The Rise of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment.
Edited by Tatsuya Sakamoto and Hideo Tanaka.

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For this Western reviewer, the publication in English by a leading British publisher, of a collection of essays on the history of Scottish political economy, is a matter of great interest. The story of the routes by which Western political economy entered Japanese intellectual culture was the subject of a ground-breaking collection of essays in English, which was published by the University of Tokyo Press in 1988, The Enlightenment and Beyond: Political Economy Comes to Japan, edited by Chuhei Sugiyama and Hiroshi Mizuta. Not much was said there about the remarkable interest that Japanese scholars have shown in the political economy of the Scottish Enlightenment in the past generation and the present volume will do much to fill the gap. The volume comprises thirteen essays which, taken together give a very fair idea of the range of current interest in the subject. Shigemi Murumatsu and Gentaro Seki deal with the Scottish debate about the Act of Union and its immediate consequences for the economy and civil society in Scotland. Toshiaki Ogose raises important questions about the economic organisation of the theodicy proposed by Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith’s teacher and the so-called Father of the Scottish Enlightenment. Yoshio Nagai and Yasuo Amoh deal with different aspects of the thought of Robert Wallace and the Enlightenment’s discussion of the population question. Tatsuya Sakamoto, Ikuo Omori, Keiichi Watanabe and Shoji Tanaka, discuss different aspects of the political economy of the so-called Scottish Triangle, David Hume, Sir James Steuart and Adam Smith, paying particular attention to the relationship between their economic thinking, their thinking about government and their concerns with the ethical problems involved in maintaining the moral fabric of civil society in an age of commerce. Kimihiro Koyanagi sketches some of the outlines of Kames’ and William Robertson’s historical thinking. Hideo Tanaka continues his investigation of the political thought of Smith’s great pupil, John Millar and Hisashi Shinohara provides a careful exegesis of Dugald Stewart’s attempt to set the remarkable philosophical culture of the recent past in a wider philosophical and historical perspective. The volume ends with Hiroshi Mizuta’s own authoritative account of the way in which Scottish political economy entered Japanese intellectual culture.

I would guess that it is with Mizuta’s essay that most westerner readers will begin. It is hard for many of us to understand the
enormous interest the subject has attracted in Japan and we are badly in need an introduction to the questions which are of particular importance to Japanese scholars. Mizuta shows how Japanese understanding of the Scottish Triangle of Hume–Steuart-Smith was shaped by changing attitudes to modernization, Marx and above all Confucianism. The problem Japanese economists and social theorists faced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was one of developing an ethically viable language of modernization for a civilisation whose social ethics were deeply patriarchal and Confucian, and were at odds with the language of individualism and self-love that seemed to be characteristic of the western liberal tradition. As Mizuta points out, in reviewing the western language of modernization, Japanese scholars were confronted by two contrasting analytical models of political society, firstly the 'logical' and apparently 'individualist' models supplied by Hobbes, Locke and their successors and secondly the 'historical' models that were embedded in the actual experience of western society as it moved from its feudal to its commercial or capitalist stage of development. Seen from this point of view Scotland seemed to provide Japan with a particularly relevant example of economic development. Its distinctive system of political economy was forged at a time when it had lost its political independence but had managed to retain and strengthen a distinctive civil society. What is more this political economy was integrated with a social theory and a system of social ethics which directly addressed the ethical problems provoked by the individualism on which economic development depends.

Mizuta’s historical perspective will be of great value to western scholars who wish to understand the orientation of the essays in this tightly edited volume. The editors’ starting point is the well-known but now somewhat outdated collection of essays which was published by the Cambridge University Press in 1983, *Wealth and Virtue; the Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*. They regret the failure of historians and economists to follow through the exploration of ‘the ambiguous relationships between wealth and virtue in the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment’ and they regret the reorientation of subsequent research on the history of the Scottish Enlightenment towards questions relating to philosophy and political theory. The purpose of the present volume, they tell us, was to put the original project back on track by examining the different types of economic discourse employed by the Scots, and by considering their relationship to the thinking of the Triangle and to the wider concerns of a society preoccupied with improvement. The editors are right to call attention to the enormous amount of interest the political and philosophical thought of the Scottish enlightenment has generated since 1983 and it is undoubtedly true that this has had the effect of putting questions about the origins and nature of the conceptual language of Scottish political economy on hold. But as a participant in the wealth and virtue project as well as being a contributor to that volume, one may ask whether the great project of writing the history of Scottish political economy has really lost its way as badly as the editors suggest.

The original purpose of the wealth and virtue project was to test the hypothesis that Scottish political economy developed as a form of political discourse that had its roots in what were then taken to be the dominant forms of political discourse shaping British
political thought — classical republicanism as it had recently been defined by J.G.A. Pocock in his Machiavellian Moment and the natural jurisprudence of Grotius and Pufendorf as it was currently being viewed by two scholars with very different perspectives, Istvan Hont and Knud Haakonssen. It was realized at the time that both of these languages had significant Scottish histories and that the Scottish Triangle and its predecessors and associates had responded to them in their own particular ways. One of the most striking outcomes of the project — although it has to be admitted that this is not always evident in the published collection of essays — was the realization that the languages of classical republicanism and natural jurisprudence were of much greater complexity than had been realized and that their different filiations and interconnections would have to be identified and disentangled before the task of determining the debts that political economy owed to them could be developed. Thus, when the editors talk of “the simple dichotomy between wealth and virtue” most western scholars would reply that in historical terms, the dichotomy is anything but simple and that understanding the “purely political and philosophical issues” that have been the subject of so much recent research is absolutely essential to understanding the intellectual culture in which Scottish political economy was embedded. Indeed while the essays in this volume do directly address problems arising out of the discussion which was begun in 1983 in Wealth and Virtue, and while it is clear that they do indeed address the specifically Japanese agenda Mizuta has explained so clearly, only a few of the authors seem familiar with recent work on the political culture of Britain and France and with the changing face of the debate about wealth and virtue. Let me explain what I mean in a little more detail by offering comments on some of the papers in this collection.

Muramatsu’s and Seki’s essays on the debate about the Anglo-Scottish union and its consequences deal with crucial moments in the development of Scottish political culture, moments in which Scots discussed the problems involved in restoring Scottish ‘independence’ and the particular relevance of economic improvement and virtuous citizenship to the outcome. The two authors deal effectively with the relevant texts, taking careful note of concepts which would be of central importance to the language of political economy developed by the Triangle. Muramatsu pays particular attention to Andrew Fletcher and comments on his failure to develop ‘an economic logic’ which would link questions about the pursuit of individual wealth to questions about its consequences for the public good. Seki has interesting things to say about the Jacobite and anti-unionist provenance of an early strand of thinking that questioned the role of government in generating economic improvement. Both essays are written by careful and thoughtful scholars and both are written with the conceptual language of the Triangle in mind. But the economic thinking both writers address is locked into political languages very different from those of the Triangle authors, languages which need to be excavated and understood if their relationship — if any — to the thinking of the Triangle is to be understood.

Ogose raises important questions about the economic organization of the theodicy which Francis Hutcheson developed in the System of Moral Philosophy and saw as a school of virtue for the modern citizen. Once again the analysis looks forward, in this case
to Hutcheson's great pupil Adam Smith, although it might be suggested that it is equally profitable to look back to the Irish and Scottish contexts in which his thinking took shape, to the curiously old-fashioned radical whiggism of the previous century and to a political culture that seems very different from the improvement-orientated whiggery of the Triangle and their associates. This more recent line of thinking raises new questions about the precise nature of Hume and Smith's debts to Hutcheson and suggests that the intellectual and ideolological space between them was much greater than has been generally realized. Sakomoto's discussion of the relevance of Hume's political economy to the development of his theory of manners and his remarks about the importance of his European tour of 1748 in shaping his famous critique of Montesquieu is sophisticated and suggestive. His essay reminds us of the importance of the Scots' debts to Montesquieu and of the importance of the improvement-orientated intellectual milieu of Edinburgh and Glasgow in the later 1740's and '50's as forums in which Montesquieu's seminal work could be discussed critically. What is striking about that language of improvement is that it was a historical language, deeply embedded in a distinctive language of progress that, when theorized, was to be of primary importance in shaping Scottish political economy and in conceptualizing the natural processes that would explain the origins of the sort of civil society that would reconcile the tensions between individualism and community, wealth and virtue which lie at the ethical heart of Scottish political economy. It is to be regretted that Koyanagi's sketch of the historical thought of Kames and Robertson is the only contribution to this all-important subject.

Omori's and Watanabe's essays on 'the Scottish Triangle in the Shaping of Political Economy' and on Smith's politics of taxation are likewise sophisticated and thoughtful examinations of texts of central importance to the present enterprise. Both raise important questions about the intellectual characteristics of Scottish political economy and more particularly about the role of legislators in ensuring the economic efficiency and ethical viability of a modern state. Omori argues that Steuart, indebted as he was to Hume and Montesquieu, was the first Scot to develop a self-standing system of political economy based in his case on a distinctive monetary theory and on a theory of economic management which required the active participation of a legislator. Watanabe, by analyzing Smith's theory of taxation, is able to address some of Donald Winch's questions about the role of legislators in maintaining a Smithian polity. It is a great pity that, presumably for editorial reasons, these analyses of complex subjects are so short. Omori has no space to develop a complementary account of the principles of Smith's political economy to compare with Steuart's. In the same way, Watanabe's discussion of the politics of tax reform is too compressed to be wholly convincing and provokes the provisional comment that one must assume that a large part of Smith's thinking about tax reform was motivated by a concern about the costs of tax collection and the opportunities for the sort of corruption that plagued most tax reformers of the eighteenth century. Tanaka's thoughtful and meticulously-argued essay on the relations between the Theory of Moral Sentiments and the Wealth of Nations throws important light on the long-standing debate about the relations between the two texts. He wishes to emphasise the providential and
quasi-Stoic dimension of the theory of natural liberty and thus to question the Humean/utilitarian dimension of his ethics. The analysis is careful if schematic — this is too big a subject for such a short essay. I myself would want to think of Hume's skeptical theory of imagination as playing an important part in shaping Smith's moral theory and, indeed his philosophical thinking generally. It surely matters that the Impartial Spectator is a figment of the imagination, an ethical fiction that moral agents conjure up in times of need for it suggests that our ideas of order, providence and virtue, like any other sets of ideas have their roots in the passions, the imagination, in custom and habits and in the material and moral needs which Smith, Hume and most of their other associates view as the source of energy on which all human life depends.

The essays to which this review has drawn particular attention, like most of those mentioned in passing, are notable for their scholarship, their suggestiveness and the exegetical care their authors have shown in presenting texts. Where they failed to satisfy this western reviewer was in being over-rigorously focused on the outdated agenda of Wealth and Virtue, in failing to take account of the complexities of the political culture in which Scottish political economy was born and in being much too short. Many of these essays would have profited from being developed at greater length. It is to be hoped that their authors will do so before long and that they will once again take steps to publish them in English as well as in Japanese.

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