

# Scotus and Smith

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Alexander Broadie

A HISTORY OF SCOTTISH  
PHILOSOPHY  
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might be said to be distinctively Scottish – though he does say at one point that a persistent interest among Scottish philosophers in a strong theory of free will, such as was first developed by Scotus, is evidence of “a seven-centuries long Scotistic vein in the tradition of Scottish philosophy”. Instead, he finds a “unity” in “the circumstances of the philosophical activity, of people standing in the relation of friend to friend, of colleague to colleague, of teacher to pupil”. Scotland’s philosophers, he continues, “were influenced by the national church (and in many cases were officiants in it), lived under the same legal system, were brought up in the same educational system”. And this makes it appropriate, Broadie claims, to speak of such a thing as Scottish philosophy.

The seven centuries between Scotus and John Macmurray (1891–1976), however, saw dramatic changes in the religion, law and educational system of Scotland. The most extreme of those changes came in the form of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and it is a curious feature of Broadie’s book that he has next to nothing to say about the impact on Scottish philosophizing of that very sudden and violent incursion of Calvinist

Protestantism. John Knox himself wrote works of some philosophical significance, but he goes almost unmentioned here. The Reformation generated a vigorous and sophisticated debate in political philosophy, but this debate is ignored by Broadie. George Buchanan, the author of the influential *De jure regni apud Scotos* (1579), is mentioned only as “the great Latinist and historian of Scotland”. Broadie is very much at home among the logicians of the pre-Reformation period, and the reader is sometimes left with the sense that he would like to be able to pretend that the Reformation never happened, so that an eighteenth-century figure such as Reid could be presented as having been in philosophical conversation with Mair and Scotus. But in reality it was in reaction against the dark and cruel doctrines of Calvin that the Scottish Enlightenment defined itself. The agenda of the young Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), often portrayed as the “father of the Scottish Enlightenment”, was shaped not by anything that had been taught or written in Scotland prior to 1700, but rather by English philosophers such as Locke, Cudworth and Shaftesbury, who provided intellectual resources sufficient to enable him to escape the culture he had been educated into.

Thus while it is true that some Scottish philosophers were friends to other Scottish philosophers, and that some Scottish philosophers had among their pupils young men who would become philosophers themselves, such relationships do not gather themselves into a continuous chain stretching down through the centuries. The story of philos-

ophy in Scotland is as much one of disruption and making it new as it is a story of the growth of something that might be called a tradition. In fact, it is hard to identify any single thing called “philosophy”, Scottish or not, when one considers the diversity of figures included in Broadie’s book. This is an issue that is masked by Broadie’s focus on topics in logic, the theory of knowledge and metaphysics. The reader might have hoped for more about Scottish writing on questions in ethics and politics, and for acknowledgement of the fact that the very narrow self-understanding that philosophy has today is a recent development. To take just a single example of what is not included by Broadie but might have been, the inquiry into the origins of fundamental social structures pursued by Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) and John Millar (1735–1801) was most certainly understood in its time to be an exercise in philosophy – as, indeed, was Hume’s *History of England* (1754–62).

Of course it is all too easy to find omissions in a work as ambitious and wide-ranging as *A History of Scottish Philosophy*. It is likely that Edinburgh University Press insisted that the book be as short as possible, and some hard choices had to be made. Broadie gives judicious and elegant summaries of the figures and topics that he covers, and my guess is that no one who reads this book will fail to learn from it. Not many people today have a working knowledge of the epistemological theory of Norman Kemp Smith (1872–1958), let alone of the logic of Robert Galbraith (c.1483–1544). The biggest problem the book has is not Alexander Broadie’s fault at all. It was simply perverse for a Scottish publisher to give a book such as this, aimed as it is at the general reader, the extortionate cover price of £85.

## Where the dog barks

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Matthew Nudds and Casey  
O’Callaghan, editors

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New philosophical essays  
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located? How do sounds relate to the material world, and, in particular, to their sources?

Pursuing these matters, the majority of contributors adopt an attractive methodology: an account of the nature of sounds must do justice to what it is like, subjectively, to hear them. How sounds seem should, so far as possible, constrain one’s account of what sounds are. Given this shared starting point, the depth and extent of disagreement that emerges are striking. It turns out to be remarkably hard to agree over how sounds seem.

On the one hand, it is natural to hold that we hear sounds as being at the particular place where their source is located. We hear the bark to be where the dog is. Taking such appearances at face value, theorists locate sounds where their sources are. This involves

sharply distinguishing between sounds themselves and the waves by which we hear them, just as we distinguish the objects we see from the light they reflect into our eyes.

Locating sounds with their sources, Locke treats them as properties of their sources, the auditory analogues of colours. Appealing to temporal appearances, others insist that sounds are source-involving events. We talk of hearing dogs and doorbells as well as their barks and buzzes. Both proposals suggest an account of this source-perception: we hear sources either by perceiving their properties, or by hearing events involving them (e.g. their disturbing of the surrounding air).

On the other hand, it is no less natural to think that we hear sounds as coming *from* their sources, as propagating towards us. Taking these appearances at face value, we might either think of sounds as lobbed from their sources towards us like balls, or, alternatively, like gas, spreading out through space from their sources. Sounds, on this picture, are not akin to objects seen by virtue of reflected light waves, but closer to the light itself. Indeed, it is tempting to conclude that sounds are identical to, or instantiated by, their associated sound waves. On this picture, it is far less clear what to say about source perception. If sounds are the direct objects of

perception, and are merely the causal products of their sources, we must either explain how source-perception is possible (seeing an effect is not generally sufficient for seeing its cause), or dispute the existence of such a phenomenon.

The contributors appeal to a wealth of considerations in defence of their various accounts. Nudds draws on his beautifully clear overview of the science of auditory processing. O’Callaghan focuses our attention on a variety of acoustical phenomena: echoes, interference, and transmission through barriers. Roberto Casati and Jérôme Dokic point to rare cases of spatial deafness, as well as to underwater hearing and auditory tunnel effects.

Given the contentiousness of appearances, one might hope that some of these considerations offered purchase on the nature of sounds independent of their appearances. But such hopes are vain. Whether or not the nature of sounds is exhaustively determined by the way they sound to a normal hearer, as Roger Scruton argues persuasively, an appeal to auditory appearances is unavoidable if we are to be sure that our focus is genuinely on sound (as opposed to some related but distinct property or process). Since correctly characterizing the appearances is far harder than we might have imagined, an appreciation of the multitudinous forms of auditory experience is invaluable. We need all the help we can get.

Alexander Broadie recounts the story of the French philosopher Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard coming across a translation of Thomas Reid’s *Inquiry into the Human Mind* while browsing the bookstalls by the Seine in 1811. The result was a new departure for French philosophers, who, tired of Condillac and the *idéologues*, remained under Reid’s sway for much of the rest of the century. The importance of David Hume to the philosophical revolution effected by Immanuel Kant in Prussia is well known. Scottish work on the nature of civil society was important, too, to the gestation of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Scottish philosophy was a success in America as well, quite possibly influential on the young Thomas Jefferson, and a mainstay of the philosophy curriculum in early nineteenth-century Princeton and Harvard. And of course the philosophers of Scotland have always been in fruitful dialogue with philosophers south of the Tweed. The potted biographies with which Broadie introduces each of the men (they are all men) whom he discusses reveals that, from the nineteenth century onwards, very often they spent time studying and teaching at English universities.

Despite the evidence he himself provides that ever since the Middle Ages philosophy has been an international and cosmopolitan enterprise, Broadie is committed to the existence of a distinctively Scottish philosophical tradition. To speak in such terms is, presumably, to do more than note that a number of immensely brilliant philosophers, from John Duns Scotus (c.1266–1308) and John Mair (c.1467–1550) through to Hume and Adam Smith and beyond, happen to have been born in Scotland. But what more, exactly, can be said than this? Broadie steps back from claiming that there is any set of doctrines that

A Martian reading contemporary work on perception might be forgiven for thinking that humans had only one sense: vision. Witness the title of one popular recent collection: *Vision and Mind: Selected readings in the philosophy of perception* (2002). Our obsession with sight is stifling. It leads to distorted vision-based models of the other senses, and it means that the distinctive puzzles raised by the other senses are routinely neglected. With this pioneering and long-overdue collection of essays on auditory perception, Matthew Nudds and Casey O’Callaghan aim to start correcting this state of affairs. They deserve much praise, not least for their own substantial contributions and splendid introduction.

The papers they have assembled are necessarily eclectic, aiming to introduce the reader to the wide range of issues raised by sound perception. The second half contains several contributions focused on aspects of two very special cases of audition – musical experience and speech perception – as well as a stimulating essay on the perception of silence. The question at the heart of the volume, however, is a deceptively simple one: what are sounds? The question raises many interrelated issues. For example, are sounds creatures of space? If so, where are they