In Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, historical facts, dates, and examples run throughout the text. From the use of dates as subtitles to each chapter, to the extensive use of historical examples, *A Thousand Plateaus* is brimming with history. And yet, as DG make clear, history is much more than an effort to represent the past as it actually happened. For DG the key is not to study how the actual became actual, but rather to return to the conditions for this actualization – conditions Deleuze will most frequently call the virtual. As DG put it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, to do such a history, ‘It would be necessary to go back up the path that science descends, and at the very end of which logic sets up its camp (the same goes for History, where we would have to arrive at the unhistorical vapour that goes beyond the actual factors to the advantage of a creation of something new).’\(^1\) To do this type of history, however, entails two readings. There is first the effort to read history as accurately as possible, and thus DG will frequently rely upon the works of highly respected historians such as Fernand Braudel. The second reading is what we will call the problematizing reading of history. This is the reading that affirms the virtual, ‘unhistorical vapour’ that is inseparable from the actualities that are the subject of the first reading.

It is the second reading that will be the focus of the following talk. I will argue that there is a historical ontology implicitly at work in the writings of Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari) that is crucial to understanding and doing the type of history DG call for. To set

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\(^1\) *What is Philosophy*, p. 140 (emphasis mine).
this forth we will, in the first section, focus on Deleuze’s early work on Hume, for here not only do we find Deleuze first developing the conceptual tools that he will use for much of the rest of his career, but we will also see how close Deleuze’s philosophy is to that of Hume. In extending Nicholas Phillipson’s argument that Hume is ‘the most genuinely historical of philosophers and the most subtly and profoundly philosophical of historians,’ I venture to claim that much the same is true for the work of Deleuze.²

From here we will then turn to DG’s call for history to become a problematizing history. In an elaboration of Hume as well, we will discuss eighteenth-century Scotland and the intellectual flowering that has come to be called the Scottish Enlightenment. In addition to reading the intellectual history of the Scottish Enlightenment as a series of solutions to problems – i.e., the standard reading that stresses the actualizations of the virtual – we will also discuss the problems of the Scottish Enlightenment that are inseparable from our current situation, problems that may, if one is attentive to them, allow for the creative transformation of the unquestioned actualities of daily life.

I

In Deleuze’s first published book, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, he lays out what he takes to be the central problems at work in the philosophy of David Hume. The first problem, as Deleuze reads Hume, is how the multiplicity of ideas in the imagination ‘become[s] a system?’³ This problem arises for Hume because of the externality of relations between impressions and the ideas that are the copies of these impressions. ‘The mind,’ Hume

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² See Nicholas Phillipson, *Hume*, p. 3.
³ *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 22.
says in his *Treatise*, ‘is a kind of theatre,’ but Hume immediately adds this caution: ‘The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these senses are represented…’\(^4\) As a collection of impressions and ideas that lack any intrinsic, internal basis for relating one to the other, the mind is thus, as Deleuze puts it, ‘a collection without an album, a play without a stage, a flux of perceptions.’\(^5\) How then, to restate the problem, does this multiplicity come to form an integrated system? The second problem follows from the first for Deleuze: ‘The problem is as follows: how can a subject transcending the given be constituted in the given?’ In particular, as Deleuze adds, how is it that, ‘This subject who invents and believes is constituted inside the given in such a way that it makes the given itself a synthesis and a system.’\(^6\) The problem of transforming a multiplicity into a system is thus related to the problem of accounting for the constitution of a subject within the given, a subject that nonetheless transcends the given, or is irreducible to the given.

The effort to respond to these problems will be the work of what Deleuze will call transcendental empiricism. We will discuss this effort below, but before doing so it will be helpful first to turn to a critical evaluation of Hume’s philosophy. I have in mind here the interpretation of Hume offered by David Pears, in his book *Hume’s System*. To be brief, Pears sees in Hume a ‘general failure to mark the transition from his theory of ideas developed as a psychological analogue of a theory of meaning to its development as a

\(^{4}\) *Treatise*, p. 253.
\(^{5}\) *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 23.
\(^{6}\) Ibid. pp. 86-7.
theory of truth and evidence.\textsuperscript{7} In other words, for Pears Hume’s famous argument that all our simple ideas are ‘deriv’d from simple impressions … which they exactly represent,’ is the psychological analogue to a Fregean-Russellian theory of meaning which states that an utterance is meaningful if there is a content, \(x\), which exactly corresponds to the utterance and gives the utterance a truth value – e.g. \(x\) is the argument that makes the function ‘\(x\) is the author of Waverly’ both true and meaningful when \(x\) is replaced by Scott. There is certainly ample textual support for Pears argument. Pears himself cites the following passage from Hume’s abstract to the \textit{Treatise}: ‘And when he [Hume anonymously referring to himself] suspects that any philosophical term has no idea annexed to it (as is too common) he always asks from what impression that presented idea is derived? And if no impression can be produced, he concludes that the term is altogether insignificant.’\textsuperscript{8} Hume will make this exact point again in his first \textit{Enquiry}, and thus it appears one finds in Hume an anticipation of the critique of metaphysics one finds in the logical positivists – viz., a philosophical problem is a pseudo-problem if it cannot be referred to, or resolved by means of, a verifiable sense impression.

It is at this point where the problem in Hume’s system emerges. If all our simple ideas are merely passive, mechanical copies of impressions, then a critic of Hume’s system, as Hume himself admits, would need simply to find an idea that is not derived from an impression. Thomas Reid, for example, will take Hume up on this challenge, but one need not go to Reid for a possible counter-example. Hume himself provides one. This is the well-known example of the missing shade of blue. Could one who has never had an

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{Hume’s System}, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Treatise}, pp. 648-9.
impression of this missing shade nonetheless come up with the idea of it if ‘all the
different shades of that colour, except that single one, be plac’d before him, descending
gradually from the deepest to the lightest.’ Hume has no doubt that one would be able to
do so, and yet rather than see this as ‘proof, that the simple ideas are not always derived
from the correspondent impressions,’ he simply moves on, dismissing this case as ‘so
particular and singular, that ‘tis scarce worth our observing.’ For Pears, however, this
difficulty should not be swept under the rug. To the contrary, by insisting on the
externality of relations - i.e., the claim that everything can be reduced to being merely a
collection of separable, distinct, simple and indivisible impressions – then Hume is led to
a form of atomism that will lead to further problems for his system. For Pears, Russell
and Wittgenstein attempted to do this as well, ‘But genuine simplicity proved
unattainable,’ Pears claims, ‘and he [Wittgenstein] soon abandoned his atomism in favour
of holism. Hume should have done the same.’

At the basis of Pears’ critique, I argue, is an understanding of atoms that does not stand
up to a close reading of Hume’s *Treatise*. In particular, Pears assumes the atoms are
indivisible identities, identities that come along to provide ideas with meaningful content.
The problem with this view is precisely the assumption that the atoms are *identities*,
identities that exist but without the type of ‘lateral relations’ Pears believes would help
explain the idea of the missing shade of blue. Identity, however, is for Hume, as we will

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9 *Treatise*, p. 6.
10 Hume’s System, p. 27.
11 Hume’s System, pp. 20-1: ‘So his phenomenological division of ideas follows lines laid down by
definitions until it reaches indefinables. That is how Russell too and Wittegenstein in his early period sas
the task of logical analysis … His [Humes’s] concentration on this kind of definition, reinforced by the
metaphor [of dividing an apple into parts], drives him to atomism. For it makes him neglect the lateral
connections of any thing whose idea is under analysis.’
see, *underdetermined*; rather than being the indefinable basis for Hume’s theory, as Pears sees it, identity forever needs to be constituted, systematized, and maintained. It is no wonder then that Deleuze, in his efforts to develop a philosophy of difference, found an initial inspiration in the work of Hume.

Hume’s discussion of identity occurs at a crucial part of the *Treatise*, towards the end of Book I. After offering a summary of his system, and how this system accounts for the ‘idea of continu’d existence,’ Hume claims that the principle of identity is crucial for his system. And yet, Hume admits, identity cannot arise from the perception of ‘one single object,’ for this ‘conveys the idea of unity, not that of identity’ – i.e., not the continued identity of this object in time; nor can a multiplicity of objects convey this idea, for here one finds separable and distinct existences, not the continued self-identity of one and the same existence. Hume then offers the following solution:

To remove this difficulty, let us have recourse to the idea of time or duration. I have already observ’d, that time, in a strict sense, implies succession, and that when we apply its idea to any unchangeable object [i.e., to a unity], ‘tis only by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos’d to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects, and in particular that of our perceptions. This fiction of the imagination almost universally takes place; and ‘tis by means of it, that a single object, plac’d before us, and survey’d for any time without discovering in it any interruption or variation, is able to give us a notion of identity.12

As Hume will clarify a few lines later, this fiction creates a difference within the unchanging object, a difference that enables us to see the object as the same as itself at a different time. Identity, in other words, is the result of an artifice, a fiction, and thus the

12 *Treatise*, pp. 200-1.
identity of any object, whether it is an indivisible atom, a self, etc., is inseparable from a generative, systematizing process. And this brings us back to the problem that most interested Deleuze in Hume: how is this identity generated, what is this systematizing process, especially if we do not presuppose an overarching or founding identity as the basis upon which this process is to proceed?

In returning then to the transcendental empiricism Deleuze sees in the work of Hume, the transcendental component involves addressing the question, “how can something be given to a subject, and how can the subject give something to itself?” Most especially, how can the subject give something to itself that transcends the given? The empiricist aspect addresses the question, “how is the subject constituted in the given?” For Deleuze Hume is quite clear as to how one goes beyond the given – it is through belief and invention: “Belief and invention are the two modes of transcendence.” Moreover, it is precisely through the creativity of invention and belief that the multiplicity of ideas is transformed into a system: “The subject invents; it is the maker of artifice. Such is the dual power of subjectivity: to believe and to invent, to assume the secret powers and to presuppose abstract or distinct powers…This subject who invents and believes is constituted inside the given in such a way that it makes the given itself a synthesis and a system.” These powers that constitute the subject within the given, and a subject able to invent and believe, are the principles of human nature. Deleuze is clear on this point:

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13 Ibid. p. 87.
14 Ibid.
15 Empiricism and Subjectivity, p. 132.
16 Ibid., pp. 86-7.
The most important point is to be found here. The entire sense of the principles of human nature is to transform the multiplicity of ideas which constitute the mind into a system, that is, a system of knowledge and of its objects...[but for this to be possible] we must give the object of the idea an existence which does not depend on the senses.\textsuperscript{17}

The way in which the principles do this is through a double process. First, “within the collection [multiplicity], the principle elects, chooses, designates, and invites certain impressions of sensation among others.” For example, “the principles of passion are those that choose the impressions of pleasure and pain,” and “the principles of association...choose the perception that must be brought together into a composite.” As for the second process, the principle “constitutes impressions of reflection in connection with these elected impressions.”\textsuperscript{18} What does this mean? For Deleuze, what Hume means by this is that “the principle produces a habit, a strength, and a power to evoke any other idea of the same group; it produces an impression of reflection.”\textsuperscript{19} Whenever a shade of blue appears, for instance, we are habitually able to place this shade into the series of resembling impressions that are felt to belong by virtue of the selections made by the principles of association. This double process, however, mirrors a more profound double process for Hume, that being the processes associated with the passions on the one hand and the principles of association on the other. For Deleuze, and as is well known, Hume

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p. 80.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p. 113. In support of the constitutive role of impressions of reflection, Deleuze cites Treatise, pp. 36-7 (cited p. 97 in Empiricism and Subjectivity). The text runs as follows: “Five notes play’d on a flute give us the impression and idea of time; tho’ time be not a sixth impression, which presents itself to the hearing or any other of the senses. Nor is it a sixth impression, which the mind by reflection finds in itself. These five sounds making their appearance in this particular manner, excite no emotion in the mind, nor produce an affection of any kind, which being observ’d by it can give rise to a new idea. For that is necessary to produce a new idea of reflection, nor can the mind, by revolving over a thousand times all its ideas of sensation, ever extract from them any new original idea, unless nature has so fram’t its faculties, that it feels some new original impression arise from such a contemplation.” Such a new original impression is an impression of reflection, and these impressions are the results of the principles in their constitutive role.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p. 114.
gives clear primacy to the passions: “Association gives the subject a possible structure, but only the passions can give it being and existence…the principles of the passions are absolutely primary.” To restate this using Deleuze’s much later terminology of double articulation, the principles of human nature draw the multiplicity of ideas into a “possible structure” through the association of ideas (1st articulation), and the principles of human nature actualize this possible structure by way of the passions (2nd articulation). By prioritizing the passions, therefore, Hume gives preference to the actual demands and passions, and the creativity of invention and belief are subordinate to these actual demands (hence Hume’s famous statement that reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions).

We can now restate, in Deleuze’s terms, the process whereby the underdetermination of identity becomes determined. In the first articulation, an unchanging object becomes related, through a fiction or artifice that is nonetheless natural, to a series of others that change in time. In the second articulation, this series is then synthesized or actualized through an impression of reflection whereby what is constituted is the felt identity of an object in time. And now we can see why Hume dismisses the case of the missing shade of blue. It is worth noting, as well, that Hume offers the same counter-example in his first Enquiry and dismisses it with exactly the same words he used in his Treatise. Put simply, Hume dismisses the case of the missing shade precisely because it is singular; in other words, the idea of the missing shade of blue is subsumed by the felt identity of the synthesis of the resembling shades of blue, and thus the singularity of the missing shade does not derail the established habits associated with ‘blue’ – i.e., it does not call for a

20 Ibid. p. 120.
new synthesis. In the case of the Laplander, an example from Hume’s first *Enquiry*, they can form no idea of wine because they have not even had the first in a series of wine-impressions, and thus they cannot even begin fictioning or synthesizing the identity associated with wine. Once started, however, this process whereby identity comes to be generated is not immediate. There are examples in Hume, and in Deleuze as well, where a sudden transition seems to occur.\(^{21}\) More frequently and more importantly, however, the identity of an object gathers strength over time. The very being and identity of these objects has a history—it is not all or nothing, being or nothingness—and it is this process that I refer to in using the term, historical ontology.

A few examples at this point may help to clarify what we mean. The subject who believes, for instance, is a subject subjected to processes that generate what it means to be a subject. As Deleuze puts it, for Hume, ‘The mind is not subject; it is subjected.’\(^{22}\) Perhaps the most important of these processes, for Hume, is that whereby the subject becomes a subject motivated by a concern for humanity, for the public interest. Such a motivation does not arise naturally and immediately, Hume admits, for ‘there is no such passion in human minds as the love of mankind.’\(^{23}\) Our natural inclinations, according to Hume, are always partial to our concrete, actual circumstances, and we are not naturally predisposed to get fired up about the more distant, remote, and abstract interests of the public. Consequently, Hume claims that ‘we must allow, that the sense of justice and injustice is not deriv’d from nature, but arises artificially, tho’ necessarily from

\(^{21}\) One case in particular concerns memory.
\(^{22}\) *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, p. 31.
\(^{23}\) Treatise, p. 481.
Moreover, the emergence of justice and the protection of and respect for property that goes with this, according to Hume, is a belief or motivation that acquires strength over time. Hume is clear on this point: ‘Nor is the rule concerning the stability of possession the less deriv’d from human conventions, that it arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it.’

The same applies, for Hume, to political and social institutions. Such institutions, education especially, but also the actions of politicians and others who subject subjects to the standards that create a cultured, moral subject; these very institutions and standards are themselves subject to a generative process. As Hume puts it with respect to the legitimacy of political power that magistrates and leaders have, ‘time alone gives solidity to their right; and operating gradually on the minds of men, reconciles them to any authority, and makes it seem just and reasonable.’ And again, in reference to the governmental institutions themselves, Hume argues that ‘Time and custom give authority to all forms of government, and all successions of princes; and that power which at first was founded only on injustice and violence, becomes in time legal and obligatory.’

For Hume and Deleuze, then, on our reading, whatever identity we choose to say is, whether this is the simple identity of atoms on Pears’ reading of Hume, or the established forms and institutions of government, this identity has a history. Every identity, in short,
is in itself underdetermined and requires a historical, inventive process to establish its actuality. If understood in only this way, however, then we would be following the path from the virtual to the actual, as I mentioned at the beginning of this talk. For Deleuze, by contrast, the hope is to begin with the identities that are actual and given, and then move to the generative, inventive processes that remain inseparable from these actualities.

Hume, moreover, seeks to do the same thing. ‘In England,’ Hume notes, there are ‘many honest gentlemen, who being always employ’d in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos’d to their senses.’ Hume, of course, sought to carry his thought beyond everyday actualities, and associated with the effort to do this is what I would call doing historical ontology.

II

Turning now to the theme of problematizing history, adding now the discussion of historical ontology, I want first to compare this type of history to two similar versions set forth by contemporaries, or near contemporaries, of Deleuze himself. The first is Foucault. In fact, during a lecture delivered towards the end of his life at UC Berkeley in 1983, Foucault argues that his work has been an effort to do a ‘history of thought’ rather than a ‘history of ideas.’ Foucault describes the difference between the two as follows:

Most of the time a historian of ideas tries to determine when a specific concept appears, and this moment is often identified by the appearance of a new word. But what I am attempting to do as a historian of thought is something different. I am trying to analyze the way institutions, practices, habits, and behavior become a problem for people who behave in specific sorts of ways, who have certain types of habits, who engage in certain kinds of practices, and who put to work specific kinds of institutions. The history of ideas involves the analysis of a notion from its

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28 *Treatise*, p. 272.
birth, through its development, and in the setting of other ideas which constitute its context. The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and “silent,” out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions.29

Deleuze’s project, as I see it, is quite in line with Foucault’s. They are each concerned with addressing the unquestioned actualities of life through ‘histories,’ or ‘archaeologies’ as Foucault also frequently called them, that reveal the contingencies associated with what has become the durable actualities of today. There are a number of examples of this analysis at work in Foucault, from his early work on madness which studied the problematization of the insane and the attendant discourse which medicalized them, to the theme of the lectures from which the above quote was taken, how parrhousia (Greek for frank, open, and free speech) became problematized as the Demos of Ancient Greece began to claim a right to parrhousia themselves. In both cases, and in most if not all of Foucault’s work in between, the problems Foucault analyzes are problems inseparable from our current ways of thinking, though our view of these problems may lie hidden beneath certain unquestioned assumptions.

Foucault will even use the term historical ontology on one occasion to describe his project. However, as Ian Hacking is correct to point out, the constituted being with which Foucault is most concerned is the subject. In particular, Foucault is concerned with how the ‘truth’ and ‘legitimacy’ of certain discourses constitutes ourselves as objects of knowledge. Secondly, Foucault is concerned with the power through which we constitute ourselves as agents able to act upon, or be acted upon by, others. And finally, Foucault

29 Fearless Speech, p. 74.
was concerned with the ethical implications of how we are constituted as moral subjects, subjects with obligations and duties towards ourselves and others. Where Hacking, who currently holds the chair at the College de France Foucault himself once held, differs from Foucault is on the stress he places on the ontological implications of Foucault’s project. For Hacking,

Historical ontology is about the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arise in history. It is not to be practiced in terms of grand abstractions, but in terms of the explicit formations in which we can constitute ourselves, formations whose trajectories can be plotted as clearly as those of trauma or child development … Historical ontology is not so much about the formation of character as about the space of possibilities for character formation that surround a person, and create the potentials for “individual experience.”

Now perhaps this is splitting hairs, but for Hacking historical ontology will be less a study of the institutions that legitimize and embody the practices and discourses associated with the way in which the self is constituted, and hence it will be less political, but instead it would provide a chart and mapping of the possible ways in which we can ‘be’ as subjects. To take Hacking’s example of trauma, trauma is an object of knowledge that has not always existed, and yet it is now something with very real effects upon how we see ourselves and how we respond to events that happen. An historical ontology of “post traumatic stress syndrome” (or ‘ADHD’), therefore, becomes, on Hacking’s view, less a history of the institutions and discourses that legitimize and control the practices associated with trauma – though certainly their role is significant – but rather it is a history of how we can come, in our everyday life, to see ourselves as being a person of a certain type, whether this is someone who suffers from post traumatic stress disorder, or, as was the topic of one of Hacking’s early books, see themselves as, or be seen as, being a person with multiple personality disorder.

30 Historical Ontology, p. 23.
Now the historical ontology I see at work in Deleuze is quite in line with that of Foucault and Hacking, but it extends the analysis beyond that of examining how the subject is constituted to seeing how both human and non-human subjects and entities are constituted. This is already evident in Deleuze’s book on Hume, for although the problems associated with transcendental empiricism dealt with how a subject is constituted, the constitution of the subject was inseparable from non-subjective factors. In fact, it is fair to say, I think, that Deleuze’s historical ontology is concerned with how the very subject-object dichotomy is itself just one of many entities that come to be constituted, and the double articulation model analyzed above is thus seen as an appropriate tool for understanding the generative processes associated with the emergence of entities ranging from sedimentary rock to subjects and nation-states.

With these general comments in mind, we can turn now to examine how a Deleuzian historical ontology could be used to understand intellectual and cultural change. To do this, we return again to Hume, for this was equally a concern of Hume’s. We saw earlier the double process whereby a multiplicity of ideas is transformed into beliefs that are irreducible to what is actually given. This same process is at work within socialization, or what we might call acculturation, though this time the multiplicity that comes to be transformed into a system or unity is the multiplicity of partialities, passions, and interests, or what Deleuze will call a social multiplicity in *Difference and Repetition*. Deleuze is quite clear on this point: ‘Partialities or particular interests cannot be naturally totalized, because they are mutually exclusive. One can only invent a whole, since the
only invention possible is that of the whole. Hume is thus led, for Deleuze, to understand society as not being founded upon a law that allows us to escape our nature (à la Hobbes), but rather as a series of invented institutions, inventions that are themselves indistinguishable from human nature in that they follow from the principles of human nature:

The main idea is this: the essence of society is not the law but rather the institution … institution, unlike the law, is not a limitation [as Hobbes would understand it] but rather a model of actions, a veritable enterprise, an invented system of positive means or a positive invention of indirect means.

What such institutions attempt to do, then, is not to function as representatives of a general interest or a general will, but rather they operate so as to make “the general interest an object of belief.” Such an operation, if successful, will “enter the natural constitution of the mind as a feeling for humanity or as culture.” And it is through this constitution or invention of social institutions whereby the multiplicity of partialities and interests comes to be transcended by the feeling for humanity, or where one becomes a polished, polite, and cultured subject of good-breeding.

With this latter move, we come to a core concern of Hume’s – viz. the relationship between society and what Hume calls, in his essay of the same name, “the rise and progress of the arts and sciences.” In this essay Hume recognizes that the geniuses of the arts and sciences are frequently few in number, and thus to discuss the conditions that

31 Empiricism and Subjectivity, p. 40.
32 Ibid., pp. 45-6.
33 Ibid. p. 51.
34 Ibid. p. 130.
give rise to them may seem a futile task, but then Hume argues that though they “be
always few in all nations and all ages, it is impossible but a share of the same spirit and
genius must be antecedently diffused throughout the people among whom they arise, in
order to produce, form, and cultivate, from their earliest infancy, the taste and judgment
of those eminent writers.” It is this diffusion of “the same spirit and genius”
“throughout the people,” or what Deleuze might call the drawing of a multiplicity of
interests into a plane of consistency (1st articulation), that is the antecedent condition that
allows for the actualization (2nd articulation) of the great geniuses and hence for the rise
and progress of the arts and sciences.

Hume’s concern for understanding the conditions for the emergence of creativity, in this
case the creative geniuses in the arts and sciences, and just as importantly his concern for
understanding the conditions that lead to the decline of creativity within society, is
especially relevant to Deleuze’s work. Hume’s reasoning for the necessary decline of
creativity in a particular culture (or ‘nation’ for Hume) is quite straightforward:

A man’s genius is always, in the beginning of life, as much unknown to himself
as to others; and it is only after frequent trials, attended with success, that he dares
think himself equal to those undertakings, in which those who have succeeded
have fixed the admiration of mankind. If his own nation be already possessed of
many models of eloquence, he naturally compares his own juvenile exercises with
these; and, being sensible of the great disproportion, is discouraged from any
further attempts, and never aims at a rivalship with those authors whom he so
much admires.36

35 Selected Essays, p. 58.
36 Ibid. pp. 75-6.
At this point we again merge with Deleuze’s project, especially with his transcendental empiricism. As an experimental philosophy, or a philosophy that begins with the actual in an effort to release the virtual inseparable from it, one must not prejudge or predetermine what new actualities might result from this process. A historical practice that will engender creative thinking, then, cannot allow itself to be reduced to, or be predetermined by, the identity of any model or standard, just as the genius, according to Hume, can only come to rival the other great authors they admire when there is not already an established national model, and when this developing genius, without knowing where their work will develop, is able to progress through “frequent trials” and experimentations.

Turning our attention to more recent work in intellectual history, we find in the work of Fritz Ringer a significant parallel to what we take to be Deleuze’s Humean approach to intellectual history. In his essay “The Intellectual field, intellectual history, and the sociology of knowledge,” Ringer expands upon a thesis of Pierre Bourdieu and argues that original and coherent thought is to be understood as a “kind of clarification, an emergence toward clarity,” and what is clarified are the “tacit assumptions of a cultural world,” what he calls the “cultural preconscious.” What the creative, original intellectual is able to do, in other words, is to put forth a work that holds together a “disparate multiplicity of practices” within the intellectual world of the time. This holding together “clarifies” the work of this field by making explicit what was already implicitly at work in the writings, discussions, etc., of the intellectuals at the time. The intellectual is not, on this view, the self-caused genius who, like a pied piper, sets the terms that all other

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intellectuals in the field follow. Others follow only because they were already implicitly doing what the creative intellectual does, but does more clearly. For an intellectual to become a ‘star’ or leader they must articulate (1\textsuperscript{st} articulation) in a consistent manner the diverse, heterogeneous intellectual field of which they are a part (i.e., the cultural preconscious), and as others come increasingly to recognize this clarified field they then become identified as being (2\textsuperscript{nd} articulation) the canonical figure in the field. This cultural preconscious, however, is on my view a field that is an already ordered and consistent field – the creative intellectual simply expresses the order of this field to others; they do not, of themselves, order the field. Thus, from a Deleuzian and Humean perspective the intellectual, on Ringer’s account, is not truly thinking beyond the intellectual field, beyond what is given. They are not experimenting with the actual relationships that compose the intellectual field – be they textual, interpersonal, and institutional – so as to intensify them and force a reordering of the intellectual field, and with it the clarifying work Ringer discusses. The creative intellectual for Ringer simply clarifies to others the givens with which they were already, but without consciousness (hence the cultural preconscious), working. But for Deleuze and Hume this is not creative thinking, thinking beyond what is actually given; it is an unmasking or revealing of what is already actually given.

There is an additional problem with this view and others like it that attempt to make society, or social institutions and factors the already established and constituted element that then prefigures intellectual life. Whether this is an intellectual field, class interest, ideology, etc, we need, I think, and as Bruno Latour has argued incessantly, to be wary of
assuming that society functions as an already constituted causal factor that constitutes the individuals (or intellectuals in this case) that are its included elements or effects. This is why Latour refuses to be categorized among the social constructionists, for he does not see society as the subject that constitutes its objects, e.g., intellectuals or what have you; to the contrary, as Latour argued in an essay he wrote with anthropologist Shirley Strum, ‘society is more compellingly seen as continually constructed or “performed” by active social beings who violate “levels” in the process of their work.’ In other words, and as with Hume, the identity of the social, as well as the identity of what it means to be a polished, well-bred member of society, is inseparable from a constitutive process; and one key aspect of this process is precisely the violation of levels Latour and Strum referred to, meaning, on my reading, the effort to test these identities and think beyond them. This was, recall, what Hume sought to do in his experimental philosophizing, but not what the “honest gentlemen” do who have rarely if ever ‘carried their thoughts beyond those objects, which are every day expos’d to their senses.’

Understood in this way, and turning to the Scottish Enlightenment as an example, it is indeed the case that we should study the institutional and sociological factors. For instance, there are many who argue that the loss of political power with the union of 1707 – more precisely the move of the institutional power and wealth of the Scottish parliament to London – was the precipitating cause of the Scottish Enlightenment. This institutional change, coupled with the economic growth that occurred in Scotland after the middle of the eighteenth century, forced the necessity for a rethinking and reordering of the intellectual field of the time, and the institutional changes in education (such as the

38 Latour and Strum, “Redefining the Social Link”
end of the regenting system and the end of lecturing in Latin) also provided the resources and space to pursue this forced rethinking. One should not stop here, however, for in effect this analysis, albeit brief, looks at the Scottish Enlightenment as a result of solving the particular problems of the time, of being forced to rethink and reorder the intellectual field. For Deleuze, as we saw, this would be a standard history, or a history that moves from the virtual as a problematized field to the actual solutions and changes that occurred at the time. Put differently, this would interpret intellectual life as solely a causal effect of social or other factors. In moving from the actual to the virtual, however, one will certainly begin with and not ignore the arguments and findings of the traditional histories of the Scottish Enlightenment, including the intellectual histories that see the various concepts developed by intellectuals as solutions to problems, or even as effects of social factors. A problematizing history, however, will attempt to add to this reading, through “frequent trials,” a problematizing of the intellectual solutions arrived at by Hume, Smith, Ferguson, and others. In other words, it will be an attempt to problematize the current intellectual field, the field where I, for example, can stand before others and discuss Hume’s relevance to a contemporary context, meaning, among other things, the relevance of Hume to the work each of you in this room might be doing. In doing this the concepts of Hume will come to be seen not as tools with a predetermined use and application, but rather as the inventive byproducts of a generative process, and a process that focuses not on what has been thought, but rather on the problems associated with thinking itself, the problems associated with trying to think beyond what has actually been thought, beyond the already actualized intellectual field. Thus, although intellectuals may begin with certain texts and traditions, the very identity of what these texts mean needs forever to be
reconstituted, and in this process accepted meanings may be violated, or new readings arise that problematize the intellectual field. Approached in this way a study of the Scottish Enlightenment would not satisfy an antiquarian or scholarly interest in what these great thinkers of the past thought, but, hopefully, it will engender creative thinking, a thinking that can open possibilities in today’s world that are beyond those already offered, beyond those already tried. It was this type of creative thinking during the Scottish Enlightenment that engendered many of the unquestioned ways we actually think about ourselves and our place in the world today; it will be a similar creative thinking that will bring forth the unquestioned actualities of tomorrow.