

Part I

The Man

Introduction

To appreciate the contributions of Adam Smith to philosophy, jurisprudence and political economy, to literature and letters, to the Enlightenment, and to discourse with his contemporaries, it is advisable first to know something about him as a man of the world he lived in.

There are several excellent biographies, the first written three years after his death and delivered as a paper to the Royal Society of Edinburgh (of which he was a founding member).¹ The second, just over a hundred years later, was the first full-length biography, by John Rae.² Ian Ross's, the most recent, is surely the definitive account of Smith's life.³ In between there have been numerous short memoirs by people who knew him,⁴ and some excellent and more reliable scholarly accounts of aspects of his life, of which Professor Scott's is pre-eminent.⁵

I cover swiftly those well-known aspects of his life (which because they are widely accepted as factual I have not referenced) and introduce some new, admittedly speculative, assessments of what appears to have been going on in the background of a man whose sense of privacy and prudence was well developed. I think these aspects explain something that tends to be passed over too quickly in standard treatments of his life.