A LIKELY STORY:  
CONJECTURALISM IN THE HISTORICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN MILLAR

by

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John Millar’s historical works have not, since the era of their original publication, been viewed as such by their principal commentators. Though Millar’s *Discourse on the Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771) has received acclaim for its perceived sociological value, his intended masterwork, *An Historical View of the English Constitution* (1803) has been almost completely neglected by contemporary scholarship. The intent of this paper is threefold: first, by viewing Millar in the historiographical context of late Enlightenment Britain, Millar’s texts become recognizable as they were when they were first read, that is, as works of history. Restoring Millar to this context, a time when sophisticated new modes of historical writing were being developed to explain the modern world, also reveals the origins and nature of Millar’s characteristic “conjectural” or “philosophical” approach to the study of the past. Secondly, a methodological analysis of Millar’s major works and his unpublished “Lectures on Government” will provide insight into how Millar’s conjecturalism was reconfigured to fit different subjects, purposes, and generic norms. Third, a survey of Millar’s reception in the early nineteenth century will illustrate how rapidly and how profoundly the perceptions of Millar’s historiographical approach changed from laudatory to dismissive. Millar is thus revealed not only as a historical writer, but one who was dedicated to a sophisticated, systematic program of historical inquiry.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii  
Table of Contents .......................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... iv  
INTRODUCTION: John Millar, Historian ................................................................. 1  
CHAPTER 1: Approaches .......................................................................................... 6  
  1.1 Millar’s Life and Writings ................................................................................... 6  
  1.2 Problems and Perspectives in Recent Millar Scholarship ......................... 8  
  1.3 Distance as an Historiographical Approach ................................................ 11  
  1.4 Tradition and Innovation in 18th Century Historiography ...................... 13  
CHAPTER II: Readings ........................................................................................... 20  
  2.1 The Method and Intent of Millar’s Early Conjectural Histories ............. 20  
  2.2 Millar’s Historical View and the Limits of Conjectural History ........... 30  
CHAPTER III: Reception ......................................................................................... 40  
  3.1 The Immediate Reception of Millar’s Histories ........................................ 40  
  3.2 From Philosophical History to “Authentic History” ................................ 42  
CONCLUSION: John Millar Reframed ................................................................. 46  
Selected Bibliography .............................................................................................. 48
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Introduction: John Millar, Historian

Historians of intellectual disciplines, it has been argued, all too often fall into the trap of "writing history backwards", viewing individual scholars in a narrow scope, assessing only how their work has contributed to the development of a tradition or particular set of ideas.¹ This type of historical writing acts either as a celebration of the present state of the discipline or a search for intellectual legitimacy in writers of the past. In this way, the complex intellectual lives of past scholars can become warped, as their ideas become 'precursors' or foreshadowings to the supposedly mature state of the discipline at present. And though such work may illuminate part or even most of an author’s ideas, this narrowness of purpose almost inevitably leads to gaps and inaccuracies, as works which can find no useful or relevant place in a disciplinary history are ignored or misread.

The reputation of John Millar, chair of law at the University of Glasgow, is an interesting illustration of this problem. Millar’s major texts, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* and *An Historical View of the English Constitution* were both well received in their time.² On the basis of these works, Millar developed a reputation among his peers as an original and insightful historian of early society. At the turn of the 19th century, however, Millar’s star fell rapidly. After 1830, he received no scholarly attention at all

¹ This is persuasively argued in the Introduction to S. Collini. D. Winch and J. W. Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: an Essay in Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). Their argument here is too apt to pass over: in the writing of this type of intellectual history, “The 'contributions' made by past authors are approvingly sifted from the texts in which they occur, and the residue, along with the contexts which gave these texts their contemporary point and which still give intelligibility to their underlying assumptions, are tacitly ignored” ⁵.

until the 1950s, when he was reappointed to his place alongside Adam Smith and David Hume as key thinkers of the British Enlightenment on the basis of his “conjectural history”, the *Origin*. But this revival of Millar’s reputation came at some cost. Since that time, Millar has been viewed almost exclusively as a kind of sociologist, charged with anticipating and initiating the development of a mature social or political science. This reputation as a “sociological” or political writer is in fact built upon a selective reading of Millar’s works - the *Origin* has been virtually the sole recipient of Millar scholarship.

Recent perspectives on Millar, wedded to a persistently “sociological” interpretation of the *Origin*, have had almost nothing to say about Millar’s massive narrative history, the *Historical View of the English Constitution*. Another aspect of Millar’s career that has received too little attention is his role as an educator. Millar’s lecture courses on jurisprudence, government, and law, which he gave throughout the course of his professional life, were cited by his biographer as “the foundation of his high reputation”, and the source from which both the *Origin* and the *Historical View* were derived.\(^3\)

Though comprehensive and detailed student notes of these lectures are available, they remain unpublished and to a large degree unexamined. The fact that these two aspects of such a significant author’s career have remained virtually untouched a half century after the “rebirth” of Millar scholarship indicates that the current view of Millar is inadequate and too narrowly based upon the reading of a single, early work.

A more appropriate view, and one which more closely approximates Millar’s actual intents and interests, reads Millar as his contemporaries read him: as a historian. The absence of comment on Millar’s complete historiography becomes quite remarkable when one discovers the unities of interest and method that connect the *Origin* and the

Historical View. The connections between these works are not at first glimpse apparent - here are two texts that are different in form and subject: a broad-scoped philosophical treatise on the process and properties of social development, and a detailed narrative of the development of the English constitution. With such diverse materials, it is perhaps unsurprising that a clear and comprehensive view of Millar’s work has not been developed. However, if we adopt a more inclusive, elastic conception of what constitutes “historical writing,” it becomes possible to begin seeing Millar ‘whole’.

This unified view becomes far more tenable when one considers the state of historical writing in Millar’s own time. Within his lifetime, the modes of history were the subject of significant renewal and innovation, only to be overturned once again around the time of his death. These changes manifested themselves in the birth, development and abandonment of new genres of historical writing, each possessing specific, if informal, properties and characteristics. That there came to be such a remarkable variety of generic forms available to writers of history at this time indicates how broadly the category of “historical writing” was then interpreted. An awareness of this variety allows us to contextualize non-traditional historical works within the set of possibilities that Millar himself confronted. With this in mind, it is not a difficult step to affirm that Millar’s writings were indeed unified in their “historical” outlook.

Once we recognize how Millar’s works can justifiably be considered varieties of history, it becomes clear how the perspectives and techniques Millar adopted in each of his historical texts were deliberately selected for their ability to adapt to different generic norms while maintaining a solid intellectual foundation. Millar’s philosophy of history, which remains a constant throughout his works, found an appropriate instrument in the
mode of conjectural history. The conjecturalist model of historical explanation, built upon on the perceived role of “general causes” and unintended consequences in historical change, fulfilled in many ways Millar’s goal of “philosophical” and ideological impartiality. Conjecturalism appears in different forms throughout Millar’s work, and serves different functions in each. Seeing how his works were related in this way allows for a more complete and accurate picture of Millar to develop, one which counterbalances the limited views that are now available.

In Part I, the groundwork will be laid for a close reading of Millar’s historical works. Prefaced by a short literary and professional biography, this section begins with a review of the major critical perspectives of Millar’s work over the past five decades, and the ways in which they are problematic. The section will proceed with the introduction of an analytical framework that, I believe, both allows Millar’s writings to be perceived as “historical” and facilitates the analysis of his historical method. This methodological section is followed by a brief discussion of the varieties of historical writing available to Millar, and the manner in which his contemporaries negotiated the demands of tradition and innovation in writing history. Part II will have a considerably smaller field of vision. Using the analytical approach outlined in the first section, the investigation will proceed with a close analysis of historical method in Millar’s major texts. This analysis will begin by considering the operation of one form of conjecturalism in the Origin, a work which has come to epitomize the genre of conjectural history. Another form of conjecturalism appears in the “Lectures on Government” – a form which, unlike that of the Origin, works away from the establishment of an ideal-typical historical system and towards the explanation of actual societies and institutions in the historical record. This section will

4 This process is the subject of Mark Phillips’ Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000). The summation of that period’s historiographical
conclude with a consideration of the operation and limitations of the conjectural mode in Millar’s most traditionally “historical” narrative, the *Historical View of the English Constitution*. A post-script to this discussion of Millar’s historical method is provided by the documents related to the reception of the *Historical View*, which over the span of several years turn from laudatory to dismissive. Ironically, Millar’s dedication to the conjectural mode may be at the heart of each of his separate reputations: the eighteenth-century’s praise for the sagacious philosophical historian, the nineteenth-century’s dismissal of Millar as blindly devoted to a faulty system of explanation, and the twentieth-century’s praise for the author of the *Origin*, the “father of sociology”.

context that follows here and on page 13 below is in large part derived from this work.
Chapter One: Approaches

1.1 Millar’s Life and Writings

The fine points of Millar’s biography are for the most part obscure. The lion’s share of the information that does exist comes from his nephew, John Craig, who prefixed An Account of the Life and Writings of the Author to the first posthumous edition of Millar’s The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks. In 1960, William Lehmann initiated a rebirth of serious Millar scholarship with his John Millar of Glasgow, which fleshed out Craig’s work by unearthing Millar’s correspondences and assorted memorials. And while the details remain sketchy, the outline is clear. Millar was born in 1735 outside of Edinburgh, and was a promising student at Glasgow College in his youth, where he was initiated into the small but distinguished intellectual elite of Scottish society. Craig notes that Millar had close personal and academic relationships with James Watt, William Cullen, and more notably, Adam Smith, David Hume and Lord Kames. Finding an aptitude for legal studies, Millar turned his attention to the study of “Scotch Law”, and was called to the bar in 1760. Craig’s account indicates that Millar’s taste for philosophical studies, undoubtedly fostered by his relationships with Smith, Kames and Hume, led him away from a more properly legal career towards the academy. Millar was elected to the Chair of Civil Law at Glasgow in 1761, where he would remain until his death in 1801.

Millar developed a reputation as an unusually able teacher and lecturer on the subjects of Roman, Scotch, and English Law, Civil Law, and Government. He was, by all

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6 Craig, Life of Millar, x.
accounts, an inspiring, eloquent, and engaging teacher.\(^7\) Millar's published works reflect and expand upon the lectures he was so noted for - his "Lectures on Government", is particularly important in this regard.\(^8\) In 1771, Millar published his first major work, the Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society, which would be reworked into the Origin that we are familiar with today.\(^9\) In 1787, Millar's An Historical View of the English Government from the Settlement of the Saxons in Britain to the Accession of the House of Stewart was published in London. Millar prepared a near-identical second edition in 1790. During the last decade of his life, Millar brought the Historical View up to 1688, and is said to have made some progress towards completing his history of post-revolutionary Britain.\(^10\) Under the supervision of Craig, Millar's literary executor, the texts would be compiled and reissued in 1803 as a four-volume set.\(^11\) The only other text that can be positively attributed to Millar is the Letters of Crito, a "strictly political" pamphlet published under pseudonym in the Scots Chronicle in 1796.\(^12\) The major texts,

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\(^7\) There is an extensive and complimentary discussion of Millar's capacity for teaching in Craig's Life of Millar, xiv and xv. Both Francis Jeffrey and Lord Cockburn, who were both of the generation best positioned to judge, roundly praise Millar's abilities as a lecturer. See Francis Jeffrey, review of An Historical View, by John Millar, Edinburgh Review 5 (1803), 154-156; Francis Jeffrey, review of Life of Millar, by John Craig, Edinburgh Review 9 (1806), 85-89; and Lord Cockburn, Life of Lord Jeffrey, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1852), 1:10-11. In a more general sense, see Lehmann, John Millar, 30-42.

\(^8\) "Lectures on Government" (n.p., n.d.). I am extremely grateful to Knud Haakonssen and Mark Phillips for allowing me access to a photocopy of this transcription. This complete set of student notes from Millar's fifty-one "Lectures on Government", despite its close relationship to his more celebrated works, remains unpublished. Due to the absence of numbered pages, I will refer only to the number of the lecture in question.

\(^9\) The full title for the mature, revised work is The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which Give Rise to Influence and Authority in the different Members of Society. The work would go through four editions by 1806, but would not be reprinted again until 1960 in Lehmann's John Millar.

\(^10\) Craig speculates that Millar may have been too preoccupied with the events of the French Revolution to bring his Historical View to completion before his death. Craig, Life of Millar, cxxx. While this seems possible, especially in view of Millar's 1796 Letters of Crito (Milan, Giuffre 1984), it is quite clear that the Historical View remained a priority for Millar.

\(^11\) The fourth volume, concerning the period 1688-1800, was not prepared by Millar to go to press, but was cobbled together by Millar's literary executors.

\(^12\) Lehmann, John Millar, 56. Lehmann indicates that a similar set of contributions to the Scots Chronicle of like style and politics was probably from Millar's desk, as well as a set of articles to the Analytical Review. However, Millar's authorship of these works remains uncertain and disputed. For more on this attribution, see Knud Haakonssen, Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 155.
though rather well received at publication, were quickly forgotten: by 1830, explicit references to Millar’s work become few and far-between. But for occasional traces of interest or acclaim, Millar’s works would remain out of the public eye for more than a century.

1.2 Problems and Perspectives in Recent Millar Scholarship.

In a crude fashion, it is possible to group Millar’s latter-day commentators under two general headings: those viewing Millar as a scientist of society, belonging to the traditions of natural law, classical or Marxist sociology, or a more general scientism; and those viewing Millar as a political ideologue or moralist. Duncan Forbes’ 1953 essay “‘Scientific’ Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar” foreshadowed a rebirth in Millar studies. Forbes viewed Millar, Hume and Smith as “scientific whigs” and, in later reworkings as “sceptical whigs”.

Forbes held that Millar’s Origin, along with Smith and Hume’s more elaborate compositions, was part of a sophisticated philosophical enquiry into the science of politics and its basis in natural law. Millar’s Origin was thus viewed as a scientific treatise on the historical relationship between political structures and social progress.

Millar’s “sociological orientation” was first perceived by his latter-day biographer and author of Millar’s scholarly restoration, William Lehmann. Lehmann proposed that the ‘theoretical history’ produced by the Scots of the late eighteenth-

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14 Forbes, “‘Sceptical Whiggism,’” 198-200. It is worth noting that Forbes concentrates on Millar’s ‘political science’ in the *Origin*, specifically chapters 3-5 of that work. The *Historical View* is not referred to by Forbes in this work.

15 Lehmann, *John Millar*, xiii and 58. Lehmann’s work here, in addition to providing a solid foundation for Millar studies, reprinted the *Origin* in full for the first time since the early 19th century, and thus disseminated Millar’s text widely. The *Historical View*, parts of which were excerpted in Lehmann’s book, would wait until 1994 to be reprinted, and is still not widely available. Lehmann’s work on Millar was part of that author’s larger programme of finding the roots of modern sociology in the Scottish Enlightenment. His works on Lord Karnes and Adam Ferguson are similar to his *John Millar* in this regard.

16 The term ‘theoretical history’ was coined by Dugald Stewart, biographer of the Scottish Enlightenment, in reference to the set of historical works most commonly associated with Hume, Smith, Kames, Ferguson,
century, of which Millar’s *Origin* is universally recognized as prototypical, was “a concept like that of a comparative historical sociology.”

Though Lehmann’s survey of Millar’s work was fairly broad, his search for “a turn towards sociological analysis” coloured his interpretation of Millar’s corpus. “His writings,” Lehmann states, must in the end be considered sociological treatises more than histories – even the *Historical View* was just that, a sweeping over-all view of the trends of an institutional development of lines of public policy, rather than a detailed historical account of events and the actions of men, or an intensive historical analysis of a particular institution.

Lehmann’s intentions are clear: he wished to establish that Millar was a contributor to, if not a founder of, the modern field of sociology. His analysis, having discounted the idea that his works are indeed “histories”, did not seriously consider Millar as a historian, but rather focused on Millar’s social theory. Another of the early commentators, Ronald Meek, attempted to induct Millar into a broad and perhaps not sufficiently articulated “Scottish historical school” of “four-stages theorists”. Though attending to Millar’s works as a form of historical writing, such attempts almost exclusively emphasized Millar’s emphasis on the material basis of historical change. Meek’s interpretation resisted a more inclusive consideration of Millar’s historical thought by enlisting him as a contributor to an intellectual tradition. John Pocock and Michael Ignatieff, in turn, have

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18 Lehmann, *John Millar*, 143. Lehmann qualifies this by stating that Millar’s major works were “never unhistorical”. This statement, however, explicitly illustrates the type of misapprehension of the ‘historical’ that has hidden Millar from historiographical view.
emphasized the classically republican turn of Millar’s “militant whig” ideology, primarily through a view of the author’s more politically charged writings, such as those dissertations which conclude the *Historical View*. More recently, and in many ways resisting Lehmann and Meek’s interpretations, Knud Haakonssen has assessed Millar’s approach to politics as “fundamentally scientific”, and has argued that Millar’s “science of law and government is to be viewed in the jurisprudential tradition.” Haakonssen’s 1996 work *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* was in fact a reply to the forced enlistment of Millar (and his contemporaries) in a variety of intellectual traditions.

Recent Millar scholarship, then, has been fruitful and at times rather lively, as commentators have made more-or-less powerful cases for the identification of Millar with various schools of politics, ideologies, and branches of social science. However, the work that has been undertaken has almost exclusively seized upon Millar’s ‘conjectural history’, the *Origin*, and to a lesser degree, the non-narrative dissertations and political commentary of the *Historical View*’s fourth volume. Recent scholarship, in fact, has almost entirely neglected the historical nature of Millar’s lectures and published works, even though he was received by his own and the following generation *as a historian*. It is as though the history of the English government, a subject of the greatest importance to Millar, of which the first three volumes of the *Historical View* narrate, and to which Millar devoted the greatest part of his mature career to, was somehow peripheral to the

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author’s “real” interests. The claim that Millar’s published works are to be viewed as
treatises of sociology or political affiliation glosses over the fact that these works were
composed and originally read as a variety of history.

In fact, however, Millar’s major compositions, the Origin, the “Lectures on
Government” and the Historical View, should indeed be read as histories – highly
unconventional and innovative, but histories nonetheless. An analysis of these texts and
the texts that reflect their immediate reception, one that considers their formal and
methodological attributes, provides a revealing glimpse of the flexibility of history as a
genre or set of genres, and how the perception of generically “historical” standards can
change over time. This study will focus primarily on Millar’s most historical and
(consequently, it seems) most neglected work, the Historical View. Millar’s intended
masterwork, which he did not live to complete, fused together innovative and powerful
explanatory techniques within a deeply traditional narrative form. Though ambitious,
broad in scope, and successful in its own time, the product was not issued without several
serious flaws, which may account in part for its neglect. However, when viewed as a
particular moment in the history of the genre, a moment of flux, the ideas which informed
its production and reception indicate how historians of this period perceived the changing
possibilities of historical writing.

1.3 Distance as an Historiographical Approach

An investigation of this sort, the reevaluation of historical texts as historical texts,
is aided by the apprehension of an under-appreciated element of historical composition –

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22 Haakonssen, Natural Law, 157. It should be noted that here, as in Forbes, Meek and Lehmann, the
analysis is predicated upon a study of what the author refers to as Millar’s “treatises”, and (in Haakonssen
and Lehmann) to a lesser degree his “Lectures on Jurisprudence”.
the sense of distance constructed by the writer of history. Distance may be seen as an
effect produced by the author that situates the reader in reference to the subject of the
historical investigation. In its simplest terms, this construction produces a sense of
“detachment” or “proximity” between the reader and the subject. The formal and
methodological techniques put to use in historical composition, and the idea of history
that informs them, combine to produce this sense of distance. This sense is part of the
unconscious, unexamined “common-sense” of the historical profession – every serious
reader of history must admit a sense of detachment or engagement with the text. Upon
closer inspection, however, this “sense” reveals itself as highly enigmatic –
exasperatingly difficult to describe without resort to metaphor or the unwieldy language
of the other senses. This rather blunt sense of distance appears to be the compound of
several distinct components of distance: formal, affective, ideological, and cognitive.
Like a musician at a stringed instrument, the historian frets, or foreshortens, each of these
strings, producing a (hopefully resonant) chord, the overall sense of distance. Depending

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23 Phillips, Society and Sentiment, 3-30, 342-344 and “A Short History of Distance,” a paper given as part
of the Landsdown Lecture Series, at the University of Victoria, Victoria, BC. Feb. 7-9, 2001. I am very
indebted to Professor Phillips for his advice and direction in the use of this analytical framework.
25 Ibid., 1.
26 Vision is the natural metaphor for historical distance. Millar and his contemporaries also sensed the
aptness of this metaphor, though it seems not to have been consciously considered. The titles of Lord
Kames’ Sketches of the History of Man (London, 1778), William Robertson’s View of the Progress of the
Society of Europe (London, 1769), and Millar’s Historical View alone indicate the sense the Scots had of
the “reframing of historical distance” which was occurring. T. B. Macaulay’s review of Henry Hallam’s
Constitutional History of England, is perhaps the most interesting contemporary formulation of this
metaphor: “Of the two kinds of composition into which history has been divided, [“historical essays” and
“historical romances”] the one may be compared to a map, the other to a painted landscape The picture,
though it places the object before us, does not enable us to ascertain with accuracy the form and dimensions
of its component parts, the distances, and the angles. The map is not a work of imitative art. It presents no
scene to the imagination; but it gives us exact information as to the bearings of various points, and is a
more useful companion to the traveller or the general, than the painting could be.” Edinburgh Review 48
(1828), 97.
27 Phillips, “A Short History,” 11. Formal distance refers to the sense of proximity or removal imposed by
formal attributes of composition such as level of detail reported or manner of reporting. Affective distance
refers to the level of emotional or sympathetic engagement the text is meant to produce. Ideological
distance refers to the intentional evocation of partisanship or impartiality. Cognitive distance refers to the
upon the effect the historian wishes to produce, and importantly, the historically-bound possibilities of historical thought, the same scene may thus be rendered from multiple perspectives. Writers of history, then, in the deployment of the various techniques they consciously, unconsciously, or half-consciously select, situate the reader in specific and recognizable perspectives of formal, affective, ideological, and cognitive distance. Thus, the sense of distance, “even within individual histories, let alone on a larger scale … remains a variable and complex effect, one shaped by balances or tensions between a variety of separable aspects of narrative construction and social or intellectual commitment.” For example, one could write a detailed personal history which is deeply moving and ideologically charged; another which is coldly dispassionate and ideologically neutral; and so on. It is worth the effort, then, “to separate the affective from the ideological, or the ideological from the cognitive precisely because each of these dimensions makes its own contribution the to the reader’s experience.”

The recognition of this complexity enables a decoding of the text – an exposure of the textual manifestations of historical ideas and aesthetics. In this light, it becomes possible to more fully understand the fluctuations and continuities which mark the history of historical thought – and which can be characterized as “reframings of historical distance.”

1.4 Traditions and Innovations in 18th Century Historiography

Though such reframings abound in this field, the latter half of the English eighteenth century marks a peculiarly active period of reframing: at this particular moment, a relative uniformity, a historiographical tradition, which manifested itself in a

different manners in which histories may “make sense” and be “truthful” representations, and the level of engagement that these epistemological qualities require.

28 These possibilities – and impossibilities – are readily apparent. The modern historian may, for different reasons, receive acclaim for a “history from above,” a “people’s history,” or a history of experience. The same cannot be said, it seems, for the historian who composes an historical epic poem.

29 Ibid., 12.
standard of historical distance, gave way to a rich field of possibility in historical composition, only to be overthrown in turn by a tradition itself radically different. The rupture between the traditional modes of historical composition and the social conditions of historical readership that occurred in late eighteenth-century Britain provoked the first of these reframings.\textsuperscript{30} The traditional modes available to eighteenth-century British historians were the classical-humanist narrative, the party-history, and the intellectually unsophisticated researches and compilations of antiquaries. The classical model, as understood by the late eighteenth-century, was encumbered with strict limitations of form, readership and subject.\textsuperscript{31} The subject of classical historical composition, strictly speaking, was the public life of public men: the \textit{vita activa} of princes, commanders, and statesmen. The readership was intended to be those who, in similar positions of public authority and private situation, might benefit from the lessons of conduct and character of their historical peers. The chosen form was a closely mimetic narration of events, eloquently crafted, often with moral evaluations of the events and characters portrayed. Strict linear narrative provided the most useful scheme of recounting causal links, while high eloquence and perspicuity suited the dignity and importance of the subject. The moral evaluation of acts and characters drove home the real worth of historical reflection: that the acts of great men in the past might be remembered by and inspire great men in the present. Partisan histories, which contended for present political interests by mobilizing a skewed and uncritical interpretation of past events, were abundant on all sides before and during the eighteenth centuries. These works, without any pretence to impartiality, varied in method and scope – from narratives of action to treatises on antiquities – but did not vary in their partisan zeal. The historical work of the annalists,

\textsuperscript{30} Phillips, \textit{Society and Sentiment}, 12-30.
on the other hand, was viewed by the eighteenth century with almost universal contempt. Seen as credulous, uncritical compilers of fact and recorders of (oral) tradition, the annalists' sole recommendation was that their productions provided a body of fact for later historians to draw upon. These are coarse generalizations, but illustrate the main stream of historical composition from antiquity through their rebirth in the early modern period.

These models became increasingly problematic to the moderns. What in many ways was suited to the social conditions of Imperial Rome, to renaissance merchant princes, to party loyalists and to "monkish scholars" could hardly be seen as appropriate to the new technological, commercial and social conditions of eighteenth century England. Modern histories attempted in the classical vein – illuminating the acts and character of statesmen, military stratagems, siege and battle, couldn’t possibly provide a satisfactory account of the conditions of society which characterized the modern age. No classical history, by definition a narrative of the political, could properly account for the history of women, of commerce, of literature or of technology. No partisan tract was seen as impartial enough to provide a truly accurate picture of the past. No annalistic account or chronology of events could provide the sophisticated explanatory techniques or sympathetic involvement expected by modern readers of history. If we take for granted that a society looks to the past as one of the ways it understands itself, it becomes apparent how inadequate the traditions of the past must have appeared to that era as a mode of self-recognition. The traditional genres of historical composition would have to be reworked in order for the nation to have a relevant historical self-understanding.

Fittingly, it appears that there was a rapid expansion in the methods, modes, and

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31 This abridgement is based upon Phillips' reading of Adam Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric. Society and Sentiment*, 21-24, 39-45.
properties of historical composition at this time. Having exposed the limitations of the classical, partisan and antiquarian models, British historians initiated a reconceptualization of what could properly be termed ‘historical’ composition. The expansion of the subject and the readership of historical writing forced a thorough search for new genres, new methods, and the various distance-perspectives they construct.

Two generic categories in particular found favour at this point, each proposing a substantially different distance-perspective from that of the old traditions. The first was the perspective which, by constructing a broad or philosophical view, encompasses the entirety of social experience; and the second, by constructing a close or sentimental view, approximates the history of the individual in its most intimate turns of emotion and experience. Both philosophical and sentimental histories found success in reimagining the past. Yet there remained a strong impulse to retain for historical compositions both the traditional dignity of classical histories, and the rational linearity of classical narrative. Millar’s *Historical View* is in fact an attempted reconciliation of these elements: philosophic soundness, ideological impartiality, the intimacy of sympathetic engagement, and classical eloquence and linearity. *Historical View* in fact proposed a profound reconfiguration of traditional modes, while retaining their most desirable features.

The highly-detailed narrative of agents and acts which characterizes classical historiography, the polemics of partisan history and the inelegant and unreflective compilations of facts left much to be desired for a sophisticated and diverse audience that was curious about the past. “The most able historians of our own and foreign nations,” a dissatisfied reader and writer of history wrote, “prefer what is brilliant to what is useful;
and they neglect all disquisitions into laws and into manners, that they may describe and embellish the politics of princes, and the fortunes of nations, the splendid qualities of eminent men, and the lustre of heroic action.”

Heirs to a rational, empirical approach to understanding the world in which Bacon and Newton loomed large, historians of the Enlightenment found history as a genre woefully unscientific. In their desire to establish a science of human society, they found the past to be as fruitful a field of inquiry as contemporary society, if it were treated systematically. Such a system was suggested on the basis of the century’s investigations into the science of human behaviour, and was represented in England by the works of Hume and Smith.

Hume, justifiably regarded as the initiator of “philosophical history” in England, established enabling principles for a historical science in the 1754 essay, “Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences.” Hume’s claim reads: “What depends upon a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance, or secret and unknown causes: What arises form a great number, may often be accounted for by determinate and known causes.” The operating principle of this claim is the idea that there is a uniform and knowable tendency in human motivation, an idea which would be expanded in Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature and Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments. Millar’s own metaphor for this principle is too apt to pass over: human reactions are akin to a biased die. Cast once, twice, several times, the result will be unpredictable, and, more importantly, inexplicable. Cast several thousand times, patterns develop – and the bias is

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33 Phillips. Society and Sentiment. These distinctions act as a premise for the exploration of genre throughout the work. See the Introduction, 18-19.
34 Gilbert Stuart, Advertisement to A View of Society in Europe, in its progress from Rudeness to Refinement Or, inquiries concerning the History of Law, Government, and Manners (Edinburgh, 1783), iii.
discovered. The idea proposed a substantial change in the cognitive operations of historical writing. If is safe to assume, the philosophical historians argued, that most people, sharing a similar situation, will act in similar ways, it is also safe to assume that with due care and attention, it is possible to determine the source of broad-based change over time. Here is a reframing of historical distance – to use Macaulay’s metaphor, the spectator’s view becomes cartographic – and the characters and causes so prominent in classical history, being capricious and unknowable, fade into obscurity. The focus becomes radically different, so that general circumstances operating on a generalized humanity are seen as productive of general effects. The implications of this cognitive reframing are significant. An increased cognitive distance – a “philosophical view” - promised two significant advances on the classical model. First, the necessary breadth of view provided an opening to previously excluded subjects, such as the history of commerce, religion, and the arts. Second, the philosophical nature of the view, providing rationally derived conclusions from empirically verifiable conditions, enabled a thorough reevaluation of the historical record. This procedure provided historians with a powerful response to historical methodologies in which Fortune, divine providence, or the heroic individual determine the fate of nations – thus exposing the myths and fallacies of the classical modes of historical composition.

The most radical form of philosophical history known to the era was “conjectural history”. Operating on the principle of a general human nature, conjectural history sought out the essential nature of the relationship between human behaviour and situation, divorced from even the most rudimentary ‘historical’ particularities. In works such as Adam Ferguson’s Essay on the History of Civil Society, Lord Kames’ Sketches of the

36 Origin, 5.
History of Man, and of course, John Millar's Discourse on the Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, the 'history' was purified of all the peculiarities of location, accident and individual genius which tend to make societies and situations unique. Initially, the intent of conjectural historians was to provide some sense of what had occurred in eras and locations where there was little or no solid historical evidence to work from. Britons, dependent upon archaeological evidence and Roman accounts for knowledge about their distant past, looked to conjectural history as a method of circumventing the lack of specific historical knowledge. Ironically, conjectural history was made possible by a massively expanded awareness of local peculiarity: the availability of both ethnological travel literature and the writings of antiquity. These works provided a fabulous wealth of evidence for the curious historian of society – evidence of fascinating difference and seemingly inexplicable correspondence. This evidence was amassed, evaluated, and processed by the conjectural historians in order to eliminate local difference and find the essential nature of human behaviour in a generalized set of social conditions, a theoretical 'history of the species'. The process derived its force from the naturalization or domestication of this evidence under a general explanatory scheme. The underlying belief was that diverse laws and customs are the result of universal and consistent principles in particular and inconsistent circumstances.

Chapter Two: Readings

2.1 The Method and Intent of Millar’s Early Conjectural Histories

Millar’s own conjectural work, upon which his reputation as an original thinker has been established, constitutes a continuous thread through his intellectual career. In my view, however, Millar’s conjecturalism was subservient to a higher end, pursued above all in the more traditionally “historical” Historical View. Nevertheless, as conjecturalism is a central element of that work, it is desirable to observe the operation of a ‘pure’ conjecturalism in Millar’s earlier works, the Origin and the student notes from the “Lectures on Government.”

The most explicit statement of method for the mode of conjectural history is offered in the Introduction to the Distinction of Ranks. Some attention to this foundational text is warranted.

“The following inquiry,” Millar writes, ”is intended to illustrate the natural history of mankind in several important articles. This is attempted, by pointing out the more obvious and common improvements which gradually arise in the state of society, and by showing the influence of these upon the manners, the laws, and the government of the people.”

The central premise of this “natural history of mankind,” the universal similarity of human motivation, was for a scholar of the British Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century a given. Millar unapologetically appropriated Hume and his mentor Adam Smith’s system of moral psychology which explained human behaviour upon views of utility and propriety. For our purposes, it will suffice to characterize this complex set of arguments as proposing a benign variety of sociable self-interest – the

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38 The subject matter of the Origin, in this aspect, is peripheral. It considered, through its conjectural-historical scheme, four types of social inequality: women and men, parent and child, ruler and ruled, master and slave. In it, travel literature and the literature of antiquity were used as evidence proving the systematic operation of social development on social and legal institutions.
pursuit of security, comfort, and social amity. The second premise, more or less derived from the first, was of a "disposition and capacity" for progress or improvement inherent in all human societies,

by the exertion of which, he is carried on from one degree of advancement to another; and by the similarity of his wants, as well as of the faculties by which those wants are supplied, has every where produced a remarkable uniformity in the several steps of his progression.\textsuperscript{40}

These uniformities of disposition, desire, and faculty provide the foundation for a conjectural history of the progress of the species. The species was envisioned as progressing through four distinct stages of social development, based upon the achieved mode of subsistence: the predatory "nation of savages," "so destitute of culture, as to appear little above the condition of brute animals"\textsuperscript{41}, the "great improvements" of pastoral and agricultural advancements, and development of "the various branches of manufacture, together with commerce, its inseparable attendant, and with science and literature, the natural offspring of ease and affluence."\textsuperscript{42} Each stage was viewed as exhibiting characteristic manners, laws, and customs, the chief determinant among these being the state of property. Millar's 'stadialism', or theory of stages, constituted a conjectural narrative of human social development which, in the body of the work, served as a rack upon which diverse localized evidence, dextrously stripped of 'mere circumstance', could be hung as proofs of the operation of a system.\textsuperscript{43}

Perhaps the chief success of the conjectural \textit{Origin}, in and of itself, was a positive, imaginative rendering of a philosophically sound ideal-type. Through a radical distancing of the historian's eye, the muddying circumstances of agent, accident, and

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Origin}, 12.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, 3.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, 3-4.
situation which complicate and often obscure local histories could be eliminated, exposing the nature of human association. However, it is readily apparent that Millar’s aim was less to construct a pure system than to use that system as an instrument of more precise investigation. The real achievement of conjecturalism as a historical mode was in fact, not an ideal-typical “history of society”, but a scientization of the study of human institutions and a consolidation of the shift in cognitive distance away from narratives of action and agent, chronicles and annals. Such a claim does not, I feel, overly devalue the role of conjecturalism in Millar’s thought. It does, however, undercut the dismissal of Millar’s works as overly systematic. Proof of this claim is found even in the Origin, the most theoretical of Millar’s works - the conjectural perspective is but a means to an end: Millar’s study of relationships of inequality. Further credence to this claim is offered by his “Lectures on Government”.

Millar’s “Lectures on Government” is divided into three parts: “Of the origin and progress of government in society”, “Illustration of the Subject from a View of particular governments”, and lastly, “Present state of Government in Great Britain”.

44 It should be noted that the Origin as a whole is not a formal narrative but a set of dissertations. However, the conjectural model at the heart of the work is itself a variety of narrative.

45 Craig’s Life of Millar emphasizes this point. Millar, Craig states, was “far from meaning to assert, that every nation, which has arrived at a high state of improvement, must have passed, successively, through all these conditions … he adopted the ordinary division as the most convenient for suggesting and introducing the various changes recorded on human institutions and manners … he considered it, though not universal, as probably the most general course of improvement which could be traced in history.” Life of Millar, xlv-xlvi.

45 “Lectures on Government” I.
simple state of Society to the most improved.” The conjectural scheme here works in service of the greater purpose – the course of lectures given to university students on the topic of government, a subject central to the *Historical View*. However, as the *Historical View* adopts a specific position of historical distance which is rather different from this text, it is necessary to follow Millar’s line of argument in the purely conjectural vein.

“All authority in one man over another,” Millar says, “seems to have been originally produced, 1. By superior personal Qualities. 2. By superior wealth. Superior personal qualities, of body, or mind, procure authority, either by exciting admiration & respect, or from a consideration of utility.” These original principles of authority are reinforced by custom, by which a voluntary submission becomes habitual, and an aesthetic sense, in which the orderliness of an established and regular system of public control pleases the mind. In every scene, these original principles of awe, interest, custom, and to a lesser degree, aesthetics, are the cornerstones of civil government. The operation of these principles is first illustrated through use of the conjectural model. The state of government among “savages” – meaning hunting/fishing/gathering societies – is proportionally limited to their notions of property. Eking out a bare subsistence upon the scarce fruits of the earth, savage societies or tribes are small, familial, and mobile, owning no significant property beyond their persons. The savage society, due to its instability, predatory character, and rudimentary notions of property is “commonly addicted to theft and rapine.” Finding itself at perpetual war with other tribes, it sees fit to elect the strongest of body and mind as a military leader, upon the principles of authority already established. The military chief has relatively little authority – as it is solely based upon unstable and temporary personal qualities, he has little chance of securing the

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46 *Ibid.*, 1:1
more permanent and extensive authority of wealth and custom. The “taming and pasturing of cattle”, the first great revolution in mode of subsistence, is productive of substantial changes in the manners and customs of a people.\textsuperscript{49} Owing to the more stable supply of food, pastoral societies acquire a greater degree of stability, comfort, and sociability. This state is marked by the establishment of “considerable property in moveables”\textsuperscript{50} – a new and relatively stable source of authority unknown to the savage. Especially capable or unusually lucky heads of families were able to acquire transmissible wealth. This wealth, in an age in which luxury was unknown, could purchase the personal and military loyalty of domestic servants or retainers. As the notion of private property spread, the profits of conquest and the necessity for internal police – the resolution of disputes within the tribe – the “influence of a chief greatly increased,” as the role began to involve executive and judicial powers. The pastoral state witnessed a shift towards a more permanent and regular authority. The development of agriculture, “a more difficult art” contingent upon the circumstances of situation, and the next logical step of the ideal-typical order, produces a more significant change in the nature of government.\textsuperscript{51} As farming requires a more permanent settlement upon large tracts of land, the division of the land into workable sections suggested the idea of landed property. Property in land, Millar continues, capable of being parcelled out to tenants and dependants, expanded the potential for great inequality of wealth, and, naturally, of authority. The authority of the chief, supported by preeminence in wealth, was supplemented by increased civil powers – the expansion of judicial business, as property

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 1:3. This sentiment is mirrored in the \textit{Origin}, 145.
\textsuperscript{49} The following abridgement is derived from the “Lectures on Government” 2, and is mirrored in both the \textit{Origin}, 171-175, and the \textit{Historical View’s} consideration of Saxon society, v.1, Ch. 2-4.
\textsuperscript{50} The chief form of private wealth at this point is, of course, the “herds and flocks” upon which the shepherds depend. See also \textit{Origin}, 152-154.
\textsuperscript{51} “Lectures” 5.
disputes became widespread, and the establishment of a legislative authority in the chief
to prevent such disputes and secure property. The development of the arts and
manufactures – a consequence of the stability and affluence provided by agriculture and
the efficiency of subdivided labour – produces the final stage in the development of
society. This development, last in the conjectural scheme, is commercial society.
Wealth, no longer solely related to the agricultural production of masters and tenants, is
more evenly distributed among the independent orders of society. The government, in
addition to maintaining its oldest function of prosecuting war, now becomes the
legislative and judicial steward of the nation’s commercial transactions. Every owner of
property has an interest in the legal protection of that property, and is inclined to support
the government which guarantees the security of their property. And while the economic
independence of the people creates a “spirit of liberty”, and a sense of entitlement among
the common people, the massively expanded revenue and professionalization of the
military enables the customary sovereign broad and unprecedented jurisdiction. At this
point, “different circumstances, in particular countries, have, on such occasions, favoured
the despotical or the democratic principle.” It is at this point of conflict that Millar’s
conjectural history must end. Millar has completed a cognitively distanced ‘map’ of the
ideal progress of government through the four stages of development, terminating in the
inevitable conflict between democratic and despotic authority at the commercial stage.

The radically distanced perspective has obvious recommendations. By
constructing a system of explanation upon the economic conditions of society, Millar is

52 The minute division of labour, Millar writes, liberalizes the economy from one of personal dependency to
one of independent proprietorship. “Lectures” 6. This idea is mirrored in the Origin, 230-235, and in
Historical View, 4:3. This view is derived from Hume and Smith’s account of the effect of commerce on
the decline of the feudal nobility.
53 “Lectures” 14. Elsewhere, Millar claims that “a variety of accidents may contribute to cast the balance
upon either side.” Origin, 236, and chapter 5, sections 1-3. Among these various “accidents” include the
able to derive a variety of insights into the relationship between universal conditions, the
search for sustenance and ease, and their natural counterparts, the human institutions
designed to aid this search. Yet in and of itself, it is of limited value. As an ideal system,
regardless of its philosophical sophistication, it can produce only so much useful
knowledge. To Millar, the true worth of conjecturalism lay in its contributions to an
altogether different mode of historical composition. Deciphering the common economic
basis of social worlds, the work of this mode of conjecturalism, provided only half of a
complex equation. For Millar the challenge and reward lay in embedding the conjectural
system within a specific historical context. The distance imposed by the adoption of the
conjectural mode, a scheme which eliminated the effects of situation, accident, and agent
as relevant historical data, would have to be diminished in order to properly account for
these elements in the actual history of the nation. That is to say, it was desirable to Millar
to maintain the cognitive distance or philosophical power of conjecturalism while
shortening the affective, ideological and formal distances by an application of the system
to a subject closer to the hearts of Britons. Moreover, the adoption of the conjectural
system as a perspective entailed serious breaches of form. As indicated above, the worth
of history as a genre was in part predicated on its traditional eloquence and linearity.
Formal solutions to this problem of adequately narrating the operation of philosophical
systems met with various success. Hume separated the philosophical from the narrative
by way of appendices; William Robertson did so by way of footnotes and prefatory
dissertation; Robert Henry’s history divided the narrative in six parts, each discussing one

size of the state and the proximity of rival states, each of which influences the military power of the
sovereign.
54 In this, as in the Origin, Millar’s imagination is barely contained by his design, and he constantly
ventures outside of his immediate subject into the cultural and moral implications of social progress. This
provides a good deal of the pleasure of reading Millar – following the causal links which Millar uses to
aspect of the history of the nation, only one of which was in the classical mode of political narrative. The object was to establish history on a systematic footing, inclusive and accommodating to the real force of circumstance, while retaining the linearity and unity of classical event-based narrative. Millar undertakes this operation, albeit in a cursory manner, in the second division of his lectures on government, “Illustration of the Subject from View of particular Governments”. Though it is framed as an evidentiary proof of the first (conjectural) set of lectures, this section can also be read as a first attempt to embed the system in an actual or specific historical context.

What would such an attempt entail? It is worthwhile to look back to the Origin to get a better grasp on Millar’s historical thought. In constructing the outline of a conjectural history for the Introduction to the Origin, Millar enumerated the “various accidental causes” which could “accelerate or retard” the operation of general-causes for the purpose of denying their viability as general causes. This list may serve as an idea of the minor-causes Millar would have to account for in the reversal of distance. Negatively, it may be seen as a list of the perceived inadequacies of the cognitive distance at work in traditional histories. Foremost among the minor causes Millar cites is the influence of geographic situation. The ‘Empire of Climate’ was a commonplace in the eighteenth century, as various theorists held that the nature of a nations’ soil, climate, and terrain was the chief determinant of its social institutions.

connect, say, savagery with the brutalization of women, pasturage with epic poetry and commerce with the ‘riot of luxury’.


56 Origin, 4-5. The Introduction to the Origin offers the most explicit statement of Millar’s conjectural method.

57 This was a doctrine of which elements can be found in Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws, the writings of Buffon, Rousseau’s first Discourse, and James Dunbar’s Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and
“remarkable effect,” resisted its primacy as a determining factor, citing the deep differences between cultures of similar, or the same, geographical situation. Compare, Millar instructs, the “mildness and moderation of the Chinese, with the rough manners and intolerant principles of their neighbours in Japan … the Athenians and Lacedemonians … the English, the Irish, and the Scotch.” Yet the influence of climate upon both the economic foundations of society, and upon the ‘accidents’ of war and catastrophe, loomed large as second-causes. The myth of the heroic legislator, the favoured causal force of ‘vulgar’ historians, as historians of the classical and antiquarian tradition were coming to be known, proved an easier target. This argument, “recorded by uncertain tradition, or by fabulous history” held that the superior genius or foresight of “heroes and sages”, in the mould of Solon or King Alfred, enabled them to set out unique and visionary systems of law and governance. While allowing for the limited influence of the historical agent, Millar asserts that the changes instituted were ultimately both authored and approved of by the home society. The perceived inadequacy of this explanation hinged on the cognitive distance-perspective adopted by Millar in the Origin. Working from the primacy of economics as a cause, Millar’s philosophical position required him to deny the force of agency as a significant cause - though in the reduction of historical distance which Millar would attempt in the construction of his Historical View, the force of the agent would again emerge, qualified by the conjectural scheme. Unaccounted for in the conjectural Origin was a view of the operation of catastrophe or pure accident. In the same league as the capricious actions of an agent, these forces could

*Cultivated Ages.* While he of course recognized the influence of situation, Millar found the idea of a direct relationship between climate and physiology absurd. *Origin*, 9-10.

58 *Origin*, 11.
not register in the radically distanced view. This too would require some attention in the rescaled history.

The second, ‘illustrative’ division of the lectures on government acts as a bridge between the philosophical distance of pure conjecturalism and the more localized, narrativized *Historical View*. Millar was conscious of the problems inherent in pure system, such as understanding those societies which, from the influence of situation, skip one or more stages of theoretical development. As the work of pure conjecture could only explain societies in a vacuum, it was necessary to temper the operation of economic causation with the secondary influences of climate, agency and accident. This could only be done in the laboratory of the past. Millar’s second series of *Lectures on Government* concerns six such laboratories, Athens, Sparta, Rome, England, France and Germany. A brief view of the account of the Spartan and Athenian governments will suffice to show the nature of this work.\(^{60}\) Millar’s abandonment of a “pure” stadialism is readily apparent. Having no evidence of savagery in the history of the Greek republics, Millar passes over any conjecture of its existence. Instead, he focuses on the powerful influence of situation: the “barrenness and maritime situation of Attica” led its inhabitants into navigation and commerce, while the “inland situation and improvable soil of Lacedemon induced the people to procure subsistence by pasturage and agriculture.”\(^{61}\) The influence of situation is naturalized as an unvarying and solidly empirical aspect of national development. Lacedemon’s geographic situation, exposing it to frequent raids, inclined that people towards military discipline, while Attica’s isolation led the inhabitants to cultivate ‘the arts of peace’. Having assessed the probable influence of situation, Millar’s economic

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\(^{60}\) *Lectures on Government* 17 and 18—As this text is the transcription of a lecture, a different species of rhetoric from that of written history, the politics of narrative are somewhat less heated. However, as all historical compositions assume a level of distance, the body of the lectures illustrate the changing vantages Millar was adopting.
theories, developed in the conjectural sphere, are applied to the particular situation of each society. Each developed laws and systems of government appropriate to its own situation: the Lacedemonians, rude and militant, adopted severe sumptuary laws and a senatorial government appropriate to the prosecution of war in a small state, conditioned by the early codification of laws by Lycurgus. The Athenians, deriving an independent spirit from the operations of commerce, developed a popular government, likewise conditioned by the influence of the lawgiver Solon. The perspective gained by the inclusion of situation, agent, and accident in the field of historical data was significantly different from both the 'vulgar' narrative or chronology of events and his own conjectural dissertation on the operation of social systems, as seen in the *Origin*.

### 2.2 Millar’s *Historical View* and the Limits of Conjectural History

Such a change in perspective is indicative of the kinds of changes which would have to be applied in the approach of the English historical record. Millar appears to have felt that a sufficiently ‘distanced’ narrative of the history of the English government had yet to be written. The introduction to his *Historical View* indicates exactly what he felt was wanting in the current historiography. “In delineating the progress of the English government,” Millar writes, “I have endeavoured to avoid those fond prepossessions which Englishmen are apt to entertain upon the subject, as well as the prejudices peculiar to the two great parties.”62 Of all the elements of the English past, none was more encumbered with vulgar myth than the ‘ancient constitution’ Millar was preparing to describe. By 1779, the publication date of the *Historical View*, the perpetual contest between the parliament and the crown over the nature of English liberty had radically

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62 *Historical View*, 1:viii. This statement indicates Millar’s desire to achieve both cognitive (anti-mythic) and ideological (non-partisan) distance.
Millar's claim to a philosophically sophisticated and politically impartial ‘distance’ (which is of course, not unproblematic in itself), is the first key to a discussion of his mode of historical composition. The second key, narrativity, was also a significant problem in the existing historiography. Those works which adopted a philosophical or distanciated perspective were marred by a lack of linearity and unity, as for example, Hume's appendices to the History of England. Those works which maintained a linear narrative were too often unable to divorce that form's unsophisticated methodology from its admirable style. Millar’s Introduction attempted to reclaim historical narrative on a solid philosophical footing. “It is necessary,” he wrote,

in order to have a full view of the circumstances from which it has proceeded, that we should survey with attention the successive changes through which [our government] has passed ... it is hoped that, by considering events in the order in which they happened, the causes of every change will be more easily unfolded, and may be pointed out with greater simplicity.  

Millar’s concern with narrative is here voiced in a very pragmatic manner: he believed that narrative, as an instrument, was most capable of the clear exposition of historical data. As the conjectural scheme was, as we have seen, itself narrative, there is conflict between narrative form and Millar’s claims to long cognitive distance. Millar continues:

As the subject however, is of great extent, I shall endeavour to avoid prolixity, either from quoting authorities and adducing proofs in matters sufficiently evident, or from intermixing any detail of facts not intimately connected with the history of our constitution.

This passage is indicative of the tension between the formal traditions of narrative and the requirements of a properly impartial, “philosophical” perspective. Here Millar may be

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63 Ibid., 1:7.
64 Ibid.
seen as foreshortening the *formal* distance-perspective of the dry-as-dust conjecturalist ‘treatise’ towards the proximity which distinguishes traditional narratives of action.

The conjectural system of the *Origin* and the first section of the *Lectures on Government*, when embedded and historicized in the English record, was believed by Millar to be able to provide an adequately linear (grand) narrative while maintaining the cognitive and ideological distance necessary to an philosophically sound and politically impartial history. Millar’s *Historical View* would proceed very much along these lines.

“By what fortunate concurrence of events,” Millar asks in his introduction,

> has a more extensive plan of civil freedom been established in this island? Was it by accident, or by design, or from the influence of peculiar situation, that our Saxon forefathers, originally distinguished as the most ferocious of all those barbarians who invaded the Roman provinces, have been enabled to embrace more comprehensive notions of liberty, and to sow the seeds of those political institutions which have been productive of such prosperity and happiness to a great and populous empire?  

This particular construction of distance, created through the application of the ideal-typical conjectural system to the events and conditions of the English historical record is maintained through the first two volumes of the *Historical View*.

A fine example of the operation of this technique comes in Millar’s consideration of the conditions which led to the granting of the great royal charters of the medieval era. This example illustrates the operation of the theory of general causes as a primary force in a known and ideologically charged historical milieu. “When we take a view of these great transactions,” Millar states,

> and endeavour to estimate the degree of attention they merit, their number, their similarity, and the long intervals of time at which they were procured, are circumstances which cannot be overlooked.

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Here Millar’s metaphor of the dice is here applied historically: the same result having been delivered from a wide variety of historical actors and settings, Millar cannot help but conclude that a greater principle is in operation.

Had one charter only been granted by the sovereign, on a singular occasion, it might well be supposed to have arisen from a concourse of accidents, and from partial views. Instead of expressing the opinions entertained by the king and his people, concerning the rights of either, it might, in that case, have been the effect of a mere casual advantage, which the one party had gained over the other; and, so far from displaying the ordinary state of the government of that period, it might have exhibited the triumph and injustice of a temporary usurpation. But those important stipulations, not to mention the confirmations of them in a later period, were begun and repeated under the reigns of six different monarchs, comprehending a course of about two hundred years; they were made with princes of extremely different characters, and in very opposite situations ... [yet] their main object continued invariably the same. 

Here Millar is aware of the force of accident and agency in the formation of policy, and thus the potential for a “casual advantage” or “partial views” to temporarily alter the current of history. But through the distance-perspective that Millar has constructed for his audience, the historical spectator is able to perceive that these events, ostensibly the product of unique and “accidental” situations, are in fact part of a consistent pattern, which declares “in a clear and unequivocal manner, the general and permanent sense of the nation.” Having established that the granting of the charters were part of a regular and established pattern, Millar proceeds to decipher that pattern:

During the whole period which we are now considering ... while the barons were exerting themselves with so much vigour, and with so much apparent success, in restraining the powers of the crown, those powers were, notwithstanding, continually advancing; and the repeated concessions made by the sovereign, had no farther effect than to prevent his authority from increasing so rapidly as it might otherwise have done. For a proof of this we can appeal to no better authority than to the charters themselves; from which ... it will appear, that the nobility were daily becoming more moderate in their claims; and that they submitted, in reality, to a gradual extension of the prerogative; though, by more numerous regulations, they endeavoured to avoid the wanton abuses of it.

67 Ibid., 2:74-5
68 Ibid., 2:75-6
69 Ibid., 2:76-77. Proofs of this claim follow, 77-80.
Having now distanced the historical eye not only from event (the granting of Magna
Charta at Runnymede) to pattern (the gradual elevation of the sovereign), Millar proceeds
to gain further distance by settling this pattern within the familiar conjecturalist system of
stadial development.

The elevation of the crown, Millar writes, was a natural consequence of the
advancement of agriculture in medieval European states. Rudimentary agricultural
societies, as England was at the time of the Norman conquest, are characterized by the
existence of allodial estates, farmed by independent proprietors. In the infancy of law,
these independents were subject to the constant danger and harassment of neighbouring
lords, and naturally sought protection from these depredations by converting their
independent estates into feudal benefices, and at length were “reduced into the condition
of military servants.” Military and economic power was increasingly focused into the
great feudal estates of the nobility,

who felt a stronger incitement to the exercise of reciprocal hostilities, as well as
the capacity of prosecuting them with greater vigour and perseverance, according
as their power, together with their pride and their ambition, had been
augmented.

Ironically, the nobility who preyed upon the allodial proprietors, and who were now
subject to the depredations of their peers, would find it necessary to submit to the feudal
sovereign in order to obtain security.

The great nobles were thus rendered subordinate to the crown in the same manner
as the inferior free people had become subordinate to the nobility; the whole
kingdom was united in one extensive barony, of which the king became the
superior, and in some measure the ultimate proprietor; and the feudal system ... was at last completed.

70 Ibid., 2:14-22. The following is a summary of Millar’s argument. See also correlative statements in
Millar’s other works: Origin, Chapter 4 and “Lectures” 6.
71 Ibid., 2:16.
72 Ibid., 2:17.
Millar's framing device of grand narrative thus allows for the subsumption of individual events, characterized by the instabilities of character and accident, into greater patterns, and those patterns are made sensible with reference to a structuring system of natural and inevitable development. Patterns, and the independently inexplicable events that constitute them, are in Millar's view both properly accounted for and inserted into a rational, ordered system. This approach, approaching the cognitive and ideological distance of conjectural history while also approximating the formal and affective properties of factuality and linearity enables Millar to claim for the *Historical View* the equally impressive titles of 'impartiality' and factual fidelity.

However, the operation of the stadial system, reliant on a set of particular social circumstances for the lion's share of its explanatory force, had its cognitive limitations. The governmental form correlative to commercial society, unlike that of pastoral or agricultural stages, was uncertain under Millar's conjectural system.\(^73\) Upon the development of commercial government, the conflict between the independent spirit of the commercial people and the extraordinary military powers of the sovereign has no socially dictated resolution. Millar's system, so reliable in the interpretation of the early history of the nation, may here be seen as failing as an explanatory device.\(^74\) The admission that a "variety of accidents may contribute to cast the balance upon either side" constitutes a significant departure from the chiefly determinist cast of the account of the preceding eras. Millar's chief frame of reference, the distanciated position of conjectural social analysis, is found to be inadequate to the challenges of a truly modern history. It is this limitation, and the reframing which Millar undertakes to complete his history, which

\(^{73}\) See note 53, above.

\(^{74}\) Millar's admission of this failure is open. See *Origin*, 292-295, "Lectures" 11, and *Historical View*, 3:8 and 3:124-5.
makes the *Historical View* an even more curious text, and which provides insight into the operation of variable historical distances *within a single text*.

Millar thus undertakes, in the account of the commercial period – "From the accession of the House of Stewart to the Revolution of 1688" a remarkable reversal of approach. Far from the cartographic view of society which characterized the earlier volumes, Millar engages in a close appraisal of character, motivation, and circumstance, in pursuit of the ‘accidental’ causes which determine the fate of modern nations. The challenge was to maintain a unity of cognitive sophistication and ideological impartiality while abandoning the long-view of the conjectural system and adopting a traditional, detailed narrative of events and actions – a formal distance-perspective which was traditionally partnered with precisely the opposite cognitive and ideological distances. This operation is most apparent in Millar’s history of the Regicide. Millar undertakes his discussion with a close narrative of the principal events of Charles’ reign, focussing most notably on the disputes between the crown and parliament.\(^75\) The narrative mimics, in a sense, the conflict which was seen by Millar as determining the fate of the commercial nation: the demands of the people for the maintenance of civil liberty against the demands of the crown for sovereign authority and the means for enforcing it, a standing army. It is not until the execution, however, that Millar undertakes the most interesting portion of this narrative: the post-mortem analysis of Charles’ character and motivation. Ironically, it is through this formal reframing, which scales the field of analysis down to the operations of the mind, that Millar is enabled to revive the cognitive and ideological distance lost by the failure of the stadial system.

\(^75\) *Historical View*, 3:178-219.
The story of the Regicide, as so much of English constitutional history of this period, remained a battleground for royalist and whig historians, despite the growing distance in time. The matter was so utterly shot through with political hyperbole that even the father of “philosophical” history in England, David Hume, could not escape accusations of party prejudice in his treatment of this period. Millar’s prefatory remarks to this section indicate both the problems and proposed solution in discovering the truth about Charles.

We can pay little regard, either to the panegyric of the one set [of ideologue historians], or the invectives of the other; and if our object be the discovery of truth, we must fix our attention solely upon that series of actions by which the eventful history of his reign is distinguished.

It is upon a formally close reading of action that Millar proposes a reevaluation of the reign of Charles. Millar’s attempt to rise above the party bias he detects in Hume and lesser historians provides us with a micro-view of historical reframing. The historian here attempts to conjecturally enter into the mind of Charles, logically projecting what, in fact, Charles must have known and understood about his own actions and their consequences. The cognitive and ideological distance which is assured by passed time allows Millar to conduct a fascinating foreshortening of affective distance: “At the distance from which we now survey the conduct of Charles, his misfortunes can hardly fail to move our compassion, and to soften that resentment which the whole tenor of his conduct is apt to excite.” Millar is confident that he can be successful precisely where Hume failed, the

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76 In Hume’s autobiographical statement “My Own Life,” he reminisces on his intent of writing a truly impartial history: “I thought I was the only historian, that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices; and as the subject ws suited to every capacity, I expected proportional applause. But miserable was my disappointment. I was assailed by one cry of reproach, disapprobation, and even detestation.” Essays, xxxvii. Millar’s own critique of Hume’s account is itself somewhat remarkable, given their close intellectual affinities and friendly relationship. Craig, Life of Millar, viii-ix.

77 Ibid., 3:312-4. Italic mine.

78 Ibid., 3:312.
dissociation of sympathy from accurate historical judgement - allowing for an affective and formal proximity while retaining cognitive and ideological distance.

Millar’s critique of Hume is in fact founded upon the too sympathetic rendering of Charles’ mental state, to the prejudice of rational, impartial, investigation. “Who,” Millar asks, “that acknowledges the happiness of society to be the great end of all government, can enter so far into the feelings of a tyrant as to listen to his justification?”

It has been suggested, that his misconduct proceeded from the notions which he had imbibed of the English constitution: that he followed merely the footsteps of his father, by whom he was taught to look upon himself as an absolute prince ... that he found this opinion supported by the example of many of his predecessors, those especially of the Tudor-family; and that he was farther confirmed in it, by observing the absolute authority exercised by most of the cotemporary princes upon the continent of Europe.

Millar’s own conjecture of the mind of Charles, regardless of its actual accuracy, exposes his pretension to cognitive distance:

The barbarous chief is probably unacquainted with any other mode of living, but Charles must have known better. He had cultivated his understanding by acquired knowledge, and was no strange to the different forms of government which had existed in different countries ... He was no stranger to the history of his own country, and could not fail to know that it never was, at any period, subjected to a despotical government. He could not overlook those great charters which his predecessors had so frequently granted to their subjects, and which expressly ascertained the privileges of the people and the limitations of the prerogative.

The force of Millar’s method, the contemplation of the mind of the historical agent, now comes to light: If, Millar writes,

We consider this prince merely in the light of a private individual, and compare his conduct with that of other criminals, there can, I should think be no doubt that he merited the highest punishment.

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79 Ibid., 3:315.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 3:316-17. Italics mine.
82 Ibid., 3:323.
Millar’s pretension to impartiality in historical judgement situates the audience in a radically different manner from that of the first two volumes of the *Historical View*. We are able, Millar implies, even through the narrow aperture of recent history, to achieve a high degree of impartiality with appropriate cognitive reframing. The acts of the historical agent can be impartially adjudicated with reference to what was perceived by Millar to be the universal standards of justice, utility and propriety. The empirical, comparative principle which is at the heart of Millar’s affectively-distant conjectural impartiality thus emerges also at the heart of his later, more proximate impartiality.

Curiously, Millar is able to claim the same degree of cognitive distance and ideological impartiality for both his intimate ‘portrait’ and his systematic ‘map’, though they involve significant shifts in formal properties and methodological orientation.\(^{83}\)

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\(^{83}\) Incidentally, the proximate view Millar adopts in the third volume is far less convincing than the conjecturally-based account offered throughout the rest of Millar’s work. This in itself does not invalidate the existence and operation of variable distance in Millar’s work.
Chapter Three: Reception

3.1 The Immediate Reception of Millar’s Histories

An illuminating postscript to the discussion of distance in Millar’s historical writing is provided by a view of the reception of Millar’s works in his and the following generation of British historians. Both Millar’s *Origin* and the *Historical View* were well received in their time, the former seeing six English editions as well as a German translation and pirated runs in Dublin, Edinburgh, Basel and Amsterdam. The *Historical View* was offered in five English editions through 1814, a significant number for such a sizeable and challenging work. The *Critical Review* and *Monthly Review* offered laudatory, if uncritical remarks and lengthy excerpts. Here Millar was praised for his “ability and ingenuity” as a historian. More compellingly, these reviews praised Millar’s “new and promising kind of historical investigation,” his “free and liberal philosophy” and the his “art of developing the secret spirit of the times.”

The predominant tenor of the early reviews is of a general praise for the novel approaches of Millar’s historical work in the *Origin* and the *Historical View*.

These sentiments are echoed and amplified in James Mill’s review of the *Historical View* in the *Literary Journal* of October 1803. Here, Mill’s admiration of Millar could not be more apparent:

As the subject of Millar is one of extraordinary importance, so has he treated it with uncommon ability. This is not the hasty production of a half-informed scribbler. It is the fruit of the labours of a life spent in the prosecution of similar studies, of a mind replete with knowledge in the subject, habituated to profound reflection, and which has spent much time in considering the materials of which

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this work is composed. With regard to the profound acquaintance with his subject, the clearness of his ideas, his knowledge of human nature, and the sagacity he displays in tracing effects to their causes, there can be but one opinion.\textsuperscript{85}

Mill’s praise for the \textit{Historical View} is no less high than his praise for its author. “The chief circumstance which distinguishes this enquiry,” Mill writes,

is the sagacity, with which the author, by his profound knowledge of human nature, is able from the faint outlines, afforded us by ancient authors, to fill up the picture. In every part indeed of the work this is a merit which shines conspicuous; and he applies with great penetration the general principles of human nature to explain the particulars.\textsuperscript{86}

The nature and extent of Mill’s praise is worth staking out. Mill, like the other early reviewers, is deeply impressed with the orientation and tactics of Millar’s conjectural mode. Mill’s review in particular finds two significant advantages to the conjectural approach. In the first instance, Mill sees the \textit{Historical View}, through the application of “general principles,” as being able to “fill up the picture” – coloring in the map of the distant past. Secondly, Mill perceived in Millar’s \textit{Historical View} a new possibility for historical investigation. Beyond “the relation of public events, and transactions, the simple business of history,” there lie “disquisitions with respect to the causes and consequences of these transactions ... with respect to the tendency and operation of the political arrangements in any country, which successively take place.”\textsuperscript{87} “The first,” Mill pronounces,

is properly speaking history, the last might be called philosophical considerations on history; or more shortly the one might be denominated history, the other the philosophy of history. It is in this light that [Millar] seems to have reviewed this

\textsuperscript{85} James Mill, review of \textit{An Historical View of the English Government}, in \textit{Literary Journal} 2 (1803), 327. Later in the review, in discussing the \textit{Historical View} account of political economy, he puts Millar upon a par with his mentor Adam Smith: “Mr. Millar goes over the same ground, not however as a servile follower, but pursues the lights of his own reflections. And it is peculiarly interesting to the philosophical reader, to observe the different modes in which two men of equal originality and depth of thought, contemplate the same subject,” 391.

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid.}, 328.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Ibid.}, 326.
subject; and that work might with no great impropriety be denominated the philosophy of the history of the British islands.\(^{88}\)

The value of the "philosophy of history" that Mill perceives to be at work in Millar goes beyond a well-wrought picture of Celt or Pict society. In Mill’s view, at least, the conjectural approach elevated the work of historical investigation past ‘mere’ facts towards a higher truth.

The highest compliments Mill made to Millar were rather more subtle. The *Historical View* was early and required reading in the education of John Stuart Mill, and was recommended by the elder Mill to his friend David Ricardo.\(^{89}\) It is a significant comment in itself that in Mill’s own *History of British India* Millar’s writings are cited as “almost the only source from which even the slightest information [on the history of civil society] can be drawn.”\(^{90}\) It has even been argued that in the *History*, Mill “makes it quite clear that he sees his work, in some respects, as a direct continuation of that of Millar”\(^{91}\) - an idea borne out by the Mill’s statement that his goal, at least in part, has been “to contribute something to the progress of so important an investigation.”\(^{92}\) Millar’s historical theories were in fact viewed by Mill as “but detached considerations applied to particular facts, and not a comprehensive induction, leading to general conclusions.”\(^{93}\)

At this early stage, Millar was viewed - by Mill at least - as perhaps not systematic enough.

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\(^{88}\) Ibid.


\(^{92}\) Mill, *History*, 229n.

3.2 From Philosophical History to “Authentic History"

Despite Mill’s proselytizing, Millar had the misfortune to die on the cusp of another radical reframing of historical distance. The vogue for philosophical history, expressed so clearly in immediate reviews, passed on with Millar at the turn of the century. Indications of the type of criticism to be levelled at Millar over the next 30 years would be first expressed in Francis Jeffrey’s review of the *Historical View*. Jeffrey, who was in many ways the spokesman and brightest light of the new generation of Scottish intellectuals, was an admirer of Millar, but would critique the *View* in telling ways. These reviews are worth close consideration, as Jeffrey represents a transitional figure in Millar’s historiographical reputation. In the review of the *Historical View*, Jeffrey introduces Millar’s intellectual work in an somewhat backhanded manner. Millar, Jeffrey states, “corresponded pretty nearly with the abstract idea that the learned of England entertain of a *Scottish philosopher* ... acute, sagacious, and systematical ... rather indefatigable in argument, than patient in investigation; vigilant in the observation of facts, but not so strong in their number, as skilful in their application.” Jeffrey here approaches an important change in Millar’s reputation - a shift away from the adoration of “philosophical history” in general, and conjecturalism in particular. Though the reviewer retains an appreciation for Millar’s approach, especially in the context of earlier traditions, it is clear that Jeffrey senses a problem.

While the antiquary pored with childish curiosity over the confused and fantastic ruins that cover the scenes of early story, he produced the plan and elevation of the original fabric, and enabled us to trace the connections of the scattered fragments ... it is impossible not to be delighted with the ingenuity and happiness of the combinations by which these explanations are made out.  

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To this point, Jeffrey’s appreciation of Millar’s historiographical “sagacity” and
“ingenuity” appears to be in agreement with Mill’s view – but Jeffrey continues:

Mr Millar’s confidence in [his system’s] infallibility was greater than could always be justified. As his object was to obtain great clearness and simplicity in his theory, he was apt, when satisfied, upon the whole, of its truth, to pass somewhat hastily over all that could not be easily reconciled to it. His greatest admirers must admit, that he has sometimes cut the knot which he could not untie, and disregarded difficulties which he was not prepared to overcome; that he has asserted, where he ought to have proved; advanced a conjecture for a certainty; and given the signal of triumph, when the victory might be considered as doubtful.96

Millar is thus perceived as somewhat overly systematic, too dedicated to an inductive explanatory scheme that regards facts as merely illustrative. Jeffrey had not completely left the fold of the philosophers, however, citing his delight and captivation with Millar’s ingenious “speculations” on the remote past.97 His disappointment with the third volume, in fact, derives from the inability of conjecturalism to provide insight into the history of the modern era.

A review of the *Historical View* in the journal *The British Critic* speaks far more harshly against Millar’s historical method. “In the fifth chapter,” the reviewer states, “we perceive the love of theory prevailing against facts indisputably authenticated.”98 Millar is imputed to be “enslaved to a system,” making use of mere “cobweb theories” where the explanatory force of “authentic history” is required.99 Elsewhere, the *British Critic* is openly hostile to Millar:

He had evidently never studied the history of the church in original records; nor, as it appears to us, the Greek scriptures. In the mean time, amidst all the parade of philosophy with which he endeavours to veil his ignorance of the Christian

system, he lets slip no opportunity of giving vent to his spleen against the Church of England.\textsuperscript{100}

The conjectural system, far from providing historical insight, is here perceived as a deeply flawed mode of historical explanation. This critique would be echoed more modestly in Henry Hallam’s complaint that Millar was guilty of “a fault too common among the philosophers of his country, that of theorizing upon an imperfect induction, and very often upon a total misapprehension of particular facts.”\textsuperscript{101} John Allen, in a review of Hallam’s \textit{View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages}, reiterates the by-now well established opinion of Millar:

\begin{quote}
[The \textit{Historical View} is] remarkable for the sagacity of its conjectures, the ingenuity of its explanations, the boldness of its discussions, and its total freedom from prejudice; but it is deficient in accuracy and research, and will not bring conviction to a mind that has received its first impressions form the plausible but delusive representations of Hume.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

The similarity of these criticisms indicates that another significant reframing of historical distance was in the process of taking shape. Millar’s later critics, many of them possessing a wholly different idea of the work that history does and the means it uses to accomplish that end, could not accept the cognitive distance-perspective of Millar’s conjecturalism. As the nineteenth-century abandoned conjecturalism as a valid mode of historical explanation, Millar’s works became obsolete. The fact that Millar’s histories, including the \textit{Origin}, but in particular the \textit{Historical View} and the “Lectures on Government,” have gone without historiographical comment since that time further illustrates the degree to which the distance-perspectives Millar adopted have become alien to current historical practice.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ibid.}, 597. While the \textit{British Critic} clearly took offence at Millar’s perceived republicanism and anti-clericalism, it is complaints about Millar’s \textit{historiographical} method that must be attended to.

\textsuperscript{101} Henry Hallam, \textit{History of Europe During the Middle Ages}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., (New York: Colonial Press, 1840), 1:xiv.
Conclusion: John Millar Reframed

The impetus for this project, as seems to be the case for so many preliminary studies, came as a result of a significant gap in present scholarship. It is quite remarkable that Millar's *Historical View*, a work of high ambition, originality, and scope, and one of only two major texts authored by a man who is now almost universally regarded as a major figure in the British Enlightenment, should be almost entirely neglected. This neglect appears to be rooted in a more general misrecognition of the nature of Millar's thought. By investigating Millar through the lens of social science, it seems difficult if not impossible to come to a comprehensive assessment of Millar's works. While elements of Millar's *Origin* may indeed have foreshadowed the development of a mature sociology, the social scientific approach seems unable to recognize, let alone interpret, the existence and importance of the *Historical View*. This perspective, by sifting out the disagreeably non-sociological elements of Millar's life, can at its best produce only a fragmented picture of Millar's life and work.

An historiographical approach to Millar is, by contrast, far more productive. If we attend closely to the methodological intricacies of Millar's work, it becomes possible to see throughout Millar's texts a unified theory of the relationship between human nature and historical development: the system of conjecturalism. This in itself is a good thing. Recognizing the properly historical concerns and approaches in Millar's work is an important first step in counterbalancing the current, narrow perception of Millar. However, if we take the further step of contextualizing Millar's work within the set of historiographical innovations which had come before, and those which would follow, it

102 John Allen, review of *History of Europe During the Middle Ages*, by Henry Hallam, *Edinburgh Review*
becomes possible to perceive the operation of a far larger process at work, the way in which traditional modes of historiography are constantly altered and realigned in order for societies to possess a useful or at least functional view of the past. In doing so, one becomes acutely aware of the paradigmatic discrepancies which separate different eras of historical thought. An awareness of these discrepancies, and the manner in which they are manifested in the histories themselves, allows for a better understanding of the enigmatic process through which once-lauded authors are abandoned and misunderstood.
Selected Bibliography


