The title of Roger Emerson’s *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment: “Industry, Knowledge and Humanity”* suggests a miscellaneous work. A quick glance at the contents page confirms this impression with essays on reading, Hume, Archibald Campbell, 3rd Duke of Argyll and various aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment. It is a testament to the simplicity of Emerson’s style and method of exposition, that his essays engage with several thick and thorny historiographical debates at the same time as providing a welcome path for the uninitiated.

The four essays on David Hume that appear in the middle of the book are well ordered and of a high quality. The first three are useful introductions to their subject and intelligent statements of Emerson’s belief that Hume’s historical and political achievements are as integral to his intellectual achievement as his philosophy. This is not exactly new ground. Nicholas Phillipson’s *Hume* and many more recent works have proven that Hume the historian and Hume the philosopher are inseparable. That said, Emerson’s own musings on Hume’s historical writings are so neatly woven into the general intellectual landscape of Enlightenment Scotland that I would recommend them to any student of historiography.

His other essays on the world of the Scottish Enlightenment, covering topics such as reading and demographics are of general use for historians of the
eighteenth century. His essay on Scottish medics offers an invaluable analysis of datasets for the period. While Emerson invites readers to look beyond the borders of Scotland and even Great Britain for the story of Scots medics, one wonders why India and indeed the East India Company more generally are excluded from his consideration. The commonplace idea of Scots operating in an Atlantic world has been put in a more global context by Andrew Mackillop and others.

If Emerson’s topics are various; his message is remarkably cogent. Distancing himself from Richard B. Sher, J. G. A. Pocock and others, Emerson argues that the Scottish Enlightenment has been seen chiefly as a debate “moral, political-economic and social theories produced after c. 1730,” typified by a handful of leading Edinburgh and Glasgow luminaries (p. 225). In contrast, Emerson describes a Scottish variant of general European Enlightenment, starting much earlier. For Emerson, late seventeenth century Scotland, with its close intellectual, political and religious ties to Holland and France was not the forerunner of Enlightened Scotland but its genesis.

The lasting importance of these essays is very slightly blunted by the fact that many of them are structured around refuting specific arguments or groups of historians. This is perhaps inevitable given their origins as academic articles. As the recently published collection of Istvan Hont’s essays, The Jealousy of Trade demonstrates, this impression could have been avoided with the use of a more comprehensive introduction. In sum, Emerson’s essays provide well-rounded, robust summaries of their topics. The book’s eagerness to engage closely with the works of fellow historians of Scotland and the Scottish Enlightenment will only add to its utility for students and researchers alike.

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