The Segmentation and Connectedness of Public Discursive Sphere in the 18th Century

A Case Study of Thomas Reid

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(1) Introduction

This paper will discuss the segmentation and connectedness of public discursive sphere in the 18th century Britain. After one of Jürgen Habermas's early books, *Der Structur Wandel der Öffentlichkeit*, rediscovered by the historians of the Enlightenment as an important work giving an insightful view of the intellectual movements of the age, it has been taken for granted that public discursive sphere was the cradle where texts emerged and constructed in the century of the Enlightenment. Literati, politicians, philosophs and even ordinary people gathered in pubs, coffeehouses and other public places to discuss the popular subjects of the time. Most of texts written in the century reflected their interests and arguments. Idioms and languages seamlessly imported from utterance to écriture. Most importantly, questions, problems, issues and subjects that the texts of the century seem to have been obliged to answer had initially been posed in public discursive sphere. The problem-setting that ignited the creations of texts and the frameworks of texts in which answers should have been given were supplied from the sphere. As far as "the creation of texts" in the century is concerned, it is not sufficient only to look at texts themselves. Public discursive sphere as the field of their creation must be examined.

However, it seems that not much attention has been paid to the fact that public discursive sphere in the century is not as perfect as that of contemporary world where the equal opportunity of every citizen for accessing information is an essential component of civil right. 18th century Europe was a society with class structure and the very unequal distribution of wealth. The information flow of such a society must have been asymmetrical and segmented. Habermas's idealised concept of public sphere has already been criticised by historians. Its membership was restricted to the upper ranks of a society. Inevitably it had "bourgeois" nature. The narrowness and imperfection of it not only confined to its membership. When being compared to the institutionalised openness of contemporary public discursive sphere, 18th century

societies gave no guarantee of the fairness and openness of information for their citizens. The public discursive sphere of the century was not homogeneous and universal in its nature. It was heterogeneous and partial. This historical feature of text-creation could affect the texts emerged in the century. As following analysis will suggest, even scientific arguments were not free from this historical constraint.

(2) Method and materials

It is not difficult to see the imperfectness of discursive sphere in the 18th century. Information technology as it is was not invented. Transport had many technical difficulties. Censorship was still in place in every country. It was very powerful when implemented by the hand of Catholic Church. Books were still expensive and they had a small circulation. Illiteracy ratios in European nations were higher than that of Japan. An animated public argument concerning politics was dangerous in many cases. Therefore many important works on political and religious matters had to be published by anonymous authors. In general, there was neither legal framework nor the will of a state to ensure "freedom of speech".

It is obvious that there were defects and malfunctions in the cobweb of information flow in the 18th century. There is no need to add any evidence to demonstrate that there were many kinds of political distortion of it, too. Some of these imperfect conditions of information flow can be seen even today in less developed countries with dictatorial governments and/or insufficient public and social infrastructures. This paper will concentrate on the less discussed domain of public discursive sphere in the century. That is, the sphere in which philosophical discourses were produced, circulated and consumed.

The term "philosophy" will be used in the same way as in the 18th century literature. "Philosophy" means theoretical or systematic knowledge. For example, the word "natural philosophy" in the 18th century literature substitutes for "natural science" in contemporary language. "Philosophical discourse" and "philosophical discursive sphere" in this paper thus signify academic or scientific discourse and sphere. There is an advantage to use the old word "philosophy" in the following discussions. Although there were scientific and academic languages and discourses that can be clearly distinguished from ordinary and political languages and discourses, these domains are not so much separated before the institutionalisation of science in the 19th century. The term "philosophy" conveys the vagueness of the social and institutional definition of academic and scientific knowledge in the century.

The following examples are taken from a Scottish philosopher's writings. Thomas Reid is the most distinguished philosopher of the common sense school of Scottish philosophy. He is the author of three philosophical books. He left many manuscripts that are accessible in the Special Collections of Aberdeen University. His printed books and manuscripts can serve as useful materials for investigating the structure of philosophical discursive sphere in the 18th century Britain. The succeeding chapter will explain the importance of examining manuscripts of philosophers of the

century. Then the paper will give the examples of discrepancy between manuscripts and printed books as discourses, firstly, of 18th century British mathematics and, secondly, one of Thomas Reid's handwritten papers dealing political and social philosophy. The conclusion will emphasize the importance of treating the books and manuscripts of philosophers of the century as the products of their speech-acts.

(3) Lecture notes and Letters

Philosophical interest in Reid's realist philosophy has been revived because the philosophical realism became one of the focal points in the contemporary discussions of the philosophy of science. His philosophy is spotlighted also from Richard Rorty's post-modernist arguments in his "*The Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*". Reid was the first critic of "the theory of the idea" of Lockean philosophy, which Rorty regarded as one of the representations of the Western philosophical obsession to look human mind as "the mirror of nature". There are good reasons that philosophers rediscovered Thomas Reid in the end of the 20th century.

Reid is an important figure in the study of today's Scottish intellectual history because of his surviving manuscripts. Aberdeen University owns the unusually large collections of his handwritings. Most of them classified as "Birkwood Collection" but the library has other important manuscripts, too. With these materials, the historians of 18th century Scottish thought can reconstruct the intellectual developments of Reid and observe the inner life of 18th century Scottish intellectuals in general.

Being considered to be the author of Aberdeen's manuscripts and other letters and lecture notes, Reid appears to be a different person who has been known through the standard history of British philosophy. His short publication list that includes *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principle of Common Sense* in 1764, the first and the masterpiece, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* in 1785 and *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* in 1788, gives the impression that Reid invested most of his time into philosophical studies: "philosophy", not in the 18th century usage of the term, but in today's sense, the disciplinary study of philosophical questions. He seems to have been obsessed by the study of "human nature", that is, the 18th century expression of the psychology and functions of human brain. Reid dedicated three books to the same subject. His other publications are: a small philosophical paper, "*An Essay on Quantity*", a treatise of the law of the motion of a body and the adaptation of mathematical means to moral subjects, and a critical essay on Aristotelian logic published in 1774 as an appendix to Lord Kames' book.

Many works of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, three major figures in British empirical philosophy, discussed the wide range of topics in natural and social world, other than the philosophical subjects. They also made remarkable contributions to historiography, social, political, ethical and judicial thoughts. Reid's intellectual life looks much more monotonous than theirs.

Nonetheless, Reid was a master of every domain of sciences. The surviving lecture notes are evidences that he could treat and teach almost all of the subjects

from mathematics to rhetoric. The lecture notes owned by Aberdeen University on "natural philosophy"[1] demonstrate the fact that Reid was a good natural scientist with excellent skill in mathematics. Lecture notes on logic in the Special collections of Edinburgh University[2] give evidence that Reid was one of the founders of empirical logic in Scottish philosophy. A recent publication of his notes on politics[3] has shown that Reid was a genuine political philosopher who was interested in, and able to discuss, natural jurisprudence and politics.

There is a small set of papers in Birkwood collection that apparently the lecture notes on political economy. The lectures performed just after he had succeeded Adam Smith's chair at Glasgow University.[4] Though his lectures on political economy were earlier ones among those of Scottish professors treating the same subject, Reid seems to have considered the issue much more profoundly and thoroughly than any other professor in Scottish Universities except Smith. Reid employed two key concepts of Smithian political economy. Natural price and useful labour systematically applied to the subject in Reid's lectures. There are significant distinctions among their views, too. Reid gave a detailed examination of natural price theory which he seems to have had once accepted, and highlighted the malfunction of it.[5]

(4) Parallel lines

Thomas Reid was not a "philosopher" in today's sense, but an all-mighty intellectual of the 18th century who could argue every theoretical issue of the time. It is natural to ask oneself why Reid did not publish his ideas except philosophical ones in contemporary sense. A possible answer could be found in the context of 18th century British mathematics.

Some researchers have claimed that Thomas Reid discovered Non-Euclidean geometry. But he mentioned this brilliant idea only briefly in the chapter "Of the geometry of visible" in his first book. It is evident from the following statement that he was perfectly aware the fact that he was proposing a new geometry.

> "The mathematical reader, I hope, will enter into these principles with perfect facility, and will as easily perceive that the following propositions with regard to visible figure and space, which we offer only as a specimen, may be mathematically demonstrated from them, and are no less true nor less evident than the propositions of Euclid, with regard to tangible figures"[6]

1   Thomas Reid, *Lectures of Thomas Reid on Natural Philosophy* (1757–8), Aberdeen University Library, K.106.
2   *John Campbell, 1775, The system of Logic, taught at Aberdeen 1763, by dr. Thomas Reid, now professor of moral philosophy of Glasgow*, Edinburgh University Library, DK 3.2.
3   Knud Haakonssen (ed.), *Practical Ethics*, University Press, 1990.
4   Thomas Reid, Aberdeen University Library, MS2131/4/III/1–15.
5   Shinichi Nagao, "Political Economy of Thomas Reid", *Journal of Scottish Studies Incorporating Reid Studies*, No.1, 2003, pp. 21–33.
6   Thomas Reid, (1994) *The Works of Thomas Reid*, vol. 1, Thoemmes Press, p. 148.

Then the proposition 6ᵗʰ says,

> "If two lines be parallel,—that is, every where equally distant from each other-they cannot both be straight"[7]

The proposition 10ᵗʰ says,

> "Of every right-lined triangle, the three angles taken together, are greater than two right angles"[8]

Readers of these passages cannot escape the temptation to ask the author the following question: why had not he published the first full account of non-Euclidean geometry instead of writing complicated philosophical essays? If he had done so, his name could have been recorded in the history of modern mathematics.

There was a context in which Reid's mathematical endeavour carried out and published. Colin MacLaurin had left evidence in his unpublished letter probably written in 1734 or 1735 that he was the person who found the theoretical scheme to give rational basis to calculus. He was the prominent mathematician in 18ᵗʰ century Britain after Newton and a professor of Aberdeen University when Reid was a student.

> "There is a limit in these cases toward which the Ratio is continually approaching as the increments diminish; they never come to it while they have any assignable magnitude, but they approach so as to be nearer to it than by any assignable difference, and this is justly held the last ratio of Quantitiys."[9]

If these words are translated into mathematical symbols, they become the modern definition of the limit of French mathematician, Augustin Louis Cauchy, in the 19ᵗʰ century.

MacLaurin is the first author who wrote the first theoretical book on calculus.[10] But it was a very strange book. He tried to build up the system of calculus only using geometrical demonstrations in the first part of the book. In the second part, he described modern calculus with the mathematical symbols and equations, but he insisted in the introduction to the part that all these demonstrations had been already done in geometrical ways in the first part. If the readers of the book understand the context in which it was written, the reason why he wrote an important achievement of British mathematics in such a way becomes apparent.

MacLaurin's book was written in order to hit back the criticism against calculus by George Berkeley in his *The Analyst* published in 1734. Berkeley wrote the book because he thought mathematicians ruined the "true religion" and the only way to fight them was to demonstrate that their science had no more rational basis than Christian miracles. The anger held by mathematicians including MacLaurin when

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7   *Ibid.*, p.148.
8   *Ibid.*, p.148.
9   Colin MacLaurin, Aberdeen University Library MS. 206/153–8. Stella Mills (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Colin MacLaurin*, Shiva Publishing Ltd., 1982.
10 Colin MacLaurin, A.M., *A Treatise of Fluxions in Two Books*, Edinburgh, 1742.

they had been attacked by Berkeley is easily noticed in the beginning of the same letter.

> "As you know me to be a sincere wellwisher to Religion and that at the same time the Mathematicks are my favorite and particular study, you will easily believe that I must consider the Analyst as a performance of a very extraordinary nature…it must appear very surprising to see him represent Mathematicians as generally Enemies to Religion and abusing the Authority they may have acquired by their Mathematical knowledge, by misleading unwary persons in matters of the greatest moment…"[11]

The recent study of 18th century British mathematics has found that there are two ways of writing mathematics, geometrical expression, using words and figures and constructing an argument from the first proposition to the last by demonstration, and algebraic expression calculating with symbols.[12] Only geometrical expression was found in published books. This is one of the reasons that the historians of mathematics believed that British mathematics had declined after Newton just in the time algebraic mathematics had become important in the continent. But the truth is that British mathematicians employed algebraic expression in correspondence within their circles. The reason why British mathematicians strictly used geometrical expression in published books is evident from the letter of MacLaurin.

MacLaurin thought, although calculation by symbols was heuristically more efficient, geometrical demonstration was more persuasive to general public, therefore the better way of presenting mathematics in order to escape criticism from the public.

The examples of Reid and MacLaurin tell us that 18th century British mathematicians were not as incompetent as thought to be in the conventional historiography of mathematics. They also point to the following fact. There was not the one way of publishing ideas in the century, even in scientific writings. There were several ways available. Manuscripts, letters and handwritten papers served authors as the means to transmit ideas within the circles of specialists. They were public discourses as books were. Furthermore, they provided socially safer ways of sending messages to narrowly targeted audience, because the authors lived in a society where still no absolute freedom of speech allowed to exist, even though Britain was one of the most secure places for authors and publishers to work in the 18th century world.

Continental mathematicians freely expressed their theories in their books with symbols and equations. Thus communicating "private" ideas of mathematicians only with the means of manuscripts apparently prevented the development of British mathematics. Science advances most rapidly when there are continuous and lively exchanges of ideas among the participants of scientific projects. But there were channels in the 18th century community of British mathematicians through which they

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11 *Op.cit.*
12 Niccolo Guicciardini, *Reading the Principia: the Debate on Newton's Mathematical Methods for Natural Philosophy from 1687 to 1736*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

could interact without being annoyed or even threatened by conservatives, religious fanatics or George Berkeley. It is possible that Reid considered his idea of non-Euclidean geometry was premature or, for some reasons, not suited to make it known to public in an adequate "scientific" form. The reason why he put the hints of new geometry into his published book is that the argument was designed, not to stimulate mathematical researches, but to reply to another philosophically destructive statement on the theory of perception by George Berkeley.

(5) The "Utopian Paper"

One of Reid's paper that has eventually been published in 1990 will shed light on more striking contrast between "published" and "not-published" discourses. It was believed that Reid's political view was conservative. One of the clues to the judgment is his small essay entitled "Danger of Political Innovation" published on 18th December 1794, in the midst of French Revolution, in a conservative journal *Glasgow Courier*. The essay says that every attempt inspired by new ideas to introduce rapid change in a political system could be harmful for a society. The existing British constitution has been well tested by experience and the best one that could imagine. The essay, however, was only the parts, the introduction and conclusion, of a longer paper read at the meeting of Glasgow Literary Society, an academic meeting of the faculty of the university, on 28th November 1794.

Knud Haakonssen published the whole of the paper held by Aberdeen University Library, entitled "Some Thoughts on the Utopian system", and made it clear that the original intention of the paper was not to stand against the Revolution with people like Edmund Burke, but, on the contrary, to demonstrate the possibility of an ideal system of a society functioning without private property. After having discussed the danger of rapid change in an existing political system, Reid explains the original intention of the paper, that is, to describe the best form of a society to promote human happiness and dignity.[13] The society he considered was the system that abolished private ownership completely.

> "In the Utopian System the People are fed, cloathed, have their Wants supplied by the Publick, the Labour of the People must therefore be directed by the Publick, in such manner that the produce of it may be sufficient in Kind & Quantity for this purpose. The Labourers in every Profession must be trained, directed and overseen, and the produce of their Labour received and stored by proper Officers."[14]

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13 "Having said so much with regard to changes in Governments which actually exist, whether violent or peaceable I proceed to what I consider abstractly chiefly intended in this Discourse; To that Form of political Society which seems to be best adapted to the Improvement and Happiness of Man." (*Practical Ethics*, p.280)
14 *Ibid.*, p.284.

The reason why he had such an extreme political view was that he had deep discontent with, and anger against, the existing market order of commercial society in which he lived. This made him write in the paper the following prophetic contempt of the system of private property;

> "Private Property has always been, & must necessarily be very unequally divided. Time, & the Progress of Society, naturally tend to increase this inequality, till at last the greater part of a Nation, by their Poverty are depressed & dependent upon the few that are rich; They must Labour, like Beasts of Burthen, to feed the Pride & Luxury of the Rich, & to earn a small Pittance for their own necessary Subsistance. By this Means both are equally corrupted"[15]

However, while these words sound very similar to those of the radical prophetic preachers of the reformation period, the paper is still the product of the Enlightenment. To interpret the paper only in the contexts of Aristotelian-Christian political philosophy and Utopian literature cannot be justified for the following three reasons. Firstly, as already discussed in the former section, Reid had his own economic theory. It was based upon both the notion of labour as the source of the wealth of nations and the self-regulating mechanism of the market. In the centre of his "socialist" design of utopia, there is a theoretical question very similar to Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, that is, how to allocate labour most efficiently and without pains. Reid was well aware that a market economy worked well in producing national wealth. But he also thought that it was not the most efficient and ideal system of resource allocation.

Secondly, the utopian system described in the paper was equipped with the incentives for the individuals to act properly. They are carefully planned to give strong drives to the members of the nation to act for public good from their own passion to compete and being praised by others. Eventually his system became, different from the one explained by Thomas Moore in his *Utopia*, a system of meritocracy.

> "It is a capital Defect in the System of private Property that the different Professions and Employments are not honoured & esteemed in proportion to their real Utility, & the Talents required for the discharge of them. The most useful and necessary Employments are held in no Esteem. Nor indeed do they deserve it; because they are undertaken only for the sake of private Interest. Their Utility to the publick is accidental, & not in the view of those who practise them."[16]

> "In such a Society [Utopian society], there must be a Scale of Honour in which all the different Professions and Employments have a Rank assigned them, proportioned to their Utility and the Talents necessary for discharging them."[17]

15 *Ibid.*, p.286.
16 *Ibid.*, p.290.
17 *Ibid.*, p.290.

This is the evidence that Reid understood well the strength and persuasive power of the argument of Bernard Mandeville on the functions of private interest in a commercial society, just as David Hume and Adam Smith did. There is no doubt at the same time that Reid wanted to demonstrate the proposition that "the system of private property" was not the only one system that had stimulus to executing individuals' abilities and energies properly.

Thirdly, his arguments in the paper can be seen as a very extreme solution to the major issue of the Scottish Enlightenment, that is, "the wealth and virtue". The social and political philosophers of 18th century Scotland speculated to find the way to bring both the market system and the existence of a state as the ethical institution into harmony. It was one of the favourite themes of the discussion in the Select Society of Edinburgh, which was, as David Hume wrote, "the parliament" of the man of letters in 18th century Scotland. For example, there are such "questions", the themes of discussions at the meeting of the society, in the *Minutes* of the society owned by the National Library of Scotland:

1. Does the increase of trade and manufacture naturally promote the happiness of a nation?
2. Whether is a nation on a state of barbarity, or a nation of luxury and refined manners the happiest?
3. Whether doth landed or a commercial interest contribute most to the tranquility and stability of a state?
4. Whether luxury be advantageous to any state?
5. Whether a nation once sunk in luxury and pleasure can be retrieved and brought back to any degree of worth and excellencies?
6. Whether in the ancient times of every nation the people were not stronger, of body healthier, and longer lived than in late times?[18]

These questions repeatedly asked and discussed many times in the meetings of other smaller societies in 18th century Scotland. Eventually they created many books and hand-written papers. It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the subjects that intellectuals in the country were obsessed and felt being obliged to answer theoretically in the period.[19]

Thomas Reid differed, however, significantly from his colleagues of the Enlightenment in finding his "solution" to the question. In the writings of Scottish moral philosophers of the 18th century, private property was the cornerstone of the commercial society, either from the modern understanding of the market society in the case of Hume and Smith, or from Harrintonian republican ground as Adam Ferguson did. They opposed to Jean Jack Rousseau's well known view expressed in *the Origin of Human Inequality*. Reid, who was a sincere believer of Christian values and had keen interest in social problems like urban poverty and the conditions of jails, seems not having been satisfied with the modern state based on private property,

18 *Minutes of the Procedure of the Select Society*, National Library of Scotland, MS 23.1.1.
19 Shinichi Nagao, *Politics and Society in Scottish Thought*, Imprint Academic, London, 2007.

because it could corrupt the morality of a nation. It is possible that he was seeking a system that could replace a market economy and French revolution gave him both inspirations to develop his ideas and an opportunity to make the ideas "public" in a sense.

Who is, then, responsible for making his radical utopian ideas in the paper into the esoteric doctrine of the Scottish Enlightenment? Paul Wood speculates that the persons belonged to the inner-circle of Reid were afraid that Reid's favourable attitude toward French Revolution could ruin the social approval of Scottish moral philosophy in the midst of counter-revolutionary sentiments. Some passages in the paper could have been critical. They decided to present Reid as a modest philosopher and published politically safer parts of it. One of his students and his good friends, Dugald Stewart, wrote his biography that described Reid as a calm and respectable philosopher, although Stewart was not a conservative and spoke very radically in his lecture notes. In this case, discourses printed and handwritten were conveying contradictory messages and functioning completely differently.

On considering philosophical discourses of the 18th century, we cannot take American ideas of "publish or perish" for granted, for opportunities including the access to knowledge are hierarchically classified and differently given to people according to the ranks and classes with which they were identified in an 18th century society. There was no one and united public sphere in the century. Therefore discourses spoken and written had different functions according to the types of spheres within which they circulated.

The books were oriented to the widest range of receivers, although many academic books were still circulated by booking lists. Lectures at universities must have been regarded as one of the ways to "publish" teachers' views. They were often written down by the hands of students, beautifully bound, circulated and preserved in individuals' libraries. To listen or read lectures was a privilege, because very few young people had access to higher education in the century. Hand-written papers like "The Utopian Paper" gave another way to make authors' thoughts and opinions known to the far more limited number of receivers. Scientists were still used to communicate with each other by "academic correspondence", for formal scientific communities were yet to be institutionalized in the next century. It was also a secure way of writing socially controversial themes and even mathematicians had such kinds of subjects. They were all "public" discourses, in the way that, although they were created to be circulated within privileged few, the communities within which they were spoken, written and transmitted were not "intimate spheres", the circles of relatives and friends, but the associations and networks in which the members of them considered themselves to be engaged in something important, something useful to a society, such as literary activities, scientific researches and policy making, in other words, engaged in something "public", and they were supposed not to be private persons, but to be public persons when they were in the associations and networks.

However, public sphere has always been segmented, even in contemporary societies where, formally, information is considered to be open to everyone. There are legal and institutional frameworks in today's society, the constitutional freedom of

speech, academic societies, mass media, the nationwide and the world wide distribution of books or the system of public library, to guarantee every member of a society to be at least a receiver of information circulating in it. Furthermore, Internet supplies even the opportunity to be a sender, too. But substantially the most of population is still alienated by the lack of skills needed to get access to certain and valuable knowledge. In particular, both specialization and professional interest block the entry of ordinary people into the circulation network of scientific and political knowledge.

The segmentation in the 18th century is only different in kind. Jürgen Habermas' original concept of public sphere has been criticized that his examples were bourgeois communities, small in scale and only wealthy and privileged people could join them. The circuit of information flow in the century was not only substantially, as in the case of high illiteracy ratio, but also formally and institutionally divided due to the lack of institutional support to open up information to general public, such as the limited distribution of books and the existence of censorship and, generally, the class structure of societies. The largest and widespread institutions that assumed information flow were churches but naturally they only dealt with the certain kind information in very biased ways. Other institutions, universities and societies were only for selected people. It is very likely that senders in such a society sometimes consciously took the advantage of the stratification of information flow, just as today's politicians manipulate the asymmetry of information.

(6) The structure of "public discursive sphere" and its usage

Reid actually "published" his interesting and challenging ideas in a way or another. Or to use a more precise expression, he created some forms of discourses based on his ideas that he himself thought to be worth sending, at least, to friendly, intelligent and careful receivers who were able to interpret the texts correctly as the sender intended. At the same time, he did not write books or printed papers about some subjects in which he displayed ingenuity. In the case of "The Utopian Paper", receivers got completely different information about the same issue according to the kinds of discourse to which they had access.

The study of 18th century manuscripts as the forms of discourses shed light, not only on the nature and contents of the materials, but also on the very nature of the printed books of the same authors. All these arguments inevitably bring us to the following question: what is a "book", or the meaning and intention of writing a "book", in the variety of discourses of 18th century writings? These questions could be redefined further like these: what are the "meanings" of the major works of the Enlightenment, such as *The Wealth of Nations*, *The History of Civil Society* and *An Inquiry into the Human Nature*? Are they really meant to be sincere confessions of the beliefs and the representations in the form of printed books of the conclusions of scientific investigations done by the authors as contemporary scientific papers are, and, of course, pretend to be? Or are they rather the means of strategic actions of the authors

who consciously employed their great rhetorical skills to manipulate readers' minds in order to create intended effects upon public sphere, just as contemporary political discourses are?

In other words, we are still not sure whether we are right in reading their "books" in the way that we read contemporary academic papers. However, one thing is certain. The language of a book in the century was targeted to remote readers compared to other kinds of discourses available to authors. Books thus consist of the kind of discourses that were most distant from the intimate sphere to which the authors belonged, therefore it could be representing the "formal" and "public" selves of the persons, rather than the individual and private existences of the authors.

Of course, contemporary scholars still can insist that the matters worth studying to them are the things that authors wanted to say to the wider public than their intimate circles consisted of their friends and colleagues. However, if we interpret the major texts of the Enlightenment in the way, we are in danger of naively taking the literal expressions of the books for granted, in other words, being "cheated" by 18th century writers.

Literary theory warns us that the "meaning" of a text is not self-evident. Seeking what an author really meant in a text is like peeling skins of an onion in order to find the core of it. Even diaries were written, not as the sincere confessions of authors, but to present authors' self-images. It is true that texts exist relatively by themselves. They formed a world of "texts", reflecting and relating with each other, creating cobwebs of references between words. But it is also self-evidently true that texts would never have existed, if there had not been authors who had written them consciously, with intentions and purposes.

Texts create their own histories, sometimes regardless of their creators' expectations and strategies. But they are the products of speech acts and the every action to write something must have been activated by somebody's desire at the first moment. In other words, there must be a human being behind the bulky volumes of papers called "classics". The viewpoint of looking at 18th century texts under the light of discourse would reminds us of this very simple fact that, along with the textuality of a text, contextuality cannot be ignored, too.