principle the complete vindication or realization of which is for us impossible; for, obviously,

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Caird, *Idealism and the Theory of Knowledge*, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 1 (London, 1903), 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

nothing short of omniscience could grasp the world as a complete system. It is involved in the very idea of a developing consciousness such as ours, that while, as an intelligence, it presupposes the idea of the whole, and, both in thought and action, must continually strive to realize that idea, yet what it deals with is necessarily a partial and limited experience, and its actual attainments can never, either in theory or practice, be more than provisional.<sup>8</sup>

Science, like religion, is a work of 'faith', but if 'in one sense we must call this idea a faith, we must remember that it is in no sense an arbitrary assumption: rather it is the essential faith of reason, the presupposition and basis of all that reason has achieved or can achieve'.<sup>9</sup> Caird's 'idealism', in other words, is not the denial of the material world as presented by science but an incorporation of the material and subjective in a higher, an 'ideal' unity, which overcomes the limitations of late nineteenth-century materialism and of the idealism which was promoted both by Kant's assumption that we could never know 'the thing in itself' as well as by the then increasingly widespread acceptance of a Berkeleyian belief in the fundamental unreality of the physical world. Instead, Caird argues for a philosophy which cannot ever be completed and which moves

towards an organic system of knowledge, in which justice shall be done to all the differences and oppositions of appearances, without sacrifice of their essential unity. And it casts confusion upon the whole process, when we treat it as if it were confined to the work of building upon fixed foundations, which are given either in sensation or in thought, apart from any process at all. On the contrary, it cannot be adequately represented except as an evolution, in which it is only the last product that shows distinctly the meaning of the germ out of which it sprang.<sup>10</sup>

Caird's philosophy was thus shaped by the desire to incorporate and to transcend both the empiricist *a posteriori* and the subjectivist *a priori* accounts of the mind, overcoming the divisions which had riven Western metaphysics and western science since the inception of the modern era.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 11.

In an age of agnosticism (a term invented by Sir William Hamilton and used to justify their arguments both by supporters and opponents of Darwinism) and, indeed, of increasing atheism, Caird's philosophy appealed to those in search of a philosophy which would give them confidence that Christianity, in the aftermath of Darwin, had not become meaningless; and in Scotland, that there was something more fundamental and more universal than the local opposition between the Established and the Free Churches. The impact of his teaching can be gauged in this account by John Watson, Professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and the leading Canadian philosopher of the early twentieth century:

Day by day, week by week, [I] saw unrolled before me the ideas by which Caird exhibited before his pupils the process by which the Greek Philosophy gave rise to the categories by means of which Christian experience was gradually developed into a theology that enabled it to conquer the world ... All this was nothing less than the disclosure of a new world to a Scottish youth, who from his early years had been accustomed to roll like a sweet morsel under his tongue such abstract themes as the relations of faith and works, predestination and foreknowledge. The close shell of Calvinism was burst.<sup>11</sup>

Caird's influence can also be gauged by the career of Montreal-born Canadian-Scottish novelist and theologian Lily Dougall who, after having attended lectures in Edinburgh and taken an LLA ('Lady Literate in Arts') from St Andrews, visited Oxford where she became friends with Caird and his Scottish colleague, William Wallace, translator of Hegel. Travelling back to Canada in 1894, she read Caird's *The Evolution of Religion* (1893), and wrote to her close friend Sophie Earp: 'I can't ever say what that book of Caird's has been to me. It has united things that seem hopelessly separate (although one felt that there must be a union some place) and it has given everything a place and a satisfactory place, in the big whole of things'.<sup>12</sup> The novel she wrote in the following year, *Zeit-Geist*, dramatises the discovery of this unity through its central character, Toyner, who, when he has been left for dead in the Canadian wilderness by the father of the woman who will subsequently become his

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in A. B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal, 1979), 186.

<sup>12</sup> Lily Dougall to Sophie Earp, quoted in Joanna Dean, *Religious Experience and the New Woman: the Life of Lily Dougall* (Bloomington & Indianapolis, 2007), 91.

wife, has a sudden vision of the universe as the expression of an immanent and all-encompassing deity:

The life that was in them all was all of God, every impulse, every act. The energy that thrilled them through, by which they acted, if only as brutes act, by which they spoke, if only to lie, by which they thought and felt, even when thought and feeling were false and bad, the energy which upheld them was all of God.<sup>13</sup>

Dougall's novels, like Caird's philosophy, strive to discover this underlying unity in which saint and sinner, outcast and priest, are all participants in an evolving spirituality. Inspired by Caird's philosophy, Dougall went on herself to become an influential theologian as the leading figure of the Cumnor group in Oxford (so named after the village in which she lived), whose meetings around the First World War turned into an influential series of books on religious issues. It is indicative of her commitment to the Scottish Idealist tradition that for her final edited collection, *The Spirit*, with the ambitious subtitle of *God and his Relation to Man Considered from the Standpoint of Philosophy, Psychology and Art* (1919), the introductory essay was written by Andrew Seth (by then A.S. Pringle-Pattison), whose 'personal idealism' developed from Caird's evolutionary conception of religion:

This idea of perfection disclosing its features gradually, as men become able to apprehend the vision, is the immanent God, the inspiring Spirit to whom all progress is due ... It is the immanence of the transcendent, the presence of the infinite in our finite lives, that alone explains the essential nature of man.<sup>14</sup>

Seth's essay provided the context for Dougall's own contributions on 'God in Action' and 'The Language of the Soul', and underlined how substantially her theology was a continuation of Scottish idealism.

Such testimonies to the power and longevity of Caird's work are, for Davie, simply indications of the effectiveness of his destruction of his Scottish

<sup>13</sup> Lily Dougall, *The Zeit-Geist* (London, 1895), 145.

<sup>14</sup> B.H. Streeter (ed.), *The Spirit: God and His Relation to Man Considered from the Standpoint of Philosophy, Psychology and Art* (London, 1919), 22. Dougall remained almost to the end of her career the anonymous author of her theological works as well as the unacknowledged editor of the collections deriving from the gatherings at her home in Comnor, which were always listed as edited by one of the other contributors.

inheritance, for if Ferrier's failure opens the way to the 'blackout' of a distinctive Scottish philosophy, Caird is the usurper who fills the power vacuum created by that blackout—and the distinctive feature of Caird's philosophy, according to Davie, is

his refusal to admit the intellectual importance of the moderate common-sense philosophy, half-way between monism and pluralism, which, in the estimates of Hamilton and Fraser, constitutes the very heart of the philosophical tradition of the West. (*DI*, 330)

As a consequence, Caird has nothing to offer on the subject of the Scottish tradition, and Davie scathingly quotes comments offered by Caird's biographers that

He most rarely referred to the philosophical views which were then current in Scotland in his time, whether as conscious doctrines or as unconscious assumptions, implicit in the traditional morality and religion. Session after session passed and no allusion, near or remote, was made to the Scottish school of Common Sense. No Scottish name later than David Hume passed his lips. (*DI*, 330)

This refusal to present the work of his Scottish predecessors is, for Davie, indicative of Caird's real impact, which was the displacing of the Scottish tradition for an English one developed at Oxford—Caird, Davie suggests, represents an 'Anglo-Hegelianism', and his teaching methods were designed to subvert the traditions of debate encouraged by the Scottish school and to replace them with methods which would ensure that the 'receptivity' of his young students would be directed towards the adoption of his own views and 'against the standpoint of Common Sense' (*DI*, 331):

Caird, a devotee of the Germanising monism, had no sympathy with the standpoint of Common Sense, whether in its intuitive or its rational form; so too in religion, Caird's affinities would be probably with the mysticism of Erskine of Linlathen, and of his disciple Macleod Campbell of Rowe, rather than the two great rival factions of the Moderate Calvinists and the Evangelical Calvinists who had combined to expel Macleod Campbell from the Church of Scotland; finally, in educational matters, Caird had little use for the policy of general

education, as professed in common both by rigid adherents of the tradition, and by those who favoured flexibility in modern needs, and instead, in his evidence before the University Commission, he was for a thoroughgoing specialisation on the English plan. (*DI*, 328)

Belonging to neither of the main communities in Scottish religious life in the nineteenth century, Caird's religious and philosophical views represented

A marked contrast to the realistic and pessimistic estimates of man's situation, already familiar to the students from his colleagues' teaching and from Scottish tradition generally. He thus 'placed his students from the beginning at a point of view when the life of mankind would be contemplated as one movement, single though infinitely varied, unerring though wandering' according to which somehow, rather mysteriously, everything would come right in the end. (*DI*, 329)

Caird's philosophy was thus, in Davie's eyes, but a trojan horse for unravelling the traditions of Scottish education; his 'monism' a way of presenting all specialisms as capable of being reunited at a higher level of integration, so that there was nothing to be feared from increasing specialisation:

In trying to undermine the traditional suspicion of Romantic monism, Caird of course was not concerned exclusively with the technical issues in philosophy, but was also intent on upsetting the students' loyalty to the educational and religious ideals of their society. In particular, Caird's favourite doctrine of the organic unity of things, in the crudely optimistic version of it he put over, readily became in his hands the basis of a defence of specialist educational policy and an attack on the ideal of a general education. From Caird's point of view, in fact, the upholders of general education were inspired by a restrictive pessimistic spirit which fears that, if one pushes educational specialism to extremes, the social and cultural unity will be endangered. According to Caird, however, these cramping, out-of-date ideas become meaningless as soon as one masters the monistic insight that identity, far from being incompatible with diversity, is made possible by it, and that the specialisation of intellectual function tends to promote cultural unity rather than to endanger it. Thus whereas the defence of general education by the Common Sense philosophers rested on the idea that identity is to some

extent independent of diversity, Caird's defence of specialised education rested on the view that identity depends on diversity. (*DI*, 331)

Caird's influence, Davie acknowledges, was significant since, by the 1870s, his philosophy was 'to make a powerful and lasting impression on an important section of Scottish youth'; it did so, however, only by underlining that 'if they were to participate effectively in the great cause of social reorganisation, they must cease to involve themselves in the traditional Scottish loyalties, intellectual and national, educational and religious' (*DI*, 332). Davie's contempt for the power that Caird and his associates wielded and its influence on twentieth-century Scotland is underlined by the fact that the specialising agenda of the Scottish Education Department was promoted by one of Caird's former students, a man by the name of Struthers: 'Struthers and his henchmen at the SED' (*CDI*, 25), Davie suggests, sought to impose on Scotland a utilitarian philosophy of education opposed to the traditional values of the generalist curriculum:

Throughout this long period, the outcome of each new crisis was that the anti-utilitarian resistance of the Calvinist north more and more lost ground to the confident utilitarianism which had inspired the reform of the British state, and which the state itself, with the encouragement of Hegelian philosophers like Green and Caird, was progressively identifying itself with—not least in the work done by Caird's pupil Struthers as head of the SED. (*CDI*, 124)

Caird is the underlying force that drives the Anglicisation of Scottish intellectual life between the death of Ferrier and the brief resistance of Kemp Smith and John Anderson in the 1920s. That resistance, however, is, according to Davie, founded on the recognition of the fundamentally alien nature of idealism to the Scottish context, which produces a widespread revulsion against Caird and his followers—at least in those areas where some glimmer of 'the Scottish Enlightenment' can still be found:

...in the country in general (and more especially in the Edinburgh area) the standards and spirit of the Scottish Enlightenment remained sufficiently alive for there to be a widespread recognition in the church as well as in the universities that the kind of Hegelianism produced in such quantities by Caird and his group of disciples was heavy, imitative and indeed bibliolatrous, the work of minds which made no

secret of their belief that Hegel had more or less said the last word about everything, and that the real task of the philosopher now that the revelation to mankind had been vouchsafed via Germany wasn't to produce new ideas but to apply a ready-made social gospel... (*SE*, 109)

If Caird wrote his Scottish predecessors out of the history of philosophy, Davie just as determinedly writes Caird and his successors out of the history of Scottish philosophy.

### III

Davie's critics have often pointed to underlying ironies, both semantic and historical, in the phrase 'democratic intellect', and there are also ironies to his choice of title for 'The Scotch Metaphysics'. The phrase, he tells us, comes from a conversation between George III and Henry Dundas about the Catholic Emancipation Bill, in which Dundas urged on the king the need to distinguish between his 'official capacity as king' and 'his private capacity as an Englishman' (*SM*, 8), to which George replied, 'Fie, fie, Mr Dundas, no more of your Scotch metaphysics' (*SM*, 7). The phrase, in other words, gestures to a moment when Scots had come to play key roles in British political life, and to a time when their increasing influence led to resistance to their imposition of Scottish values on English life. Davie, however, uses it to point to precisely the opposite outcome of the Union of 1707—Scottish resistance to absorption into English culture. The tension between these two modes of how to be Scottish after the Union of 1707 Davie finds in the opposed approaches to Scottish traditions taken by David Masson, first Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh in the 1860s, and Hugh MacDiarmid, advocate of a Scots-language revival in the 1920s. Masson believed that there was no place in the modern world for the kind of explicit and exterior Scottishness that had characterised the work of Robert Burns and Walter Scott: 'Scots, Masson said, must internalise their Scotticism and cease henceforth to weary the world by parading the external facts all too frequently publicised since the success of the Waverley novels' (*CDI*, 41). The assumption that Scottishness must be discreetly internalised in order to appeal to the broad community of English speakers and readers is, Davie suggests, reversed by MacDiarmid, who insists on the value of the explicit exteriorization of Scottishness in his use of elements of the Scots language as it had existed in a much earlier period



of Scottish history—‘back to Dunbar’, as MacDiarmid’s clarion-call had it. Davie is ambivalent about the first of these approaches and supportive, at least to some extent, of the second, but neither version takes into account what George III had implicitly acknowledged in his remark to Dundas—that the Scots could infiltrate English culture and make acceptable or effective within it values which were essentially alien to English traditions.

Caird, for example, believed that his philosophy, however German in its immediate influences, was rooted in Scottish traditions and had been inspired by the most influential Scotsman of the nineteenth century—Thomas Carlyle. It was Carlyle who had introduced Caird’s generation to German writing and therefore given them a vehicle by which they could avoid committing themselves to English culture without undermining their ability to advance their careers in an English cultural environment: Carlyle, according to Caird,

... was at least the first who, in a definite and effective way, in broad and powerfully drawn outlines, represented to us the new ideas about man and his world which that literature [German] contains. He spoke, therefore, from what was recognisably a higher point of view than that of the ordinary sects and parties which divided opinion in this country, a higher point of view than any of the prevailing orthodoxies and heterodoxies. He spoke, besides, not only for himself, but as representing the weight of a new learning and culture of which we were ignorant; and, in addition to his own great genius, he had the advantage of being thus the first from whom we heard the great words of Goethe and Fichte, of Schiller and Richter and Novalis. Nor was he content to speak of the significance of German thought from an abstract point of view; he was continually trying to show what it meant for us. By the aid of the clue it put into his hands he gave us a new interpretation of history, and especially of those two great revolutions—the English and the French Revolution—from which the political, social, and religious history of this country and of modern Europe take their new beginning.<sup>15</sup>

Carlyle’s is the voice of modernity precisely by of its refusal to integrate itself into English as the only language through which that modernity could be expressed:

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<sup>15</sup> Caird, *Essays on Literature and Philosophy* (Glasgow, 1892), Vol. 1, ‘The Genius of Carlyle’, 231–2.

His prophetic tones, his humour and pathos, his denunciations of cant and formalism, even the strange tricks he played with the English language, seemed to make literature a living thing, and to realise the conception of his first great book—to strip from humanity all that the tailor has done for it, and to let us see the bare sinews and muscles of the Hercules, the passions that are hidden by the conventionalities of society, the eternal faiths and hopes, without some form of which it is impossible for men to live and die.<sup>16</sup>

Carlyle's ability to reveal the depths—the spiritual rather than just the political or economic depths—of history is a model for a philosophy which will similarly try to integrate humanity's spiritual experiences into its account of reality. That spirituality, however, is no escape from economic and material realities but rather the very core of resistance to them:

Nor was he merely a student who cast new light on the past; he was inspired with a passion for social reform, which, at least in this country, was then felt by few. He expressed, almost for the first time in English, that disgust at the mean achievements of what we call civilisation, that generous wrath at the arbitrary limitation of its advantages, that deep craving for a better order of social life, which is the source of so many of the most important social and political movements of the present day.<sup>17</sup>

Carlyle's philosophy was a call to action—and a call to the imposition of essentially Scottish values on the English body politic. Carlyle's 'Germanism', therefore, was no denial of his Scottishness: Germany and Scotland were linked by their shared commitment to the Reformed tradition in religion, and Carlyle's adoption of Germanic mentors was, in effect, the reaffirmation of Scottish religion in a mode appropriate to the modern world:

so Carlyle seemed to change the old banner of the Covenant into a standard for the forward march of mankind toward a better ideal of human life. Thus at once widening our horizon and enkindling our enthusiasm, speaking to us in the name of a wider culture, and at the same time reviving the freshness of our earliest faith, and reuniting

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 232–3

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 234–5.

for us the light and the heat which were becoming divided in our inner life—what wonder that Carlyle was listened to with passionate admiration and reverence, such as is felt by the young only for a great teacher who meets and answers the questions which they are led by the spirit of the time to ask.<sup>18</sup>

By introducing young Scots to German thought, Carlyle was actually reintegrating them into the continental religious traditions from which Scottish philosophy had originally developed. Since Davie himself emphasises the importance of the Reformation to Scottish philosophy, he actually has much more in common with Caird than he admits: the ‘blackout’ of the late nineteenth century is, for Davie,

a blacking-out from the communal mind of the fact that Scotland had a radical Reformation in religion, and that the legacy of the Reformation was the backdrop to the development of the new dialectical philosophies of which Ferrier’s was such an important example. (*FB*, 72)

For Caird, on the other hand, engagement with German philosophy was precisely the route by which modern philosophy could be reconnected to the ‘radical Reformation’, and by which that ‘radical Reformation’ could once again be a dynamic force for change in the modern world. Ironically, Caird was, in his effort to revivify Scotland’s Reformed tradition, implementing precisely the agenda which Davie believed to have been neglected in late nineteenth-century Scotland.

Davie’s determined dislike of Caird’s Germanic ‘monism’ ignores the extent to which Caird himself challenged all idealisms that sought, by a spiritual monism, to efface the reality of the material world. Indeed, Caird’s idealism was, as Henry Jones suggests in his biography of his predecessor in the Glasgow chair, actually directed at the same *end* as the Common Sense philosophy of Reid, but with the recognition that that end had to be achieved by more complex means than those adopted by Reid:

Once the first intuitive certainties of ourselves, the world and God have been attacked by doubt, there is no going back. It is reflection that has dealt the blow, and it is reflection which, like the spear of Ithuriel,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

must heal the wound that itself has made. This is why the modern spirit cannot be satisfied with any philosophy like that of the older Scottish school of Thomas Reid, which seemed merely to appeal from the philosophical scepticism of David Hume to the deliverances of “common sense.” It was not that Reid was lacking in a sense of the end to be achieved—the re-establishment of faith in the world, the self and God—but that he had an imperfect idea of the seriousness and complexity of the task, and was too ready to short-circuit the road that philosophy had to travel in order to reach that goal.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, as Jones notes, A.S. Pringle-Pattison had shown in his article on ‘Thomas Reid’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ‘that there is more in Reid’s “common sense” and thus a greater continuity between the earlier and the later Scottish philosophy of reconciliation than is usually supposed’.<sup>20</sup>

Scottish Idealism was thus able to argue that far from neglecting the Scottish past, it was continuing to develop significant aspects of earlier Scottish philosophy: indeed, Andrew Seth’s study of *Scottish Philosophy: A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume* (1885) not only began a period of significant reevaluation of eighteenth-century Scottish thought—which was to include Campbell Fraser’s study of Thomas Reid and Henry Calderwood’s of David Hume, both published in 1898, and W.R. Scott’s *Francis Hutcheson: His Life, and Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* in 1900—but argued for an appreciation of Reid’s real achievements in focusing on the importance of his theory of grammar as indicative of the fundamental principles of ‘common sense’. Seth also suggested that the apparent limitations of Reid, in comparison with Kant, derived from the different kinds of audiences for which they wrote:

Reid wrote no *magnum opus*, in the sense in which Kant wrote several. He had no learned class to whom he could have appealed, if he had written with the elaborate technicality of Kant. His works were addressed to the reading portion of his countrymen generally—to his old students, in great part, and the ministers of religion, into whose ranks many of them had doubtless passed. The *Fachmann*, or specialist, has hitherto not flourished among us, and the disadvantages of his absence are obvious. But it is possible that what Scottish philosophy has lost in

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<sup>19</sup> Henry Jones, *Edward Caird* (Glasgow and London, 1921), 270.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

scientific precision may have been compensated for, in part, by the greater influence which it has exerted upon the body of the people—an influence which has made it a factor, so to speak, in the national life.<sup>21</sup>

Seth's estimate of Reid is based precisely on the opposition of generalism and specialism, and on the *national* value of generalism, which Davie believes idealists to reject. And Seth's work engages directly with those predecessors—not only Reid but Hamilton, for instance—whom Davie believes the idealists ignore. The fact that Caird did not wish to discuss such connections was due precisely to the issue to which Davie himself attributes the problems of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy—its sectarian partialities. Indeed, Davie suggests that religious confrontation made it impossible that there could ever have been a concerted resistance to the Anglicisation of the Scottish universities:

...the movement to unite the Scots behind their distinctive scheme of 'philosophical education' was obstructed and diverted, even from the outset, by the theological hatreds generated by the all-embracing sectarian conflict. The very implementation of a patriotic programme like Fraser's was continually interrupted as each new Professorial election occasioned a fresh outburst of denomination religiosity; and during the next sixteen years the bitterness which had begun at Edinburgh over the Ferrier-MacDougal contest of 1852 successively invaded St Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen. (*DI*, 318)

It was precisely this environment of theological rancour which Caird was determined to overcome: his philosophy of philosophy, as, indeed, his philosophy of religion, was shaped by the desire to discover possible agreements even with those with whom he most disagreed, and by the endeavour to incorporate their insights into a synthesis—on the Hegelian model—that could transcend both opposing views. This is why he did not adopt the disputatious modes of previous Scottish professors: "Can't you philosophise without fechtin'?" he wrote to one of his pupils who was rash enough to desire to enter the list against Mr Bradley and the Absolute.<sup>22</sup> Reconciliation rather than disputation was Caird's aim in philosophical debate and such a response might be interpreted as implying, as Davie seemed to

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Seth, *Scottish Philosophy: A Comparison of the Scottish and German Answers to Hume* (Edinburgh and London, 1899; 1885), 128–9.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, *Life of Edward Caird*, 68.

believe, that for Caird all important philosophical problems had been solved by Hegel, and that all that was left for philosophers to do was to apply Hegel's method to any outstanding issues. Nothing, however, could be less true of Caird's philosophical method. Even Hegelianism, for Caird, was itself not proof against division, as its development after Hegel's death made clear:

That the form and the matter of Hegel—the dialectical process and the positive or constructive result of his philosophy—can thus be set against each other, proves nothing more than what a survey of his work has already shown us,—viz., that the development of that philosophy in Hegel's own works is very incomplete; or, to put it in a slightly different point of view, that the application of the principle expressed in the Hegelian Logic to the complex facts of nature and history, was only imperfectly carried out by him. Hence the shifting affinity,—by which the new principle, like a germinating seed, draws to itself the fruitful elements of the life of the past, while it repels all that is merely traditional and dead,—is apt to show itself in an alternation or opposition of negative and positive, sceptical and constructive tendencies in different minds; which may thus often appear as irreconcilable enemies, though they are really the organs of one spiritual life, and the ministers of its development.<sup>23</sup>

Division is as inevitable as synthesis, and is the necessary consequence of the fact that thought is an *evolutionary* process which can never reach its completion in the world of time. Each philosopher, no matter how apparently complete in his exposition, is but a stepping stone and their work—even the work of a Kant or of a Hegel—is bound to be reinterpreted, reapplied and transcended by that of their successors. That is why Caird wrote so much of his own philosophy in studies of the early Greek philosophers—only the distance lent by the classics allowed philosophy to escape from that too close entanglement in contemporary disputes which had been so destructive of Scottish culture in the nineteenth century.

Caird is, in effect, much more closely aligned with Davie's values than Davie himself was willing to acknowledge, and this is particularly true in the context of the whole notion of the 'democratic intellect', for few philosophers were more deeply committed to the pursuit of 'democratic intellectualism' than

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Caird, *Hegel* (Edinburgh and London, 1883), 222.

Caird—not only was he committed to developing education for working men and for women, he did so in no theoretic spirit, for he devoted much of his time to practical engagement in efforts to bring it about. In this he worked closely with his brother John, then Principal of Glasgow University, as Henry Jones explains in his biography:

In 1868, two years after Caird's appointment to his chair, and from that time until 1877, short courses of lectures were given to women by four of the young Professors at the University. These were Young, Veitch, Nichol and Caird. They were the real "pioneers to a University Extension Movement, of that form of it, too, which has achieved by far the most important practical results in Scotland."

In 1877 these courses were placed on a systematic basis: the Glasgow Association for the Higher Education of Women was formed under the chairmanship of Principal John Caird. Principal Caird, both by temperament and by his position in the University, was led as a rule to mediate between opposing (and sometimes contending) parties rather than to press his own opinions. It is all the more interesting, to note how he took, on this matter, an unambiguous and firm stand on the side of his brother. "He took every opportunity of pleading publicly for the extending to them [women] all the privileges of the University," says Edward Caird. "He was unwearied in the discussion of the well-worn commonplaces as to the capacity of women for such education and its importance to them." "Perhaps," he continues, "I may venture to recall the fact that many years ago, before my brother was Principal, I had the pleasure of voting with him, in a minority of two, in opposition to a proposal to petition Parliament against some Bill that favoured the admission of women to medical degrees."<sup>24</sup>

The extension of Scotland's intellectual resources to those traditionally excluded from the universities was one of Caird's main ambitions and achievements. Of course, if those new students were not introduced to Reid and the Common Sense philosophers then the national purpose of such an extension might be—for Davie—deleterious, but a training in Plato and Aristotle, in Descartes, Hume and Kant could hardly have unfitted them for engaging with other Scottish philosophers, past or present.

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<sup>24</sup> Jones, *Life of Edward Caird*, 97–8.

Caird was also directly involved in the University Settlement project in aid of the city's poor, not only supporting the creation of a physical space from which it could operate but speaking at its opening. In Jones's account,

... he explained the objects which the institution was intended to secure. His short speech was a model of strength and wisdom. "Hitherto," he said, "the attention of the benevolent public had been directed mainly to charitable and religious work, which was not only valuable but absolutely necessary. But that work, as ordinarily understood, was not sufficient. The general condition of the life of the poor could not be raised unless they were given the opportunities of social and intellectual progress and of contact with things that are beautiful. They must be provided with the means of rational and refined amusement. The middle and upper classes enjoyed advantages which the poor could not possess, and they ought to feel a generous shame that the heritage of humanity was, so much, the possession of the few. They should do their best to bridge the gulf that separated the well-to-do from the poor, and foster mutual understanding and goodwill by social intercourse; so that the nation might be one body and its members bound together in one fellowship."<sup>25</sup>

In *The Crisis of the Democratic Intellect* Davie praises Norman Kemp Smith's commitment to the Workers Educational Association in the 1920s, as he might have praised Kemp Smith's successor, John Macmurray, for his commitment to Newbattle Abbey College in the 1940s and 50s, a college designed to prepare those who had had no opportunity for advanced secondary school education to undertake courses at university. Kemp Smith and Macmurray were deeply committed to the 'democratic' extension of 'intellect', but both, ironically, had learned the value of such initiatives from the Scottish Idealist tradition which Davie presents as the enemy of democratic intellectualism.

#### IV

Davie's failure to acknowledge either the Scottish provenance or the democratic credentials of Scottish idealism might be put down to a simple generational shift—the idealists were those against whom the post-First World

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 115–16.



War generation of British philosophers rebelled, and though Davie rejects the specific response of Moore and Russell to their idealist predecessors, he shares with them the sense that idealism is not a relevant philosophy for the kind of twentieth century that was emerging from the First World War. But Davie's version of 'the Scotch metaphysics' and of Scottish philosophy suffers from the same problem that had afflicted earlier accounts, such as that of James McCosh, in his *The Scottish Philosophy* of 1875. As John Clark Murray, a Scottish-trained philosopher who had moved to a professorship in Canada pointed out in a review in 1876, McCosh was working with two conflicting notions of 'Scottish philosophy', one which defined 'Scottish' in terms of a specific *kind* of philosophical tradition and one which defined it in terms of nationality. McCosh identified 'Scottish philosophy' with the Common Sense tradition of Reid, but, Murray notes,

...it may be observed that he does not limit himself to the field indicated in his title. We do not, of course, object to the chapter on Hume and James Mill, and Brown, or any of the other Scottish writers who opposed the characteristic doctrines of the Common Sense School; but Dr McCosh scarcely keeps in view the proper object of his work, when he gives them a prominent place in a history of 'The Scottish Philosophy'.<sup>26</sup>

The school of Reid had come to be identified internationally as the 'Scotch philosophy' but, of course, it was written precisely to refute the work of David Hume, and Hume, therefore, could not be considered a contributor to the 'Scottish school'. Indeed, for McCosh, Hume was essentially French in his philosophical commitments: 'With these predilections', McCosh comments,

France was the country which had most attractions to him, but was at the same time the most unfortunate country he could have gone to, and the middle of the eighteenth century the most unfortunate period for visiting it. In philosophy, the age had outgrown Descartes and Malebranche, Arnauld and Pascal, and the grave and eminent thinkers of the previous century, and was embracing the most superficial parts of Locke's philosophy ... in religion he saw around him, among the great mass of the people, a very corrupted and degenerate form of

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<sup>26</sup> J. Clark Murray, 'The Scottish Philosophy', *Macmillan's Magazine*, XXXIX (1878), 112–26 at 113.

Christianity, while, among the educated classes, infidelity was privately cherished, and was ready to burst out.<sup>27</sup>

It is indicative of the tendency of Hume's philosophy according to McCosh, that he 'uttered no protest' against French immorality: 'he has left behind no condemnation of the morality of France, while he was fond of making sly and contemptuous allusions to the manifestations of religious zeal in his own country'.<sup>28</sup> Hume is as essentially alien to the spirit of Scottish philosophy for McCosh as Caird and the idealists are for Davie. Indeed, Davie's version replicates the identification of Hume with an alien perspective since Caird and his followers view 'the incoming of the German ideas into Scotland as the crucial turning point in the progress of philosophy, in the light of which all previous work by Scots—Hume apart—turns out to be limited and provincial' (*CDI*, 177). This ambivalent attitude to Hume is then transferred to the philosopher whom McCosh sees as Hume's successor, John Stuart Mill, whose *Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865) challenged the major nineteenth-century supporter of Thomas Reid:

Mr J. S. Mill, in his 'Examination of Hamilton, has reproduced to a large extent the theory of Hume, but without so clearly seeing or candidly avowing the consequences. I rather think that Mr Mill himself is scarcely aware of the extent of the resemblance between his doctrine and those of the Scottish sceptic: as he seems to have wrought out his conclusions from data supplied him by his own father, Mr James Mill, who, however, has evidently drawn much from Hume. The circumstance that Mr Mill's work was welcomed by such declamations by the chief literary organs in London is proof, either that the would-be leaders of opinion are so ignorant of philosophy that they do not see the consequences; or that the writers, being chiefly young men bred at Oxford or Cambridge, are fully prepared to accept them in the reaction against the revived mediaevalism which was sought to be imposed upon them.<sup>29</sup>

For McCosh, John Stuart Mill is the philosopher who reverses Reid's and Hamilton's arguments against Hume to re-establish a modern Humean

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<sup>27</sup> James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy: Biographical, Expository, Critical from Hutcheson to Hamilton* (London, 1875), 115.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>29</sup> McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy*, 126–7.

philosophy which appeals to an English audience with no respect for the central tradition of Scottish philosophy. Despite the fact that John Stuart Mill was educated entirely by his father, who had himself been educated at Edinburgh University, Mill is, for McCosh, the representative of English resistance to Scottish philosophy, with enough of Comte to make Mill, too, a representative of French godlessness:

Mr Mill, in his examination of Hamilton's Philosophy, has brought us to a Humism joined to Comtism. This is the dismal creed provided for those who choose to follow the negative criticisms of the day in philosophy and theology. What we need is a new Thomas Reid, not to do over again the work which the common-sense philosopher did, but a corresponding service in this age to what he did in his time.<sup>30</sup>

McCosh's refusal to accept Mill as part of Scottish philosophy is repeated by Davie: Mill's attack on Sir William Hamilton's philosophy, 'without extinguishing the Scottish philosophy in Scotland, destroyed its credit in the rest of Britain' (*CDI*, 124) and left the field clear for what he identifies as 'the English tradition in philosophy' – 'practical utilitarianism, Bentham, John Stuart Mill and his father, Russell, Ryle and Popper' (*SM*, 7). Excluding Hume and Mill on the empiricist side and Caird and his successors on the idealist side in order to produce a singular 'Scottish philosophy' actually robs Scottish philosophy of its internal dynamic, because it discounts the relevance to the definition of what counts as Scottish of the debates *between* different intellectual traditions, all with good claims to being Scottish. If only one tradition, the common-sense tradition, is to be properly Scottish, then, as McCosh creditably acknowledged, Scotland's greatest philosopher, David Hume, is not part of the Scottish tradition. But if Caird and the idealists are not part of Scottish philosophy – even though it is characteristic of Scottish philosophy, according to Davie, that it is closer to continental than to English traditions – then it becomes impossible to explain how Scotland's distinctive twentieth-century tradition in philosophy, from Andrew Seth through Norman Kemp Smith and John Anderson to John Macmurray, or indeed its twentieth-century theology in work of someone like Thomas Torrance, could have been formed, for the background out of which all of them worked was the Kantian and Hegelian tradition as it had been developed in nineteenth-century Scotland.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 148–9.

Caird's idealism, which rejected any version of idealism that reduced the material world to a phantom produced by consciousness, provided the ground on which Scottish philosophers developed what might be described as an idealistic realism in the period after the First World War. As Alexander Broadie notes in his *History of Scottish Philosophy*, 'the idealism that Kemp Smith espouses plainly implies a realist view of nature', and he adds that 'the realism in question is a tough sort that bears a notable resemblance to Thomas Reid's and that is utterly at odds with Kant'.<sup>31</sup> Kemp Smith's development of a new version of realism was to be matched by John Anderson's 'Australian Realism' at the University of Sydney, while the 'personal idealism' of Andrew Seth provided the foundations for John Macmurray's 'personalist' philosophy which had a widespread impact in Britain from the 1930s to the 1960s. Without an understanding of the *Scottishness* of Scottish idealism, the developments of Scottish philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century becomes a series of disconnected individual initiatives that happen in isolation from the past history of Scottish philosophy. A full account of Scottish philosophy has to include both John Stuart Mill and Edward Caird, even though the first made his career entirely in England and the second was recognised in England by his appointment as Master at Balliol. Neither, however, disowned the Scottish foundations of their philosophies—in Mill's case by his sustained effort to promote his father's work on *The Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829), which the younger Mill republished in 1869 with extensive additional material both by himself and by Alexander Bain, who had been appointed, in part because of Mill's influence, as Professor of Logic and English Literature in Aberdeen in 1860; in Caird's case not only by his acknowledgment of the influence of Carlyle but by his influential role as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow for 27 years. Without them the evolution of Scottish philosophy and its shaping influence on Scottish theology (William Robertson Smith), Scottish anthropology (J.G. Frazer) and Scottish psychology (Suttie, Fairbairn and Laing) cannot be understood. Symptomatically, both Caird and Mill have almost no place in Broadie's *History of Scottish Philosophy*, despite its effort to resist Davie's account of the 'blackout' of the Scottish Enlightenment.

The second and related failing of Davie's account of nineteenth-century Scottish philosophy is that it concentrates primarily on philosophy *in* Scotland, despite the fact that the period he is analysing is one when Scottish philosophy had established an almost global network. The careers of John Clark Murray

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<sup>31</sup> Alexander Broadie, *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh, 2009), 327.

and John Watson in Canada reveal a very different narrative of the relationship between the Scottish common-sense school and Scottish idealism than that given by Davie. Clark Murray had been a student of Sir William Hamilton, and, after arriving in Canada, produced a compendium of Hamilton's philosophy for the use of his students, on the grounds that there was no single coherent piece of Hamilton's writings that outlined clearly his fundamental thinking. This was published in 1870 as *An Outline of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, with a foreword by James McCosh. By the time it was published, however, Clark Murray had already set out to demolish Hamilton's philosophy in a series of articles in the *Canadian Journal* (1867–9). In these he argued that Hamilton had presented himself as the representative of the Scottish tradition and that insofar as Hamilton's philosophy failed, the Scottish common-sense tradition as a whole failed. The principal problem with Hamilton's writings, Clark Murray decided (as, indeed, John Stuart Mill had decided) is that they are full of contradictions—as, for instance, in his confusion over the nature of mental states and, therefore, about the fundamental elements of psychology:

At the very starting point of Hamilton's philosophy we are thus brought face to face with a dilemma which spreads much wider perplexity than may at first sight appear. For (1) if consciousness is the essential quality by which states of mind may be distinguished from those of matter, what is to be understood by certain states which are described as being destitute of this quality and yet mental? [i.e. 'latent' states of mind] and (2) if there may be states of mind without consciousness, what is the quality that forms the difference between a mental fact and a physical? ...in consequence of explaining certain facts beyond the sphere of consciousness by the agency of mind, he has left us in doubt as to the property by which mental and physical facts are to be distinguished from one another. In treating of psychology as a distinct branch of science it is implied that he recognised the facts, which are investigated in that science, as forming a group by themselves, distinguished by some characteristic from all other facts within our experience; but what, in Hamilton's opinion, that characteristic is, I am unable to discover. It is certainly a serious deficiency in the exposition of a science, that the distinctive nature of the objects, with which the science is occupied, is left altogether unexplained.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Canadian Journal*, LXVI (December 1867), 371–2

Such confusions are, for Murray, symptomatic of underlying problems with the Scottish tradition which Hamilton did so much to promote through his writings on Reid. Like Reid, Hamilton believed himself to be a *natural realist*—that is, believed ‘that man has an intuition of immediate knowledge of a nonego or matter as existing in space’<sup>33</sup>—while the whole philosophical tradition stemming from Locke and developed by Hume consisted of what Hamilton called ‘hypothetical realists’, those who believe that matter really exists but for whom such belief is only achieved by an induction from the sensations produced on or by our organs of sense. On this issue, Clark Murray thinks that Hamilton is simply self-deceiving, and that he selectively quotes from the works of supposed ‘hypothetical realists’, ignoring the strength of the claim they actually make as to the nature of their realism. He takes Berkeley as the apparently most extreme case of such hypothetical realism in order to show that Berkeley has, in fact, a better claim to being a natural realist than does Hamilton himself:

Now, even though Hamilton may have comprehended the main drift of Berkeley’s philosophy, the above passage might have taught him that there is no sense in which his opponent could fairly be represented as rejecting the natural testimony of consciousness to our immediate perception of material reality. On the contrary, that it is a testimony to which, as Sir William Hamilton himself admits [Reid’s *Works*, 817, n] Berkeley may rightly appeal, and actually ‘did appeal more confidently, perhaps more logically, than Reid.’ Indeed, whatever judgment may be given as to the truth of Berkeley’s system, an impartial criticism cannot refrain from deciding that it presents stronger claims to the name of Natural Realism than can be urged in favour of Hamilton’s. For (1) while the former attributes reality, in the sense in which he understands the term, to all sensible objects, the secondary as well as the primary qualities of matter indifferently, the latter limits our perception of reality to the primary qualities, though there cannot be a doubt that the natural instinct of mankind, unchecked by scientific reflection, is to believe, when a rose is before the eyes, that its color is not less real than its figure. Moreover, (2) while the gist of Berkeley’s argument’s is to prove that there is no unperceived reality underlying the objects of perception, Hamilton, in a measure, destroys the realistic aspect of his

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<sup>33</sup> *Canadian Journal*, New Series, Vol. XII (1868), 57.

system, by restoring, in his doctrine of the Conditioned, the unknown material substance which his opponent relegates to the category of unfounded hypotheses, contradicted by the natural convictions of mankind.<sup>34</sup>

For Murray, Berkeley is the measure by which Reid and Hamilton can both be judged to have failed,<sup>35</sup> for whatever Reid's claims to defend 'common sense', it is Berkeley's account of perception which, according to Murray, offers the stoutest defence of common sense, since it requires no unknowable substance which we have to infer from our sensations: all that it requires is that things are perceived by us, by others and, in the end, by God:

while the Scottish philosopher regards the material objects presented to the sense as being the qualities of a substance which is not known by us, but is, of course, known by the Omniscient, the Irish philosopher protests against the hypothesis of such an unknown substance, as not only unnecessary to explain the phenomena of knowledge, but as contradicting its essential conditions ...<sup>36</sup>

The comparison with the internal coherence of Berkeley's system, Murray believes, allows us to see the weaknesses of Reid's, for as well as retaining the notion of an unknowable substance, Reid fails to identify those elements which are *necessary* in consciousness, equating them with what is 'self-evident' without providing the criterion by which 'self-evidence' can be distinguished from the prejudice of particular individuals. 'With this doctrine of first principles', Murray concludes, 'it is not to be wondered at that Reid has been so unsuccessful in what ought to have been the most prominent excellence of his system'; and if Reid has failed then so has Scottish philosophy, since 'in Reid is included all that is distinctive of Scottish metaphysical philosophy previous to Hamilton'.<sup>37</sup> Reid's philosophy is made up of 'the universal convictions of men, oozing out of the consciousness of every moment', but 'every philosopher of common sense, if not of the Common Sense School, must see that such propositions are of no philosophical value, till purified

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<sup>34</sup> *Canadian Journal*, New Series Vol. XII (1868), 58–9.

<sup>35</sup> Here, Clark Murray is following the arguments of Campbell Fraser, whose lectures on Berkeley preceded his influential series of books on the topic from the 1870s.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

by reflective analysis—till we can show that we have accurately interpreted the language in which they are expressed, and that that language represents with scientific exactness the mental phenomena of which it is the revelation between man and man'.<sup>38</sup> On Hamilton, as Reid's successor, Murray is even more damning:

Kant, Scholasticism, and the ancient Classics, represent all that is prominent in Hamilton's mind. It was true the wanderings into which he was led by his voracious appetite for reading were always held in check by the attachment which he retained to the philosophy of his native land. But though much of his intellectual labour was spent in defence of that philosophy, in editing and expounding the works of its chief representatives, his own mental character derived none of his prominent features from that source. Ferrier truly said, it was the one mistake of his career that he dedicated his powers to the service of Dr Reid; it fettered the decided bent of his own speculative genius, and transmuted what might have been a consistent Idealism into a perplexing conglomerate of doctrines which will not fuse into one system. For his endeavour to give a distinct philosophical meaning to the doctrines of the Scottish school only prepared the way for its dissolution.<sup>39</sup>

What McCosh's account of Scottish philosophy ought to have revealed, in other words, is the bankruptcy of the Scottish tradition, insofar as it is the tradition of Reid: 'the system which had been laboriously built up by the toil of more than three generations of thinkers was reduced to the ruins embodied in a literature which can no longer represent the living struggles of men'.<sup>40</sup>

Clark Murray's analysis of the failings of the whole Scottish tradition, written in the 1860s, the decade to which Davie attributes the collapse of Scottish philosophy, might seem to support the analysis of *The Democratic Intellect* as to the destructive effects of idealism's treatment of the Scottish past, but in fact Clark Murray offers a very different interpretation; for him, Hamilton's failure points forward to the future success of Scottish philosophy in the form of Caird's idealism:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 126.



Hamilton, indeed, was himself conscious of the close approximation between his own professed Realism and an Absolute Idealism; and the subsequent developments of Scottish speculation have only evinced more clearly the necessity of advancing beyond the position of the Scottish school in order to establish that position itself ... Professor Caird's recent work on Kant is an evidence that the teaching which issues from the chair of Reid goes to a length which he could never have surmised, in protesting against the illusion which reduces human knowledge to a mere complexus of sensations.<sup>41</sup>

Hamilton's philosophy can be as easily interpreted as a prefiguration of Absolute Idealism as a recapitulation of Reidian Realism. For Murray, Caird's philosophy fulfils Reid's desire to challenge both 'the way of ideas' and the reduction of knowledge to 'sensation' but does so with a philosophical sophistication which reveals that 'Reid's thinking never represents the speculative toil of a philosophic intellect, but merely the refined opinions of ordinary intelligence'.<sup>42</sup> Scottish Common Sense is displaced by the higher forms of Scottish Idealism not as the negation of the Scottish tradition but as its fulfilment. Significantly, then, when Clark Murray moved from Queen's University in Kingston to McGill University in Montreal in 1872, his replacement was another Scottish migrant—John Watson, a student of Caird's who was to be one of the leading figures of the idealist movement in North America in the following half century. What Clark Murray and Watson reveal is how Scottish philosophy in the Empire moves from Common Sense to Idealism as the continuing assertion of the special place of Scottish philosophy in a general scheme of education that Scots had exported across the globe. The same replacement of Scottish Common Sense by Scottish Idealism took place in universities throughout the British Empire and migrant Scottish philosophers replaced one set of Scottish text books by another, reinforcing Scotland's centrality to anglophone philosophy while reshaping the understanding of what 'the Scottish School' meant. Reid's answers to Hume were replaced by Caird's, but Scottish philosophy's commitment to faith in the rationality of the world and its ultimate spiritual purpose remained.

From this imperial perspective the overthrowing of the common sense philosophy in the 1870s is far from being the national disaster that Davie describes—it is, indeed, the indication of Scottish philosophy's vitality and ability to respond

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 125–6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

to changing circumstances. Far from being the symptom of the end of Scottish philosophy, Scottish idealism is the vehicle by which Scots-educated philosophers reassert Scotland's centrality to contemporary philosophical debate in the late nineteenth century but, more than that, provide the foundations for what will emerge in the twentieth century as distinctive national traditions in philosophy in the United States, in Canada and in Australasia. The evolutionary structure of Scottish idealism's conception of the world made it an appropriate means by which new imperial societies could begin to envisage their own national contributions to philosophy. Scottish philosophy was not erased in the 1870s but extended itself into new national traditions in philosophy across the globe—and the feedback from those transformations would return to redefine the history of philosophy in Scotland, creating, among other things, the notion of the Scottish Enlightenment, a notion absent from any nineteenth-century account of Scottish thought and unlikely to have been present in the subtitle of the original manuscript of Davie's *The Scotch Metaphysics*, since the term did not come into modern use till the late 1960s. Scottish idealism may have initially displaced the common sense philosophy of the 'Scottish' tradition: its very success, however, sent philosophers and historians back to explore its evolutionary foundations, and, as in the case of Andrew Seth, to discover continuities between scepticism, common sense and idealism that reinforced the sense of a national tradition which could incorporate not just one but all of these possible responses to the human condition. The 'Scotch Metaphysics' is a much larger tradition than Davie suggests and has to be read in terms of its broad imperial and 'postcolonial' scope if we are to understand the full significance of the Scottish philosophical tradition in nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as the real issues shaping Scottish philosophy and education in Scotland in last hundred years.

## V

In its conception of an evolutionary development of the human spirit that was expressed equally, and equally clearly, in religion and in science; in its commitment to the transformation of the conditions of women and the working classes in the modern urban environment; in its belief in the potential of human action to transcend and transform the conditions of industrial society; and in its belief in the fundamental—or potential—goodness both of humanity and of the world that it inhabits, Scottish idealism provided the

intellectual framework within which Patrick Geddes's ideas developed. This is clear in the recollections of one of Geddes's earliest collaborators and one of his closest friends, James Mavor.<sup>43</sup>

Mavor, a generalist like Geddes who became a professor in disciplines—Political Economy and Constitutional History—in which he had never taken a degree, and who shared with Geddes a profound admiration for the ideas of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, had been taught by Edward Caird during his brief period as a student at Glasgow University, and subsequently, despite not having graduated, became Caird's assistant lecturer in the academic session of 1890–91.<sup>44</sup> Their shared commitment to improving the conditions of the working class brought them into a longlasting friendship. In his autobiography Mavor recounts his early involvement with the Social Democratic Federation that had been formed in 1884 to promote the economic and political theories of Karl Marx, and which had established a branch in Glasgow: 'I joined this branch', Mavor recounts, 'not because I found myself in entire sympathy with the doctrines of Marx, but because I felt that the Social Democrats were at least thinking seriously on social questions and because I recognised in the movement at the beginning of it an educational force of an important character'.<sup>45</sup> William Morris was an early speaker at a meeting organised by this branch of the Federation:

There was a large meeting (about a thousand people) attracted by Morris's reputation. It was held on a Sunday evening. I had been asked to take the chair. Before the meeting began, Edward Caird, who was in the audience, came to me and said that if there was any difficulty about procuring a chairman that he would be glad to take the chair himself.<sup>46</sup>

Caird's presence at such an event is testimony to his political activism, and his willingness to take the chair a signal of his own reputation in the city, but the meeting of poet and philosopher was to reveal, for Mavor, the strengths of the latter and the weaknesses of the former:

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<sup>43</sup> See the 'Introduction' to this issue for a discussion of Mavor's relationship with Geddes.

<sup>44</sup> James Mavor Collection, Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Box 33, item 6, letter to the Carnegie Trust.

<sup>45</sup> James Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World* (London, 1923), Vol. 1, 177.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 179.

Morris appeared seldom to trouble himself about forming considered judgments of men. He was indiffernt to most of the people whom he met. He passed them by because they did not interest him—that is, because they did not seem to be worth the emotional strain involved in friendship. Hence his judgments of men were sometimes abrupt, and often really unsound. For instance, he said to me of Edward Caird, “He is a dull man.” Caird was by no means dull, and he had a much more penetrative appreciation of Morris than Morris had of him.<sup>47</sup>

For Mavor, Caird would always be ‘my revered teacher and friend’<sup>48</sup> and he corresponded with him from Toronto until Caird’s death in 1908. The unity of the world and of our knowledge of it was the key lesson which Caird’s students took from his teaching. As another of those students, the Scottish-Canadian philosopher John Watson, was to put it in summarising Caird’s work in 1909,

For their own purposes the special sciences treat the world as if the only explanation of it were that which traces out its relations of coexistence or succession; but, though it is true that the higher teleological view of nature presupposes the humbler work of the special sciences, we cannot admit any abstract contrast between the mechanical and the teleological conceptions of the world, as if the one were contradictory of the other. Nor can we stop, even with the determination of existence as involving purpose, for the world of necessity “stands in essential relation to the unity of the self that knows it,” and thus “the external necessity which characterizes the objective world when we regard it as complete in itself (as it is generally regarded by science), must receive a new interpretation when we recognize that it cannot be separated from the unity of the intelligence.”<sup>49</sup>

It was the search for that unity between world and intelligence that underpinned Mavor’s conception of political economy, which he saw as fundamentally *moral* in its purpose. Addressing a conference on ‘Social Progress and Spiritual Life’ in 1900 he declared:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 201.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., Vol. 1, 331.

<sup>49</sup> John Watson, “The Idealism of Edward Caird: IP,” *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (May 1909), 259–80 at 279–80.

I do not think that we can well disregard the important influences towards the awakening of the moral sense which a serious study of the economic aspects of social progress involves. It may startle you if I were to say what I firmly believe that the Nihilist movement in Russia and the Socialist and Anarchist movements in various countries are merely incidents in a great moral awakening; and that those who have never shared in any way in this awakening have missed the most powerful of regenerative influences of our times. Although every one of the tenets of these schools were proved to be altogether wrong, there would still remain the impressive moral stimulus, which a serious investigation into the facts of industrial and social life must give us.<sup>50</sup>

That economics, as a specialised discipline, must be guided by a sense of humanity's moral purpose is the consequence of Mavor's insistence that knowledge is one and whole. He identifies this 'wholeness' as typical of the best works of modern economics: 'In the current writings of the chief economists nothing is more clear than that they regard economic interest, not as a mere pecuniary affair, affecting a limited group of persons, but as an interest in which the life of society as a whole is the paramount consideration'.<sup>51</sup> It was this concern with the spiritual and moral purpose of their activities in relation to the 'whole' of society, indeed, in relation to the whole of humanity and its environments that Mavor and Geddes shared with the Scottish idealists. Geddes's search for the best relationship between the city—scene of the highest forms of human evolution—and the natural world from which it emerged was the carrying out of what Caird had insisted upon as fundamental to the understanding of the human condition:

To cut off any part from the whole, to which it belongs, is to evacuate it of its true significance. Positivism admits that this is true of the attempt to separate the individual from humanity. But it is equally true of the attempt to separate the life of humanity from the life of nature. In asserting the essential interrelation of man and nature there are of course serious difficulties, particularly the difficulty of the priority in time of the inorganic to the organic and of life to consciousness upon the earth. It is just such difficulties that Positivism seeks to avoid

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<sup>50</sup> James Mavor Collection, Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Box 58a, item 144, (November 1900), 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

by its limitation of knowledge to phenomena and of the unity that is achievable to the “subjective” one of human society. But the attempt to achieve unity by thus arbitrarily restricting the range of the mind’s demand for it must end in defeating itself. For human life becomes meaningless if taken apart from its setting in the world or apart from the double relation of spirit to the order of nature as at once contrasted with and akin to it.<sup>52</sup>

Geddes’s concern with the relationship between human civilisation and its natural, its environmental context was already part of the intellectual agenda of the Scottish Idealists. If Geddes is, for Davie, one of the last representatives of the ‘democratic intellect’, then he is so because of what he shares with the Scottish Idealists rather than what differentiates him, and what makes them too a part of the tradition of ‘democratic intellectualism’, despite Davie’s attempt to present them as the negation of Scottish traditions.

In Geddes’s case the search for interconnection and for wholeness expressed itself in those ‘thinking machines’ that Lewis Mumford believed had ruined Geddes’s capacity for expressing his ideas in prose.<sup>53</sup> The ‘thinking machines’, however, allowed Geddes to see the relationships of a ‘whole’ which would otherwise escape his grasp in its many subsidiary parts. The striving after ‘wholeness’ was an aspect of Geddes’s generalism, but also part of what he shared with the Scottish Idealists, an inheritance that profoundly shaped Geddes’s, as indeed Mavor’s, conception of the role and purpose of the intellectual as an agent for change in the modern world.

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<sup>52</sup> Sir Henry Jones and John Henry Muirhead, *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* (Glasgow, 1921), 267–8.

<sup>53</sup> See Frank G. Novak, *Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes: The Correspondence* (London and New York, 1995), ‘Appendices’, which give Mumford’s views on what prevented Geddes fulfilling his ambitions. In 1925, he wrote, ‘what can I do with the man whose muffled soliloquy spreads over hours, the man who is caught in his “thinking machines” as one who had invented decimal notation might perhaps spend his life by counting all possible objects in tens’, Appendix 1, 341.