© Lo Sguardo - rivista di filosofia
N. 37, 2023 (II) - Il linguaggio nell'età dei Lumi

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13829547

Contributi/3

Lord Monboddo's Anti-Enlightenment

Conjectural History, Human Nature, and the Teleological Foundation of Language

Francesco Cataldi 0009-0007-0082-9483

Articolo sottoposto a *double-blind peer review*. Inviato il 07/02/2024. Accettato il 16/08/2024.

This paper aims to illustrate how Lord Monboddo (James Burnett), one of the most eccentric figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, conceived language, contrasting his positions with the views adopted by his contemporaries who endorsed Lockean and Newtonian empiricism. I will take into consideration his two major works (*Of the Origin and Progress of Language* and *Antient Metaphysics*) in order to elucidate some analytical aspects concerning Monboddo's account of language and his sharp critique directed towards Locke's theory of knowledge. Eventually, after analyzing Monboddo's metaphysical frame, his adoption of a hylomorphic account of the mind, and his endorsement of Aristotelian physics, I will endeavor to show how such elements are linked to his teleological conception of conjectural history, whose peak is represented by reason, language of art, and the political foundation of the civil society.

***

Spoken words are symbols (σύμβολα) or signs of affections or impressions of the soul (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ); written words are the signs of words spoken (ἐν τῇ φωνῇ)

Aristotle, *On interpretation*, 16a-3-4

1. Lord Monboddo's Philosophical Position in the Scottish Enlightenment

In the context of the Scottish Enlightenment, Lord Monboddo (James Burnett, 1714-1799) holds a peculiar place and can be considered a pivotal figure among those who foreshadowed a resolute reaction to the widespread intellectual atmosphere of that time. Unlike key thinkers of eighteenth-century Scotland, such as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam

Ferguson, who drew upon Locke's and Newton's systems in order to craft their own theoretical and practical views, Monboddo's philosophical position is entrenched in ancient metaphysics and a steadfast response to the empiricist framework embraced by his contemporaries. According to Monboddo's perspective, these systems, especially Locke's, reflected what he considered the decay of contemporary society. He esteemed ancient philosophy so highly that he also considered it from a political perspective, as he believed the only remedy to prevent the European society of his era from facing «destruction and annihilation» was for rulers to engage in the study of ancient philosophers[1]. It is therefore not surprising that Monboddo, in a famous passage of his *Antient Metaphysics* (1779-1799), referred to Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, one of the most influential sources for the Scottish Enlightenment, as a «hasty collection of crude and undigested thoughts»[2] whose sway led to the skepticism professed by David Hume. Among other reasons, this is why Monboddo's main philosophical work, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-1792), in six volumes, has fairly been regarded as a critique of Locke and of the course of the Enlightenment as a whole, despite the typical Enlightenment concerns it faces[3].

On this point, the discussion is still sparse and evolving[4]: Monboddo has been viewed either as a participant in the Enlightenment debate or as an anti-modern philosopher with reactionary elements[5], which calls for further clarification. Given that these views are not inherently conflicting, I believe that categorizing Monboddo's philosophy as a form of anti-Enlightenment is justified for two reasons. The first is epistemological: Monboddo's anti-Enlightenment should be understood not merely from the content of his works or the issues he addresses but through his epistemological framework and his opposition to the foundational principles of the Scottish Enlightenment. This opposition is evident in his aversion to Locke and his rebuttal of Newtonian principles in favour of classical sources. The second is substantive: Monboddo's critiques and alternative viewpoints often directly challenge key Enlightenment ideas, reflecting a broader opposition to the empiricist trends of his time.

[1] *Lord Monboddo to Sir George Baker,* October 2 1782, in W. A. Knight, *Lord Monboddo and Some of His Contemporaries*, London 1900, p. 215.
[2] J. Burnett (Lord Monboddo), *Antient Metaphysics: Or, The Science of Universals*, *Volume First*, Edinburgh 1779, p. 380.
[3] I. M. Hammett, *Lord Monboddo's Of the Origin and Progress of Language. Its Sources, Genesis and Background, with Special Attention to the Advocates' Library*, Edinburgh 1985, p. 65.
[4] Silvia Sebastiani, in an interesting recent work, argues that despite Monboddo's unconventional beliefs (e.g., mermaids, giants, innatism, and elitism), he made significant contributions to the 'science of man' by emphasizing human variety and historical change, thus integrating well into the intellectual context of the time. See S. Sebastiani, *Monboddo's 'ugly tail': the question of evidence in enlightenment sciences of man*, «History of European Ideas», 48(1), 2022, pp. 47-48. On this point, concerning the 'science of man' and the Humean-like emphasis of the study of the human nature in Monboddo, see also A. Verri, *Lord Monboddo. Dalla Metafisica all'Antropologia*, Ravenna 1975, p. 37.
[5] See C. Hobbs, *Rethoric on the Margins of Modernity. Vico, Condillac, Monboddo*, Carbondale 2002, pp. 127-159. Monboddo's antimodernity is also addressed by A. Verri, *Lord Monboddo. Dalla Metafisica all'Antropologia,* cit. pp. 9-36.

Drawing on Zeev Sternhell's work on the anti-Enlightenment[6], Monboddo's views can be seen within this paradigm. While the eighteenth century is often regarded as the height of modernity driven by reason, it also sparked a notable backlash against Enlightenment principles. This movement, emerging in the second half of the eighteenth century, also targeted the British Enlightenment, including figures like John Locke and David Hume. In my view, Lord Monboddo can be considered a key example of this dissent. His critiques of mainstream Enlightenment ideas position him as an anti-Enlightenment thinker, offering more traditional (even reactionary) and sometimes unconventional perspectives, such as the unusual adoption of the Aristotelian and Platonic frameworks that will be examined below.

However, despite this anti-Enlightenment stance, Monboddo's main work delves into topics such as the origins of language and the nature of man[7], both relevant subjects for several enlightened thinkers (such as Condillac, Rousseau, Smith, and Ferguson, to name a few) across Europe. Diverging from his contemporaries, Monboddo attempts to blend empirical tendencies with rationalism, always leaning towards the latter:

> Not that I pretend to have discovered *a priori*, and from speculation merely, what I am to deliver upon this subject […]; the method of science requires, that we should begin with the principles and causes, and from them deduce the facts, though the order of investigation and discovery be just the reverse: And it shall appear, that from the facts the theory naturally arises, and that the theory again explains and illustrates the facts, it is hoped very little doubt will remain of the truth of my system[8].

It should be noted that his rationalism may be regarded more as an affinity[9] than as a robust epistemological framework, serving to counterbalance the empiricism professed by Bacon, Newton, and Locke. Other than the reference to rationalism, secondary literature has categorized Monboddo's epistemological frame as drawing upon some form of idealism: a position he steadily defended, particularly against other philosophers. Though not specifically investigated by dedicated studies, Monboddo's type of idealism is frequently cited. Knight, for example, writes of a form of «a priori idealism»[10], while Pamela Edwards argues for an «empirically grounded idealism» as the framework adopted by Monboddo in contrasting Hume's positions[11]. Another categorization is provided by

[6] Z. Sternheel, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, New Haven 2010.
[7] J. Burnett (Lord Monboddo), *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, *Volume First*, Edinburgh 1764, p. I. I'll refer to the main works by Monboddo (*Antient Metaphysics* and *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*) as *AM* and *OPL*, respectively. This will be followed by a Roman numeral which indicates the volume, and by an Arabic numeral denoting the page number.
[8] *Ibid.,* pp. 515-516.
[9] See J. Shieber, *Language*, in A. Garrett and J. A. Harris (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Volume II: Method, Metaphysics, Mind, Language*, Oxford 2023, p. 337.
[10] See W. A. Knight, *Lord Monboddo and Some of his Contemporaries,* cit., p. 29.
[11] See P. Edwards, *From the State of Nature to the Natural State*, in M. Somos and A. Peters (ed.), *The State of Nature: Histories of an Idea*, Leiden 2021, p. 327.

Marzluf[12] with the expression «Platonic idealism», which effectively conveys the relation (a kind of participation) between the intellectual world and the empirical. However, it risks overshadowing the strong Aristotelian framework of *OPL* and its layered conceptualization of ideas, which I will explore in this work in relation to language. Drawing upon the recently revived categorization of idealism by Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann, which distinguishes between ontological and epistemological idealism[13], seems to offer a more effective approach. In line with the latter, which asserts that the structure of human thought influences the contents of human knowledge, I propose categorizing Monboddo's framework as a form of 'epistemological idealism', distinct from ontological idealism. This categorization could also be linked to a form of 'dualistic idealism'[14], as Monboddo argues that mental reality holds a higher ontological status than non-mental reality. Even when considering Dilthey's renowned classification, Monboddo's idealism may be considered as a form of 'subjective idealism', namely an 'idealism of freedom', as opposed to 'objective idealism'.

Apart from the discussion on Monboddo's anti-Enlightenment and idealism, the analytical aspects of his metaphysical framework of language and its connections to the most relevant aspects of Aristotle's metaphysics and practical philosophy seem to have been be neglected. Exploring both these elements and showing their relationship to Monboddo's account of human nature and mind, as I will try to show in what follows, is a privileged path to a better understanding of *OPL*'s and *AM*'s theoretical and historical position, along with his interconnected interpretation of what Dugald Stewart termed «conjectural history»[15].

Although Monboddo's influence on the development of historical linguistics is widely recognized, he remains a quite overlooked figure in the history of Western philosophy. In what follows, I will consider both Monboddo's

[12] See P. Marzluf, *Originating Difference in Rhetorical Theory: Lord Monboddo's Obsession with Language Origins Theory*, «Rhetoric Society Quarterly», 38(4), 2008, p. 390.
[13] See P. Guyer, R. P. Horstmann, *Idealism in Modern Philosophy*, Oxford 2023.
[14] See Macintosh, *Idealism and Common Sense*, in J. Ferraris and B. P. Göcke, *The Routledge Handbook of Idealism and Immaterialism*, New York 2002, pp. 496-505.
[15] In the mid-18th century, Enlightenment intellectuals in Scotland and France formulated a theory of human development known as the 'stadial theory' and '*histoire raisonnée*'. This theory posited that all societies undergo distinct stages of advancement, typically ranging from savagery to civilization, with either three or four stages identified. The term was coined by Dugald Stewart and was also referred to as 'theoretical history'. As a speculative discipline aimed at studying the history of mankind, it explored «how it *may have been produced*» due to the impossibility of tracing the actual process. At the heart of conjectural history lies the concept of 'progress', aimed at conceptualizing the framework of civilization in various ways. For instance, Adam Smith perceived the zenith of societal advancement as the achievement of a commercial society, whereas Lord Monboddo regarded language of art and reason as the ultimate pinnacle, conceiving the process teleologically, as I will show in this paper. See D. Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Smith*, in A. Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subject*, Basil 1700, pp. XLVI-XLVII.

OPL and *AM*, as my aim is to engage with the comprehensiveness of his thought rather than focusing on a single work.

2. The Metaphysical Foundation of Language: From the Hylomorphic Framework of the Mind to the Genesis of Ideas

In order to illustrate the interconnectedness between language, metaphysics, human nature and history, it is essential to delve into the foundational principles upon which Monboddo crafted his entire philosophy of language. Notably, his account of language is inseparable from his metaphysics and theory of knowledge, both of which lean towards a specific conceptualization of the mind. This interconnection is evident since the initial definition of language provided at the beginning of the first chapter of the first volume of *OPL*:

> By language I mean *the expression of the conceptions of the mind* by articulate *sounds*. These conceptions are either of particulars, i. e. individual things, or of generals. No language ever existed, or can be conceived, consisting only of the expression of individuals, or what is commonly called *proper names*: And the truth is, that these make but a very inconsiderable part of every language. What therefore constitutes the essential part of language, and makes it truly deserve that name, is the expression of *generals* or *ideas*, according to the language of the philosophy that I have learned[16].

Building on this description, Monboddo distinguishes between what he considered the crucial features of languages: the *material part* (the sounds articulated by the voice) and the *formal part* (the conceptions of the mind signified by the sounds). In making this distinction, he draws on both the ancients (namely, Aristotle and Plato[17]) and James Harris' *Hermes or a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Universal Grammar* (1751). Harris' work, influenced by both ancient philosophers and Lord Shaftesbury's views on language, significantly shaped the theoretical framework of *OPL*. Moreover, Harris was instrumental in introducing Monboddo to Greek philosophy[18] and was a pivotal figure in the philosophical context of the time. His *Hermes* not only contains the theoretical framework distinguishing between matter and form in the structure of language, but also includes other key points that Monboddo deepens in his *OPL*: the primacy of the Greek language, the influence of Aristotle (in particular his *De Anima* and *De Interpretatione*), and the general contempt for the empiricist turn of the time. Indeed, an Aristotelian echo is quite vivid since Monboddo's adoption of the parallel between articulate sounds and the conceptions of the mind in the passage cited above, which resembles a famous section from *De*

[16] *OPL*, I, p. 5. Italics mine.
[17] John Knight, in his pioneering work on Monboddo at the dawn of the twentieth century, wrote extensively on this aspect and fairly considered *OPL*'s platonism and his endorsement of Aristotelian's views as the main features contrasting the theoretical tendencies of his century. See W. A. Knight, *Lord Monboddo and Some of his Contemporaries*, cit., pp. 24-44.
[18] *Lord Monboddo to James Harris*, March 26, 1766, in *Ibid.,* p. 48.

Interpretatione, where the Stagirite establishes a connection between an inner and immaterial part (the soul or the mind) and the faculty of speech: «Spoken words are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul»[19].

The influence of such sources[20] is further attested when examining what Monboddo means by form, as he describes it as the element that makes a thing «that which it is […] in contradiction with everything else»[21], thus considering the formal part as «the significancy of ideas» and the real *essence* of what may chiefly be considered as language. This view contrasts with the 'language' of gestures, look, signs, and inarticulate cries adopted by so-called 'barbarous languages', all of which are improperly labeled as such[22]. On the other hand, by further following Harris' lesson[23], the sound of the voice, being merely matter, is something commonly shared with other things: this is why it cannot be considered the truly distinctive feature of language in itself. But the most important point to elucidate is that Monboddo's emphasis on the formal part of language, «by far the more excellent part» of it, highlights the superiority of the mind over the body, the former being the subject of metaphysics, while the latter of physics[24]. Such an emphasis becomes vividly evident when considering a crucial passage in *OPL* intended to deepen the conception of the mind:

> The philosophy I have learned is of a very different kind: It teaches me, that mind is the most antient of things; and that, as it alone has activity, and the principle of motion in itself, it is the *efficient cause* of every thing. […] That there are other intelligences in the universe besides ours, and infinitely superior to ours; and *one* highest of all, in whose intellect resides that intellectual world, and who is not only the *efficient cause* of all things, but *virtually* comprehends in himself every thing existing[25].

[19] Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, in Id. *Categories, On Interpretations, Prior Analytics*, ed. by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, and E. H. Warmington, Cambridge 1938, p. 115. In my opinion, secondary literature has not emphasized this point, which is crucial to understanding Monboddo's stance.
[20] See J. Harris, *Hermes: Or, a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar*, London 1751, p. 2.
[21] *OPL*, I, p. 8
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 6. This point contrasts with Condillac's view, whose work Monboddo was familiar with. For a compared study on the subject see C. L. Hobbs, *Rethoric on the Margins of Modernity. Vico, Condillac, Monboddo*, cit. Monboddo distinguishes between 'barbarous language' and 'languages of art'. The former is regarded as an initial and primitive form of communication, only metaphorically labeled as language, while the latter constitutes language in the proper sense and emerges later in the history of humankind. In this context, 'art' is derived from the Latin word '*ars*', emphasizing the production of something and invention through workmanship, a pivotal notion in Monboddo's philosophical framework of human nature.
[23] J. Harris, *Hermes*, cit., p. 315.
[24] It should be noted that during the eighteenth century metaphysics was also identified with the study of the mind. In Monboddo's philosophy, the term 'metaphysics' is used in two distinct ways. One refers to the study of the mind, while the other pertains to the study of first principles, often referred to as the «science of all sciences» (See *AM*, VI, p. 27). This distinction can be seen as developed within an Aristotelian framework and can also be interpreted through the difference adopted by the leibnizian school between '*metaphysica specialis*' and '*metaphysica generalis*'.
[25] *OPL*, I, pp. 88-89.

The mind is thus considered the sole active element, while matter appears to be relegated to mere passivity. Monboddo's dualism also aims at denouncing what he perceived as, echoing Ralph Cudworth's concern, the «*hylomania*» and «*pneumatophobia*» of his contemporaries, attested by «a desperate aversion to the *mind* and a passionate love for *matter*»[26]. This is a crucial point for understanding Monboddo's historical and philosophical position, as this criticism aligns with his contempt for the empiricist and inductive *Zeitgeist* endorsed by his contemporaries. The Newtonian framework was indeed adopted by several philosophers, including George Turnbull, who pioneeringly sought to regard the mind similarly to any other component of the natural world[27]. From a metaphysical standpoint Monboddo's rejection of such accounts, also aligns with those lesser-known Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century who sought to brake the materialistic drift, such as the metaphysician Andrew Baxter and Gershom Carmichael[28], who had been Francis Hutcheson's professor at the University of Glasgow. Despite these last two authors being proudly Newtonians and possessing a deeper understanding of Newton's philosophy than Monboddo did[29], a common feature that the author of the *OPL* shares with them is a rejection of those systems – such as Toland's in *Letter to Serena* or the monistic-materialistic view propugned by Hobbes and relieved by Mandeville – which asserted that matter can move itself without any aid from spiritual substances (the mind or the soul), thus attempting to explain the mind purely in terms of matter and motion. It is also noteworthy that during Monboddo's time, a significant controversy arose regarding the possibility of thinking matter, theorized in the fourth book of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* and which was interpreted as a covert admission of materialism[30]. Indeed, from an epistemological standpoint, Monboddo's stance also aims at further highlighting the inconsistency within Locke's philosophy, which conferred «the appearance of

[26] *AM*, II, p. 188.
[27] G. Turnbull, *The Principles of Moral Philosophy*, in Id., *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, Volume I, (ed. by A. Broadie), Indianapolis 2005, p. 8.
[28] Andrew Baxter (1686/1687-1750) in his *An Enquiry Into the Nature of the Human Soul* (1733) similarly shared this point and contrasted Locke's philosophy, too. Gershom Camirchael (1672-1729), best known as the first professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow, accepted Newton's views and the empirical method, but in his *Synopsis Theologiae naturalis,* he also contrasted the reductionist and monist view advocated by authors such as Thomas Hobbes. See A. Baxter, *An Enquiry Into the Nature of the Human Soul Wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is Evinced from the Principle of Reason and Philosophy*, Volume First, London 1745 and G. Carmichael, *Synopsis Theologiae Naturalis, sive Notitiae, De Existentia, Attributis et Operationibus, Summi Numinis, ex ipsa Rerum Natura haustae. Studiosae Juventutis usibus accomodata*, Edinburgi 1729.
[29] Regarding Monboddo's misunderstanding of Newtonian positions and other peculiarities on a metaphysical level, refer to Timothy Yenter's recent paper. See T. Yenter, T*he Metaphysical Implications of Newtonianism*, in A. Garrett and J. A. Harris (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century,* Volume II, cit., pp. 108-143.
[30] A comprehensive account of this debate can be found in the still valid, and historically accurate work by J. W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Minneapolis 1984.

materialism to his system» by not recognizing that «there must be an *intellectual* world previous to the *material*»[31]. Here Monboddo critiques Locke's account, which conceived of ideas in a more modern way. Indeed, according to the English philosopher, ideas stem solely from experience, meaning they result not from the spontaneous creative capacity of the human intellect, but rather from its passivity towards external reality. When examining Monboddo's account of the intellect, the Lockean conception appears to be firmly discarded. According to the Scottish philosopher, Locke failed at properly distinguishing sense and intellect, and therefore the very ontological *status* of ideas. If rightly considered, intellect must be sharply distinct from anything that could be considered corporeal:

> The faculty by which the mind operates in conjunction with the body, is very well known by the name of *sense*; the faculty by which it operates singly, and without participation of the body, I call *intellect*. In the perception by sense, the mind is to be considered as merely passive, receiving like wax the impressions of external objects: But, in the other way of operating, it exerts that active and *self-moving* power, which I hold to be the distinguishing characteristic of mind and the specific difference betwixt it and body[32].

Ideas are «the production of *mind*, genuine and pure, without any mixture of *body*»[33], therefore a product of the intellect alone. Since ideas are formed without any intervention of the body, Monboddo explains what he perceived as the absurdity of Lockean epistemology and vocabulary. Indeed Locke's «confusion of *language*», that «naturally leads to confusion of *thought*», is derived from inaccurately denoting as ideas the perceptions of sense[34] that in the case of Locke are categorized as 'ideas of sensations'.

However, Monboddo's account of ideas appears quite confusing and contradictory, as he initially asserts their pristine nature but subsequently, when attempting to explain their origin, writes about a 'first class of ideas' formed with the intervention of perceptions of sense[35]. Indeed, though perceptions provide only the material, it is from them that some ideas are formed. More accurately, it could be stated that there exist ideas of the highest kind, which transcend even abstract ideas and are fundamentally tied to the intellectual realm[36]:

> There are ideas of a much higher order than those which we abstract from matter, being the models or archetypes of all material forms: That of such ideas the intellectual world is composed; of which the material is no more than a copy […]. These ideas of

[31] *OPL*, I, p. 93.
[32] *Ibid.,* pp. 45-46.
[33] *Ibid.,* p. 54.
[34] *Ibid.,* p. 48.
[35] *Ibid.,* p. 44.
[36] *Ibid.,* p. 64.

highest order and dignity are, in the language of antient philosophy, said to be *before the many*; that is, anterior to all individual and particular forms[37].

Not only are superior kinds of ideas understood as Platonic-like archetypes, but in line with a typical Platonist account, the world is conceived as a copy of those ideas. This suggests an even stronger resemblance to ancient metaphysics[38]. Moreover, the possibility of language is linked to the immaterial world because of its connection to ideas, which are intimately connected with the intellect, if properly understood:

> As the objects in this world are different from those in the natural, so are the faculties by which we recognize those objects. The natural world we perceive by our senses, the ideal by our intellect; two faculties altogether different in their nature and manner of operation[39].

Providing a sound conception of the mind and of the origin of ideas is a crucial task, as Monboddo holds that without such knowledge it would be impossible to provide any philosophical explanation or even discuss the origin of language:

> In this way the *origin* of our ideas will appear; without the knowledge of which, it is impossible to give any philosophical account, such as we propose to give, of the *origin* of language. After we have done this, we hope it will not be difficult to solve the question now in hand and to shew, that *ideas*, being the workmanship of mind, are not a *natural* production, but that there is a progress here, as in other things belonging to mind, from *capacity* to *habit*[40].

Even in this respect, Monboddo aims to tackle what he viewed as inadequate solutions proposed by his contemporaries and to challenge modern interpretations of ideas and language by integrating concepts from ancient philosophy. This is evident in his peculiar utilization of terms such as 'capacity', 'habit', and 'workmanship' in the passage above, which anticipates what will now follow.

---

[37] *OPL*, I, p. 88. Italics mine.
[38] As Laurent Jaffro sharply observes «the kind of Platonism that Monboddo adopts is more of a conceptualism, according to which universals exist in a mind, rather than a full-blooded realism that would (in Aristotle's terms) 'separate' ideas». Jaffro draws on the distinction provided by Thomas Reid, thus proposing to distinguish between «two uses of 'idea' in early modern philosophy: a mainstream usage, in certain Cartesians, in Locke, and in other British Empiricists, who all assimilate ideas to mental images; and a marginal trend, from Malebranche to Reid through Harris and Monboddo, who restore the Platonic sense of ideas as models or objects of thought». Even if such a distinction is useful in some sense, it may not apply universally, as Monboddo's highest form of ideas are *ante rem* and explicitly separated. See L. Jaffro, *Language and Thought*, in J. A. Harris (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford 2013, p. 130 and p. 144.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 139.
[40] *Ibid.,* pp. 54-55.

3. Monboddo's Revival of Ancient Teleology: Habits, Language and Conjectural History

During the 18th century, Scottish philosophers consistently emphasized that matter lacks animation. Given its inert nature and incapacity of thought, they argued that some principle beyond matter was necessary to explain the spontaneous movements observed in humans[41]. As for Monboddo, the principle necessitating something different beyond mere matter and body adopted is of Aristotelian-Thomistic provenance. It entails a reassessment, not a faithful replication, of Aristotle's physics and psychology. As articulated in *De Anima,* it is the mind (or the soul, ψυχή) that serves as the source of movement for a body potentially possessing life. Moreover, in *Physica* (a work frequently cited by Monboddo), the Stagirite holds that physical movement must be traced back to a formal, immaterial principle which must be made up of pure thinking: god, or the unmoved mover. What Monboddo chiefly adopts from these philosophical views is the underlying epistemological framework: since matter is prone to corruption – implying imperfection and movement – the original cause must be immaterial. In order to avoid the *progressus ad infinitum*, such a cause must be perfect and immutable by definition. Thus, mind and motion are intimately interconnected:

> What then is it that moves or begins motion? My answer is, That it is not matter or body. It is therefore an immaterial substance, and this substance I call *mind*. Of which, if we require a definition, I think the best that can be given is, that it is a substance which has in itself the power of *moving*[42].

The emphasis on the power of a universal mind also accounts for Monboddo's admiration of Anaxagoras' metaphysical innovations[43] in ancient times. The Greek philosopher was the first to challenge the materialistic framework adopted by his predecessors and conferred a pivotal role to the universal mind (νοῦς). The mind thus considered is a cosmic principle or force that is responsible for the organization and order of the universe. Anaxagoras proposed that this intelligent and powerful νοῦς set everything into motion, bringing order and structure to the chaotic mixture of elements. It played a central role in his cosmological theory, emphasizing the idea of a rational and controlling force behind the natural world. Holding such a theoretical framework in high esteem and foreshadowing a parallel with his own contemporary situation, Monboddo notes that «even those philosophers in Greece who were in such high estimation, do not appear to

[41] See T. Yenter, *The Metaphysical Implications of Newtonianism*, cit., p. 124.
[42] *OPL*, I, p. 523n.
[43] Considering Anaxagoras's legacy is not surprising, given that Monboddo's emphasis on the ancients is ubiquitous and the impact of this influence is already noted in secondary literature at various levels. See S. K. Land, *Lord Monboddo and the Theory of Syntax in the Late Eighteenth Century*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 34(3), 1976, pp. 423-440.

have made the distinction betwixt matter and mind»[44]; a distinction the Scottish philosopher thinks is unavoidable and the only theoretical option to adequately account for the existence of rationality, a faculty he attributes pivotal importance to in conceiving the possibility of language:

> Thus, I think, I have shown, that all motion proceeds from mind, mediately or immediately; and as this power of moving is an attribute of all mind, whereas, other powers, such as those of thinking and reasoning, belong to certain minds only, I think I have very properly made it the general definition of mind[45].

But unlike Anaxagoras, not only the universal mind is conceived by Monboddo as a metaphysical assumption that allows him to account for the invention of language; it is also a feature that explains the ultimate reason for the existence of empirical individuals' minds in a platonic-like manner that resembles the concept of 'participation':

> I have been taught a philosophy very different, from which I have learned, that there is a *governing mind* in the universe, *immaterial*, *eternal*, and *unchangeable*; that our minds are of a nature congenial to this Supreme mind; and that there is in us, even at the time of our birth, a portion of those *celestial seeds*[46].

Highlighting these positions is also crucial to elucidate why Monboddo firmly discards the conception of motion given by modern philosophers, such as Descartes and Locke – who vehemently argued against the Aristotelian and Scholastic account of motion based on potency and act – , by which is considered as a mere change of place[47]. This conception was of Epicurean ascent and, through Gassendi and Newton, was becoming the hegemonic one during the Enlightenment, opposing the Aristotelian view. Monboddo's 'antagonist' judge, Henry Home (Lord Kames), for example, followed Locke in discarding the Aristotelian conception of motion[48] but did not simply endorse the Epicurean one.

Indeed, both Monboddo and Kames shared a similar aversion to the Epicurean conception, though for different reasons. While the latter, following Locke, considers it a mere tautology[49] the former's criticism is rooted in the Aristotelian view he adopts. Kames is also critical of the Newtonian account of motion, or at least of his interpretation of it. An important section of his *Of the Law of Motion* (1754) is dedicated to a critical discussion of the first law of

[44] *AM*, VI, p. 25.
[45] *Ibid.,* p. 25.
[46] *OPL*, I, p. 141.
[47] See R. Descartes, *The world* in Id., *The World and Other Writings*, ed. by S. Gaukroger, Cambridge 1998, p. 27. See J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by. P. H. Nidditch, Oxford 1975, p. 423.
[48] H. Homes (Lord Kames), *Of the Laws of Motion*, in Id., *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary*, Vol. 1, Edimburgh 1754, p. 4.
[49] *Ibid.*

motion[50], a concept Kames considers «repugnant to truth»[51]. Kames is indeed more inclined to follow Robert Boyle's account, arguing for a matter with the power to act according to invariable and general laws of nature[52]. In his opinion, we can't find «either in reason or experience» a foundation «to deny activity to the matter»[53] and argue for its inertness. A sounder way to conceive motion is by asserting the activity of matter and arguing for the existence of a different kind of force, namely the *vis motrix*, which was largely adopted by Wolff and the Leibnizian school[54] as the force of a body in motion, in contrast to the sole existence of *vis inertiae*.

On a different level from Kames, Monboddo further develops these observations in his *AM*, where he firmly rejects the Newtonian account of motion and the concept of *vis inertiae*[55]. The philosopher argues that, even if we adopt Newton's emphasis on observation and experience, we are not led to conclude the existence of the first principle of motion, as it is not evidenced by the senses. In my view, one reason Monboddo is keen to adopt the Newtonian framework to discard the theory is not merely a form of *reductio ad absurdum*. The reason lies not in an empiricist framework but, once again, in the Aristotelian one. Indeed, aside from being a postulate adopted by Newton and even without supposing anything (*hypothesis non fingo*), the fact that every body is either in motion or has a tendency to be in motion is also evident «from common observation»[56]. An epistemological framework akin to the concept of what is evident from 'induction' (δῆλον δ' ἐκ τῆς ἐπαγωγῆς), which the Stagirite also uses concerning the same subject: the existence of motion as attested by the senses, countering the Parmenidean tradition[57]. On this basis, Monboddo, instead of endorsing the *vis motrix* supported by Kames, opposes Newtonian *vis inertiae* with a *vis mobilitatis*[58].

In order to contrast these modern conceptions of movement, Monboddo draws upon another pivotal aspect of Aristotelian's philosophy, according to which motion (κίνησις) is a peculiar kind of process (or the passage from potency to actuality). It is the progress «by which every thing in nature or art is produced»[59] that constitutes the proper definition of motion: a more satisfying and theoretically sounder account than the one provided by his contemporaries and close predecessors that can also accommodate the teleological description of human progress. Therefore, the change of place, «is no more than the *effect*

[50] *Ibid.,* pp. 16-25.
[51] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[52] See *ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[54] See *ibid.*, p. 7. On this point, see M. Stan*, Newton and Wolff: The Leibnizian Reaction to the Principia, 1716–1763*, «The Southern Journal of Philosophy», 50(30), 2012, pp. 459-481.
[55] See *AM*, I, p. 182.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] See Aristotle, *Physics*, 185a 13-14, ed. by D. Bostock, Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press.
[58] See *Ibid.,* p. 536.
[59] *OPL*, I, p. 17n.

of *motion*»[60] and not the motion itself. The philosopher should thus address the fundamental cause behind it, which metaphysically transcends the naturalistic realm. As Monboddo acknowledged in his later years in the *Dissertation on the Pricinples of Newtonian Philosophy*[61], this realm was well inquired into by Newton but still cannot be considered philosophical.

The metaphysical framework outlined thus far is what Monboddo bases both the invention of language and the capacity of acquiring it on. Ideas are not what Locke and modern philosophy thought them to be and the Aristotelian account of motion, being in the proper sense the passage between potency and act, is a sounder way to understand language both as the most significant faculty for the individual and as a pivotal moment in the history of humankind.

Monboddo's contempt for what he considered to be the strong materialistic framework adopted by his contemporaries, coupled with his unique Greek revival on several levels, is essential for understanding his foundation of language in relation to his conception of mind and movement. First, in order to elucidate what may be considered as the 'metaphysical foundation of language', we shall explore the exhaustive closure of *OPL*'s first chapter:

> I maintain, that the faculty of speech *is not the gift of nature to man*, but, like many others, *is acquired* by him; that not only there must have been society before language was invented, but that it must have subsisted a considerable time, and other arts have been invented, before this most difficult one was found out; which appears to me of so difficult invention, that it is not easy to account how it could at all have been invented[62].

Secondly, I shall deepen what a faculty is according to Monbodo. The philosopher holds that it is the product of a disposition, namely an 'acquired habit'. What does Monboddo mean by this expression? And why is it unnatural to men when referring to language? The answer to the first question becomes clear when considering that the philosopher seeks to faithfully translate the greek word 'ἕξις': a disposition acquired through experience[63]. This disposition is the cause of what is termed a 'faculty', and consequently, of the faculty of speech as well.

Monboddo grounds his understanding of faculties[64] on the Aristotelian distinction between potency/capacity (δύναμις) and actuality (ἐντελέχεια),

[60] *Ibid.,* p. 19n.
[61] See *AM*, I, pp. 497-544.
[62] *OPL*, I, p. 12. Italics mine.
[63] Monboddo seems to overlook the subtle difference between disposition and habit, since the latter is, if properly understood, a stable and lasting disposition acquired through experience.
[64] Joseph Shieber is correct in highlighting that Monboddo's acceptance of the Aristotelian theory of faculties is a distinguishing feature that sets it apart, for instance, from the Reidian concept of 'natural powers'. However, this adoption is derivative and not primary, as the comprehensiveness of Monboddo's theoretical framework is grounded in deeper metaphysical assumptions borrowed from the Stagirite, as I aim to illustrate. See J. Shieber, *Language*, in A.

thereby integrating the specific notion of movement outlined thus far. Stressing another Aristotelian epistemological feature that doesn't specifically align with the empiricist-inspired method (beginning from what is first in order of our conception but not in itself), Monboddo initiates his description by elucidating the concept of 'energies'. Energies represent the operations of faculties, namely those actively used by the subject possessing them. In the following section, a first distinction is made between two kinds of powers (δυνάμεις): the capacity, conceived as mere potentiality in itself (the «power of power»[65]), and the habit, defined as that power that immediately produces acts and energies[66]. But faculties and habits, Monboddo observes, are so necessarily conjoined that distinguishing them would be useless. This is why in *OPL*, he conceives of them as synonyms[67], while maintaining the difference between faculty and energy on the side of actuality, and between capacity and faculty, on the side of potency.

Having elucidated these distinctions, Monboddo seeks to further differentiate habits acquired by nature from those acquired through use, imitation, or instruction. The faculty of speech is included in this latter category with a particular emphasis on workmanship and reason[68], since natural habits operate «without any previous use, exercise or instruction», while acquired habits «are the fruit of our own industry»[69]. In the first case, the consequent energies, follow from the laws of nature, or «certain inward principle» (resembling something akin to the stoic *rationes seminales*), as observed in the instinct of brute animals. In the second case, the energies proceed «from that impulse moving the rational mind to action», as exemplified in the human will[70]. While considering such subtle distinctions and specifically addressing acquired habits, it is crucial to note the pivotal significance that Monboddo assigns to them, as human beings are «more creatures of custom and art than of nature»[71]:

Garrett and J. A. Harris (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Volume II*, cit., p. 337.

[65] *OPL*, I, p. 14.

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] There is a circular relationship between reason and workmanship, where the enhancement of the former results from the latter, yet the latter depends on some level of reason for its refinement.

[69] *OPL*, I, p. 19.

[70] *Ibid.,* p. 15.

[71] *Ibid.,* p. 24. Monboddo aligns with the Aristotelian concept of 'ἕξις', translated as 'habit' by Aquinas and persisting under this name amidst the currents of empiricism and sensism during the 17th and 18th centuries, as exemplified by figures such as Condillac, Hume, and also Locke. Though very common and interchangeably used with the word 'custom', as Monboddo acknowledges (*Ibid.,* p. 13n), thematic studies exclusively dedicated to the concept of habit were notably absent during the Early Modern period, although discussions surrounding it were intertwined with various other subjects. For a detailed inquiry on the subject see J. P. Wright, *Ideas of Habit and Custom in Early Modern Philosophy*, «Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology», 42(1), 2011, pp. 18-32. A comprehensive historical and theoretical discussion of the role of *habitus* and its reception in Early Modern Philosophy, also compared to the concept of custom, can be found in C. Dromelet, M. Piazza, *Habit and Custom in the*

Habit, (meaning custom) is a second nature. I add that it is more powerful than the first, and in a great measure destroys and absorbs the original nature: For is the capital and distinguishing characteristic of our species, that we can *make* ourselves, as it were, over again, so that the *original* nature in us can hardly be seen; and it is with greatest difficulty that we can distinguish it from the *acquired*[72].

Understanding human's workmanship under this light is crucial for several reasons. Aside from another Aristotelian nuance here adopted[73], in the case of Monboddo, emphasizing human's workmanship and habit seems to align with two positions. In the first place it aligns with the strong influence that humanist and sixteenth-century philosophy had on his thought and intellectual formation[74]. Secondly, when referring to practical philosophy, the general *Zeitgeist* of the Scottish Enlightenment held in high regard the conception of habit itself, with particular attention to the 'culture of the mind'[75] as a means to improve both society and individuals. This is true in the case of Monboddo, even when referring to virtue, as the emphasis on workmanship and the perfection of man resembles the Greek concept of 'ἀρετή'[76]. «It is evident – Monboddo states – that (virtue) cannot be without reason. For virtue is the *perfection of reason in action*, as science is the perfection of it in speculation»[77]. This attainment of virtue accompanied by rationality is possible only in a political state[78].

Once elucidated these conceptions, which underscore Monboddo's teleological approach to the conceptualization of human nature and language, it is crucial to note that in the context of discussing an acquired habit such as the faculty of speech, Monboddo also aligns with the concept of 'perfectibility'[79]

History of Early Modern Philosophy, in D. Jalobeanu and C. Wolfe (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Cham 2022, pp. 789-796.

[72] *Ibid.,* pp. 24-25.

[73] The conception of habit as a second nature according to Aristotle can be found in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1152a 30, ed. by R. Crisp, Cambridge 2000, p. 136. The issue has been recently addressed by R. Chiaradonna, F. Farina, *Aristotle on (second) nature, habit and character*, in M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*, New York 2022, pp. 7-16.

[74] See I. M. Hammett, *Lord Monboddo's Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, cit., pp. 16-42.

[75] For a comprehensive study on this subject, see T. Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment: 1690-1805*, New Haven 2015.

[76] Though commonly translated as virtue or excellence, the meaning of ἀρετή extends beyond mere moral virtue. It encompasses the idea of fulfilling a being's potential and achieving excellence in all aspects of life. It is tied to the performance of a being's function (ἔργον) and the respective purpose (τέλος). Monboddo seems to maintain this teleological nuance as he sees rationality, being the highest faculty and the proper nature of humans, as the pinnacle. This is crucial, in my opinion, to understand Monboddo's teleological frame that also includes the acquisition of language.

[77] *OPL*, I, p. 439.

[78] *Ibid.,* p. 440.

[79] It's notheworthy that the culture of the mind (*cultura animi*) discussed above is also entailed by perfetcibility. Indeed, perfectibility as a philosophical concept in the Enlightenment refers to the belief that human beings, through reason, education, and societal progress, can continually improve and perfect themselves. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Rousseau, Condorcet and Monboddo himself, embraced the idea that societies and individuals have the capacity for

(derived from the attention to workmanship and habit outlined above) as framed during the Enlightenment:

> Since withouth the use of reason and speech, we have no pretentios to humanity, nor can with any propriety be called men; but must be contented to rank with other animals here below, over whome we assume so much superiority, and exercise dominion chiefly by means of the advantages that the use of language gives us[80].

Perfectibility, along with second nature, is the manifestation of the creative power that humanity has gradually extended to every subject of nature within its reach, but Monboddo specifies that it is chiefly directed towards man's improvement[81]. Monboddo places significant emphasis on perfectibility as a key factor in distinguishing between nature and art, using it as a departure point from other animals[82]. The second volume of *OPL* opens with this twofold distinction. But even taking a distinction between nature and art, a certain connection between them seems unavoidable. I will deepen my interpretation of this point below. As for now it's sufficient to note that Monboddo himself, when stressing the link between perfectibility and second nature, explicitly draws upon another Aristotelian framework where a relation between nature and art emerges. This relationship echoes the Aristotelian belief that art imitates nature, as established at the beginning of the second volume of *OPL*, albeit filtered through the concept of God:

> The author of nature is undoubtedly the highest subject of the contemplation of the human mind; and the works of nature are likewise far more noble and excellent than the works of art, being the production of divine wisdom; whereas the other are produced by human intelligence, working in imitation of divine wisdom, and upon that model forming a kind of new creation: for not only are the materials of this creation furnished by nature, but every idea which we have of order, regularity, beauty, and symmetry of design, are all taken from the archetype of divine creation[83].

Moreover, while Monboddo expressed a strong aversion towards the corrupting impact of the experimental philosophy and advocated for the presence of eternal neo-Platonic universals, he adopted an approach akin to an experimental philosopher, albeit one characterized more by speculation, as expressed by Dugald Stewart's conjectural history[84]. Indeed, by emphasizing the connection between the faculty of speech as an acquired habit and perfectibility, Monboddo relies on a very common analogy used during the Scottish

moral and intellectual advancement. This optimistic view of perfectibility influenced discussions on social reform, education, and the potential for human progress during the 18th-century Enlightenment period.

[80] *OPL*, I, p. 2.

[81] See *OPL*, II, p. 2.

[82] See *ibid*.

[83] *Ibid.,* pp. 1-2.

[84] See A. Garrett, *Anthropology: the 'original' of human nature*, in A. Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge 2003, p. 82.

Enlightenment, crafting a parallel between the individual's infancy and the dawn of human history, both directed towards an end (encompassing reason, language and political life)[85] by means of progress:

> This progress, in the individual, is very well known; but we propose here to exhibit the species itself in its *infancy* – first mute; then lipsing and stammering; next by slow degrees learning to speak, very lamely and imperfectly at first, but at last from such rude essays, forming an art the most curious, as well as most useful among men[86].

The integration of reason, language, and the faculty of speech is thus manifested in a teleological framework, facilitated by the unconventional embrace of the Aristotelian paradigm of potency, actuality and habit, along with the associated metaphysical assumptions. Indeed, apart from being the foundation of all natural knowledge[87], this Aristotelian framework not only adapts to a progressive model of history but also aligns with the Scottish Enlightenment's progressive view of history as grounded in the principles of human nature[88]. In this sense, human habit directed towards the acquisition of reason and the invention of language and political institutions, may be seen as emergent properties of the teleological nature of the faculties expressed through human perfectibility.

The passage (or progress) between the dawn of human history to a state of maturity is also a path from animality to full humanity[89]. Such an interpretation pairs with the paradigm of perfectibility as opposed to the civilization's paradigm. While the former's priority was to «conceptualize the social», the latter «emphasized the divide between nature and history»[90], which is exactly what Monboddo seeks to accomplish when stressing that habit is a second nature and not a product of nature in itself. This stands true, in Monboddo's view, also when discussing the political birth of the civil society, whose progress «is not from nature but from human institution»[91]. But if the interpretation I provided is accurate, second nature, being an emergent property and entrenched in a teleological frame, finds its ultimate foundation in a specific conception of nature Monboddo adopts. This conception also resembles the ancient, teleological notion of 'φύσις', which, again echoing Aristotle, «does nothing in vain»: a rule that «suffers no exception»[92].

This hypothesis gains further support, particularly when considering a passage in *AM* (explicitly linked to *OPL*) where Monboddo explains his

[85] See *OPL*, II, p. 3.
[86] *OPL*, I, p. 2.
[87] *Ibid.,* p. 18n.
[88] See C. J. Berry, *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, Edinburgh 1997, pp. 61-71.
[89] S. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress,* New York 2013, p. 84.
[90] S. Sebastiani, *Civilization and Perfectibility: Conflicting Views of the History of Humankind?*, in J. Robertson (ed.), *Time, History, and Political Thought*, Cambridge 2023, p. 214.
[91] *OPL*, I, pp. 306-307.
[92] See *ibid.,* p. 448.

conceptualization of the state of nature, which is conceived as «the foundation of any acquired or adventitious state he (the man) may afterwards appear in». The philosopher makes a twofold distinction of the concept, with only one denoting the original state of man. The other, «most proper meaning», refers to man's «most perfect state, to which his nature tends, and towards which he either is or ought to be always advancing», thus unfolding both a teleological and a normative dimension of human history and perfectibility. Such a state is characterized by the perfection of man's intellectual faculties, «by which, and which only, he is truly a Man»[93]. This state, a pinnacle encompassing political society and the highest form of language, as we have seen, can thus be considered in a teleological framework of conjectural history along with the study of society intertwined with the study of the mind[94].

This is another perspective that underscores the superiority of the spiritual over the material within an Aristotelian framework, highlighting the priority of metaphysics over physics. Indeed, according to Aristotle, the *form* (actuality) better represents nature rather than *matter* (potentiality): a thing is more accurately defined by its fulfillment than by its potential[95].

He maintains this stance both on a naturalistic level and within the realms of the development of reason:

> He appears at first to be little more than a vegetable, hardly deserving the name of *Zoöphyte*; then he gets sense, but sense only so that he is yet little better than a [mussel]; then he becomes an animal of a more complete kind; then a rational creature, and finally a man of intellect and science, which is the summit and completion of our nature[96].

However, this doesn't entail that Monboddo's teleological framework manifests as a linear progression of human history[97], as he considered the ancient Greek societies more perfect than contemporary ones. This position is particularly evident when Monboddo refers to the last and most perfect stage of civil society, «in which the progression ends», historically exemplified by Sparta[98]. It is within this framework that perfectibility, resulting from second nature, shows the highest perfection of man. In this stage, not only does the most perfect language (ancient Greek) manifest itself, but education and public wisdom are pivotal, rendering the early modern conception of liberty (negative

[93] See *AM*, III, p. 26.
[94] S. Sebastiani, *Civilization and Perfectibility: Conflicting Views of the History of Humankind?,* cit., p. 208.
[95] See Aristotle, *Physics*, 193b 7-18.
[96] *Ibid.,* p. 183.
[97] As Aron Garrett states, according to some Scottish philosophers of the Enlightenment history is progressive, but stages of history can be independent of chronological order. See A. Garrett, *Law, Chronology, and Scottish Conjectural History*, in J. Robertson (ed.), *Time, History, and Political Thought*, cit., p. 190.
[98] *OPL*, I, pp. 364-365.

liberty) superfluous[99]. This conjectural history traced by Monboddo is entailed by another aspect of Stewarts' conception of it. Conjectural history indeed also serves as a method for understanding the various forms that civilized society has taken throughout different periods in history. This approach relies on a priori speculation, especially in the absence of empirical evidence, serving as guideposts for theoretical exploration[100]. It involves tracing humanity's development using established principles of human nature, even without historical sources. Monboddo sees language as both a product of civil society and an end (an ἐντελέχεια), potentially present in both individuals and the human species from the beginning, but acquired only through use and workmanship, rooted in a teleological conception of faculties and capacity. This capacity, linked to a gradual unfolding of higher intellectual faculties, establishes a further difference between animals and human beings. This is why Monboddo, in crafting his own conjectural history, feels the urge to begin with the study of brutes and animals. Again, the teleological conception of 'φύσις' seems to resurface here, as Monboddo, even when referring to the orang, is more interested in the *inward principle* than in its anatomical featrues[101].

In my view, such considerations might expand on Lovejoy's shareable conclusions[102], which refuse to categorize Monboddo's positions as a form of *primitivism*. According to Lovejoy, who also compares Monboddo's positions with Rousseau's, the positions of the two authors can be more properly considered *retrospectivist*. But the epistemological differences are important.

Despite admiring Rousseau, Monboddo's conceptualization of original nature and language differs significantly. While the Genevan philosopher views the former as a mere hypothetical construct rather than a literal historical account, Monboddo insists that such a state not only existed in the past but still exists in his time, and that understanding it is of fundamental importance[103]. He supports this argument «by facts as well by arguments», drawing upon ancient and modern sources[104]. However, both Monboddo and Rousseau express some incredulity about the idea that language, given its complexity, was not created by a divinity. While Rousseau leaves this question open in the *Discourse on*

[99] This can be considered another anti-Enlightenment feature. On this point see L. Formigari, *Monboddo. Antropologia e Linguistica* in G Herder, Lord Monboddo, *Linguaggio e società*, ed. by N. Merker, L. Formigari, Bari 1973, pp. 61-62.
[100] See D. Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Smith*, cit., XLV.
[101] See A. O. Lovejoy, *Monboddo and Rousseau*, «Modern Philology», 30(3), 1933, pp. 275-296.
[102] Monboddo held Rousseau in high esteem and considered him a genius of his age. See *OPL*, I, p. 381.
[103] *OPL,* I, p. ii.
[104] *Ibid.,* pp. 236-269. According to Silvia Sebastiani, the epistemological foundation of this aspect of Monboddo's theory is based on 'legal evidences' and contributed to the theorization of human diversity. See S. Sebastiani, *Civilization and Perfectibility: Conflicting Views of the History of Humankind?,* cit., pp. 209-210 and S. Sebastiani, *Monboddo's 'ugly tail': the question of evidence in enlightenment sciences of man,* cit.

Inequality[105], Monboddo, later in his life, seems not to exclude that language may have derived from the Egyptian 'daemon kings'[106].

Moreover, Monboddo places even stronger emphasis on the necessity of society for the invention of language than Rousseau, who in the same *Discourse* shows himself undecided[107]. This emphasis is connected to Monboddo's conception of sociability, which, in contrast to a common view in the Scottish Enlightenment, is not entirely determined by nature[108]. It's noteworthy that Monboddo's view on the connection between language, society, and sociability is once again supported by the authority of Aristotle. Indeed, Monboddo's perspective further develops the conceptualization addressed by the Stagirite in his *Historia Animalium* by distinguishing between gregarious, political, and solitary animals and by placing man in the middle of these categories[109]. Thus, Monboddo's originality regarding language also lies in his integration of a philosophical position on sociability, drawing on Rousseau's view that projecting contemporary man into the original state is a mistake, as well as on the Aristotelian distinction. Nevertheless, one must be cautious when considering Monboddo as an uncritical and dogmatic follower of the Aristotelian doctrine. Indeed, despite adopting such a robust Aristotelian framework, Monboddo doesn't hesitate to regard the Stagirite's account as too similar to Locke's[110], since the Greek philosopher ultimately derived all human ideas from matter instead of categorically asserting they reside in the mind. On the other hand, Plato's philosophy, being «nobler and more divine than Aristotle's», seems to provide a more satisfying approach and a more effective way to overcome the empiricist attitude of his time. On this line of thought, during his later years, Monboddo's 'mysticism' shifts towards an unparalleled admiration for the Egyptians[111].

Francesco Cataldi
Erasmus University Rotterdam
✉ cataldi@esphil.eur.nl

[105] See J. J. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, ed. by P. Coleman, Oxford 1994, p. 42.
[106] See *AM*, IV, p. 153.
[107] See J. J. Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality,* cit., p. 42.
[108] See *OPL*, I, pp. 221-222.
[109] *Ibid.,* pp. 217-236.
[110] *Lord Monboddo to Samuel Horsley,* December 11 1780, in W. A. Knight, *Lord Monboddo and Some of His Contemporaries*, cit., p. 140.
[111] On this subject see the comprehensive study by R. J. W. Mills, *Egyptomania and religion in James Burnett, Lord Monboddo's 'History of Man'*, «History of European Ideas», 47(1), 2021, pp. 119-139.

Bibliography

Ahnert, T. 2015. *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment: 1690-1805*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Aristotle. 2000. *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by R. Crisp, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Aristotle. 1938. *On Interpretation*, in Id. *Categories, On Interpretations, Prior Analytics*, ed. by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, and E. H. Warmington, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

Aristotle. 1999. *Physics*, ed. by D. Bostock, Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press.

Baxter, A. 1745. *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul Wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is Evinced from the Principle of Reason and Philosophy*, Volume First, London, Printed for A. Millar.

Burnett, J. (Lord Monboddo). 1779. *Antient Metaphysics: Or, The Science of Universals, Volume First*, Edinburgh, Printed for T. Cadell.

Burnett, J. (Lord Monboddo). 1799. *Antient Metaphysics: Or, The Science of Universals, Volume Sixth*, Edinburgh, Printed for T. Cadell.

Burnett, J. (Lord Monboddo). 1764. *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, *Volume First*, Edinburgh, Printed for J. Balfour and T. Cadell.

Carmichael, G. 1729. *Synopsis Theologiae Naturalis, sive Notitiae, De Existentia, Attributis et Operationibus, Summi Numinis, ex ipsa Rerum Natura haustae. Studiosae Juventutis usibus accomodata*, Edinburgi, impensis Joannis Paton.

Chiaradonna, R., Farina F. 2022. *Aristotle on (second) nature, habit and character*, in M. De Caro and D. Macarthur (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Liberal Naturalism*, New York, Routledge, pp. 7-16.

Descartes, R. 1998. *The World*, in Id., *The World and Other Writings*, ed. by S. Gaukroger, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Dromelet, C., Piazza M. 2022. *Habit and Custom in the History of Early Modern Philosophy*, in D. Jalobeanu and Ct. Wolfe (eds), *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Cham, Springer, pp. 789-796.

Harris, J. 1751. *Hermes: Or, a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar*, London, Printed by H. Woodfall, For J. Nourse and P. Vaillant.

Edwards, P. 2021. *From the State of Nature to the Natural State*, in M. Somos and A. Peters (eds), *The State of Nature: Histories of an Idea*, Leiden, Brill, pp. 303-333.

Formigari, L. 1973. *Monboddo. Antropologia e Linguistica*, in J. G. Herder, Lord J. B. Monboddo, *Linguaggio e società*, ed. by N. Merker, L. Formigari, Bari, Laterza, pp. 51-66.

Garrett, A. 2003. *Anthropology: the 'original' of human nature*, in A. Broadie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 79-93.

Garrett, A. 2023. *Law, Chronology, and Scottish Conjectural History*, in J. Robertson (ed.), *Time, History, and Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 179-193.

Guyer, P., Horstmann R. P. 2023. *Idealism in Modern Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Locke, J. 1975. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by. P. H. Nidditch, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Hammett, I. M., *Lord Monboddo's Of the Origin and Progress of Language. Its Sources, Genesis and Background, with Special Attention to the Advocates' Library*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press.

Hobbs, C. L. 2002. *Rethoric on the Margins of Modernity. Vico, Condillac, Monboddo*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press.

Homes, H. (Lord Kames). 1754. *Of the Laws of Motion*, in Id., *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary*, Vol. 1, Edimburgh, Printed by G. Hamilton and J. Balfour.

Jaffro, L. 2013. *Language and Thought*, in J. A. Harris (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 128-149.

Knight, W. A. 1900. *Lord Monboddo and Some of His Contemporaries*, London, J. Murray.

Land, S. K. 1976 *Lord Monboddo and the Theory of Syntax in the Late Eighteenth Century*, «Journal of the History of Ideas», 34(3), pp. 423-440.

Lovejoy, A. O. 1933. *Monboddo and Rousseau*, «Modern Philology», 30(3), pp. 275-296.

Marzluf, P. 2008. *Originating Difference in Rhetorical Theory: Lord Monboddo's Obsession with Language Origins Theory*, «Rhetoric Society Quarterly», 38(4) p. 385-407.

McIntosh, C. A. 2021. *Idealism and Common Sense*, in J. Ferraris and B. P. Göcke, *The Routledge Handbook of Idealism and Immaterialism*, New York, Routledge, pp. 496-505.

Mills, R. J. W. 2021. *Egyptomania and religion in James Burnett, Lord Monboddo's 'History of Man',* «History of European Ideas», 47(1).

Rousseau, J. J. 1994. *Discourse on Inequality*, ed. by P. Coleman, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Sebastiani, S. 2022. *Monboddo's 'ugly tail': the question of evidence in enlightenment sciences of man*, «History of European Ideas», 48(1), pp. 47-48.

Sebastiani, S. 2023. *Civilization and Perfectibility: Conflicting Views of the History of Humankind?,* in J. Robertson (ed.), *Time, History, and Political Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 194-215.

Sebastiani, S. 2013. *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress,* New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

Shieber, J. 2023. T*he Metaphysical Implications of Newtonianism*, in A. Garrett and J. A. Harris (ed.), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Volume*

II: Method, Metaphysics, Mind, Language, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 327-364.

Stan, M. 2012. *Newton and Wolff: The Leibnizian Reaction to the Principia, 1716–1763*, «The Southern Journal of Philosophy», 50(30), 2012, pp. 459-481.

Sternell, Z. 2010. *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, New Haven, Yale University Press.

Stewart, D. 1799. *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Smith*, in A. Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subject*, Basil, James Decker.

Turnbull, G. 2005. *The Principles of Moral Philosophy*, in Id., *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, Vol. 1, (ed. by A. Broadie), Indianapolis, Liberty Fund.

Verri, A. 1975. *Lord Monboddo. Dalla Metafisica all'Antropologia,* Ravenna, Longo Editore.

Wright, J. P. 2011. *Ideas of Habit and Custom in Early Modern Philosophy*, «Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology», 42(1), 2011, pp. 18-32.

Yenter, T. 2023. T*he Metaphysical Implications of Newtonianism*, in A. Garrett and J. A. Harris (eds), *Scottish Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century, Volume II: Method, Metaphysics, Mind, Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 108-143.

Yolton, J. W. 1984. *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Minneapolis, Minneapolis University Press.