

ANNA PLASSART. *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution*. Ideas in Context 111. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 246. £64.99 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2016.13

Up to now, there has been no focused assessment of the ways in which the philosophers and historians of the later Scottish Enlightenment responded directly to the events of the French Revolution and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Anna Plassart's splendid study, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution*, offers a new and valuable narrative, which interprets the significance of the Revolution for Scottish thinkers from 1789 onwards, including its reimagining by the generation of the *Edinburgh Review*. In doing so she reaches a new understanding of the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment to the first half of the nineteenth century. Its heirs were to focus on the transforming effects of war and national sentiment, the desirable role that enlightened and educated public opinion should play, and the perceived need for a modernized approach to international relations.

Plassart suggests that the Scottish response has been ignored because it remained isolated from high politics and from the Burke-Paine debate, which focused on issues of natural rights and political reform. Scottish writers such as James Mackintosh, John Millar, and Adam Ferguson agreed in grounding their own, differing, reactions to the French Revolution in the "science of man" developed by Adam Smith and David Hume, partly in dialogue with Montesquieu. Their approach was less concerned with the details of political institutions than with the progress of societies toward commercial sociability and modern forms of liberty. The retrospective representations of Henry Cockburn and others of Scotland in the 1790s as stifled by a repressive and reactionary Toryism should not obscure the existence of opposing voices even in a loyalist stronghold. John Millar and Thomas Reid, whigs rather than radicals, both welcomed the Revolution initially. Adam Ferguson, on the other hand, asserted that the demand for political rights could bring with it that political corruption and despotism which had destroyed the ancient republics. Both John Millar and James Mackintosh developed broader analyses of the Revolution—Mackintosh in the *Vindiciae Gallicae* of 1791, and Millar in *The Letters of Crito* (1796) and the posthumously published *Historical View of the English Government* (1803). They viewed it as the product of the general diffusion of knowledge and commerce in eighteenth-century Europe, though disrupted by the military aggression of European powers. Mackintosh emphasized that this external aggression had the effect of converting citizens into soldiers. In later writings he stressed the corruption of national spirit by an aggressive military democracy. Others took up the same theme. The Foxite whig peer Lord Lauderdale identified a new kind of national sentiment when he wrote in 1794 that "the war we are conducting is not against armies, but an armed nation" (111). Millar argued that a surviving military spirit in prerevolutionary France had found a new manifestation in a commercial society, transformed by a novel enthusiasm directed toward the defense of the nation. In his letters and in his essay of 1807, "Of the French Revolution," Adam Ferguson's more conservative commentary pointed to the dangers of democratic politics where virtue was corrupted by commerce and prosperity, and it pointed especially to the effect of the democratic spirit on the army; he predicted the inevitable appearance of a popular general and consequent military despotism. He saw challenges for Britain in its own acquisition of a commercial empire and in Napoleon's territorial imperialism. All of these writers identified the strength of national feeling emerging from the revolution and its impact on the balance of power between states.

These themes were also to inspire the next generation, those writing from between 1802 and 1815, including the leading figures writing for the *Edinburgh Review*, among them the utilitarian radical James Mill, also a pupil of Dugald Stewart at the University of Edinburgh, who contributed to the *Edinburgh Review* from 1808, and Mackintosh. Plassart here emphasizes how far these early nineteenth-century discussions reshaped and transformed earlier theories,

following the optimistic and teleological moral philosophy of Dugald Stewart. Mill and the reviewers were agreed that the French Revolution was ultimately a positive and progressive, though flawed, development; its degeneration in its early years into terror came about through the failures of practical politicians. Stewart and his followers stressed the need for a strong and educated public opinion to preserve the achievements of progress in a modern commercial society. This had been lacking in France, and in Europe it could be preserved only through the maintenance of a balance of power that would strengthen smaller states. Such themes continued to inform the commentary of the reviewers on the Napoleonic wars. Mackintosh and others, including Mill, urged the maintenance of a balance of power according to the law of nature and a developing law of nations. Mackintosh, whose reputation is here favorably reassessed, led the whig opposition to the outcome of the Congress of Vienna and its failure to respect the sovereignty of smaller states. Plassart's rethinking of the aftermath of the Scottish Enlightenment is indebted to the work of Donald Winch and Biancamaria Fontana, but it goes beyond it, and it is a most stimulating part of this study.

Plassart's quite narrow focus on the intellectual history of the Scottish response to the French Revolution and the wars associated with it is in many ways a strength, but it does leave some issues unresolved. The question of the growth of the British Empire, though considered in Ferguson's reflections on the dangers of British imperialism, is not taken up again and might provide material for further associated discussion. Finally, a negative note: the book is particularly expensive. It is hoped that there may in the future be a paperback edition.

Jane Rendall, University of York

HUNTER POWELL. *The Crisis of British Protestantism: Church Power in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–44*. Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 264. \$105 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2016.14

As the editor of the superb recent Oxford University Press five-volume edition of its minutes and papers, Chad Van Dixhoorn, notes, “The Westminster assembly [of divines] has been the elephant in every history” of the 1640s (*Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 2012, 1:xiii). Much of this neglect was due to inherent problems of source material. Because the handwriting of Adoniram Byfield, the assembly's scribe, was so appalling, and because the debates were so vast—nearly 1,400 plenary sessions and more than 200 ad hoc committees—almost all historians relied on partial and unreliable transcripts or on more accessible pamphlet materials discussing the assembly's activities. But unwillingness to engage with the assembly's proceedings was also the result of a widespread assumption that it was, in the greater scheme of the Civil War era, a sideshow. A fractious meeting of windbag clerics endlessly discussing theological and ecclesiological minutiae compared poorly to major parliamentary debates, constitutional upheavals, and military operations. The greater willingness to integrate theology and politics shown by recent generations of scholars of seventeenth-century England has begun to tip the balance back towards taking clerical activity seriously. Nevertheless, Van Dixhoorn's edition has fundamentally opened up the field, and Hunter Powell's book is one of the fruits associated with the Cambridge-based project that created it.

The Crisis of British Protestantism represents an exceptionally detailed, fine filigree reading of the Westminster assembly's proceedings to two main ends. The first is to attack any lingering sense in the historiography of “a coarse polarity” (2) between Presbyterians and Independents.