

ABSTRACT

CARROLL, ASHLEY. "Preparing the Youthful Mind for Virtuous Actions:" Adam Ferguson at the University of Edinburgh. (Under the direction of Dr. Anthony La Vopa).

Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) has not fared well in Scottish Enlightenment scholarship. He has either been relegated to the historical periphery in favor of the luminaries of the period, or has been studied only as a member of the "moderate" literati, a group of university trained Presbyterian clerics. The latter approach has been traditionally taken when examining Ferguson's career at the University of Edinburgh. While many members of the Scottish literati played key roles in the Scottish university system in the eighteenth century, Ferguson's teaching goals set him apart from his contemporaries.

Ferguson used his classroom and written works to instruct his students on how to be virtuous citizens and act within the public sphere. His teachings were rarely innocuous and often contradicted the beliefs of the "moderates" with whom he is so often grouped. For Ferguson, teaching was a form of political activism. Ferguson hoped to stop the moral and political corruption that he believed accompanied eighteenth-century economic prosperity by shaping his students to fit his mold of the ideal citizen.

This paper examines Ferguson's career at the University of Edinburgh, focusing specifically on how he attempted to change the society in which he lived through teaching the country's future leaders. It is also hoped that studying Ferguson independent of his fellow "moderates" will provide a more nuanced and accurate representation of Ferguson than is currently available in historical scholarship.

**“PREPARING THE YOUTHFUL MIND FOR VIRTUOUS ACTIONS:”
ADAM FERGUSON AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH**

by
ASHLEY NICOLE CARROLL

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APPROVED BY:

DR. MI GYUNG KIM

DR. K. STEVEN VINCENT

DR. ANTHONY LA VOPA
CHAIR OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

BIOGRAPHY

Ashley Carroll was born and raised in South Carolina. Ashley graduated magna cum laude from Furman University with a B.A. in History in 2005 and will receive her Master of Arts in History from North Carolina State University in May, 2007. In the fall of 2007, she will begin her doctoral studies in history at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Chapter One: *The Adam Ferguson Problem*

The publication of *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* in 1767 made its author, Adam Ferguson, an overnight sensation throughout his native Scotland and continental Europe. He was discussed in most literary circles and many of the greatest minds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cited him as an ideological influence. Despite this, Ferguson has been relegated to the historical periphery in favor of the “giants” of the period. When Ferguson is studied, though, it is usually only as a member of a group of moderate, educated clergymen. Both of these approaches are problematic. The first implies that Ferguson is of limited historical importance and the second presumes that Ferguson’s beliefs and life experiences were not unique enough to justify studying him individually. Neither of these suppositions is correct. In order to have an historically accurate understanding of Ferguson and his contributions to the Enlightenment, it is necessary to re-examine his life and works.

Scottish Enlightenment studies experienced a surge in popularity in the 1980s with the publication of Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff’s *Wealth and Virtue*.¹ Since its publication in 1983, countless articles and books have been written about Scotland’s period of intellectual greatness. Most of these publications have centered on Adam Smith and David Hume, the two intellectuals whose influence and writings have proven the most enduring. Other figures of the Enlightenment, including Ferguson, have simply been overshadowed by these two luminaries. Ferguson is often overlooked in general histories of the Scottish Enlightenment and, when he is referenced, he is rarely afforded

¹ Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds. *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

more than a few short paragraphs.² There just does not seem to be much scholarly interest in Ferguson.³ Only two critical editions of the *Essay* have been published in the two hundred forty years since its initial publication and his complete correspondence was not published until 1995.⁴ Additionally, his complete works have yet to be published, making many of his more obscure writings difficult to locate outside of Scotland.⁵ The only reason Ferguson's *The History of the Proceedings in the Case of Margaret, commonly called Peg, only lawful Sister to John Bull, Esq.*, a pamphlet about the need for a Scottish militia, is easily available is because, at one point, it was thought to be the work of Hume.⁶ The difficulty involved in accessing Ferguson's primary works is certainly one of the reasons (if not the primary reason) for the scarcity of secondary scholarship. Nevertheless, his influence and intellectual contributions to the Scottish

² This is true of *Wealth and Virtue*, in which Ferguson is generally only discussed in relation to Hume or Smith. Also, Knud Haakonssen's *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* only discusses Ferguson in the context of being Dugald Stewart's predecessor at the University of Edinburgh. This is an odd omission for a text that proposes to discuss moral philosophy, as Ferguson is generally viewed as being responsible for revitalizing the university's moral philosophy program. John Dwyer's *Virtuous Discourse* resigns Ferguson to the footnotes. It would be impossible to list every book that has excluded (or only mentioned in passing) Ferguson and his contributions to the Enlightenment, so these texts are merely meant to serve as an example. Lest it be thought, though, that Ferguson has been entirely neglected, it should be noted that, in the last four decades, two English-language books have been devoted to him. In 1965, David Kettler published *The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson*. Lisa Hill also published a text entitled *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political, and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* in 2006. Although not entirely devoted to Ferguson, Fania Oz-Salzberger's *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* devotes considerable time to Ferguson's influence in Germany.

³ It appears that this is slowly beginning to change. A compilation of essays that discuss Ferguson's ideas about history, progress, and human nature is expected to be published by Pickering and Chatto in the fall of 2007.

⁴ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966). Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Vincenzo Merolle, ed., *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volumes I and II* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995).

⁵ It may soon be easier to locate all of Ferguson's writings. Eugene Heath is editing a selection of Ferguson's philosophical texts for publication in September, 2007.

⁶ Anonymous [Ferguson?]. *The History of the proceedings in the case of Margaret, commonly called Peg, only Lawful sister to John Bull*, ed. David Raynor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See chapter three for a detailed explanation of why this work is now believed to have been authored by Ferguson.

Enlightenment make the lack of focused attention on his life and works historically inaccurate.

The lack of scholarly material about Ferguson provides an inaccurate representation of his importance during the Enlightenment. Ferguson's works were well-read throughout Great Britain and his publications were "translated into the major European languages as soon as the books appeared," making his work accessible to all of continental Europe.⁷ He was especially successful in Germany, where he was "favourite reading" for the educated and literary minded.⁸ The Germans also referred to him as "the noble Ferguson" and the "sage of our century."⁹ Outside of Europe, Ferguson found an audience for his *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769) in the American colonies.¹⁰ Beyond attracting an audience, Ferguson's ideas and beliefs proved influential to many of the greatest intellectuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, and Johann Herder.¹¹ In addition to writing, Ferguson spent twenty six years as a highly respected professor at the University of Edinburgh, played an instrumental role in the Scottish militia debates of the mid-eighteenth century, and served as a commissioner to the rebellious American colonies after the outbreak of the American Revolution.¹² Given his intellectual,

⁷ David Kettler, *The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1965), 3. Some of the people who read and commented on Ferguson within Britain include: James Beattie, Thomas Gray, Lord Kames, and Elizabeth Montagu.

⁸ Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 130.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, "The Pursuit of Virtue in Scottish University Education: Dugald Stewart and Scottish Moral Philosophy in the Enlightenment," in *Universities, Society, and the Future*, ed. Nicholas Phillipson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 83.

¹¹ Kettler, 3-5.

Oz-Salzberger, 130-137.

¹² Oz-Salzberger. See later sections for further discussion of Ferguson's professorial career and his involvement with the militia debate and American Revolution.

political, and social contributions, it is surprising that Ferguson is so often treated as a minor historical figure. Some historians have recognized this error and have, as a result, included Ferguson in their discussions of various aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment. Too often in these works, though, Ferguson is studied only as a member of a group of “like-minded” Scottish intellectuals, a representation that is as misleading as his exclusion from some sources.

Ferguson is most frequently associated with a group that Richard Sher has termed the “moderate literati of Edinburgh.”¹³ Members of the moderate literati included Ferguson, Alexander Carlyle, William Robertson, John Home, and Hugh Blair. All five men attended the University of Edinburgh’s school of theology and all became ministers in the Church of Scotland in the 1740s. The appellation “moderate” arose as a result of their involvement in the formation of the moderate party within the Church of Scotland.¹⁴ More importantly, though, these men were friends who supported and encouraged each other without fail.¹⁵ It is because of their well-documented friendships and similar educational and professional backgrounds that these men are more frequently studied as a group than as individuals. Historians assume that, because of these similarities and how close they were with each other, they had similar belief systems.¹⁶ While this assumption may hold true for the other members of the moderate literati, it does not do so for

¹³ Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ Although the moderate party wanted to enact all manner of change within the Church of Scotland, their main goal was to depart from the traditional fire and brimstone teachings of the church in favor of a more enlightened and polite brand of Christianity. For a more detailed explanation of their beliefs and involvement in the Enlightenment, see chapter two.

¹⁵ Sher, 23-93.

¹⁶ Failing to study Ferguson as an individual does not happen as often as failing to consider Ferguson at all, but, to read examples of this, see Richard Sher’s *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* or John Robertson’s *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*. Also worth noting is Gladys Bryson’s *Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century*. Although she does not discuss Ferguson as a member of the moderate literati, she does refer to him as “typical” and “representative of the Scottish group,” which is equally problematic. Bryson, 30.

Ferguson. Although there were certainly some issues on which Ferguson and the other members of the moderate literati were in agreement, this method of studying and discussing him ultimately misrepresents his beliefs by ignoring the unique aspects of his life and ideas.

Adam Ferguson's upbringing was quite unusual when compared to that of the other moderates. Born in Logierait in 1723, Ferguson spent his formative years in the Scottish Highlands, an area of the country that contrasted drastically with that of the Lowlands, the region where most of his contemporary intellectuals were raised. During his time in the Highlands, Ferguson was exposed to clan society and became fluent in Gaelic, the native tongue of the Highlanders.¹⁷ After attending the University of Edinburgh's school of theology, Ferguson was ordained as a minister in 1746 and appointed deputy chaplain to the Black Watch.¹⁸ Although he had not fulfilled all the requirements for the ministry, Ferguson's fluency in Gaelic as well as his familiarity with the Highlands made him a successful chaplain. Ferguson spent several years with the Black Watch before resigning his commission in 1754 in order to find a parish in Scotland. After this search failed, Ferguson set off on a period of "wandering and uncertainty" during which he traveled throughout continental Europe.¹⁹ This period in his life would prove to be very decisive in forming Ferguson's temperament and beliefs.

¹⁷ Not only did Ferguson spend his youth in the Highlands, his maternal uncle was a Scottish laird, further exposing him to clan culture. Jane B. Fagg, "Introduction," *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), xx.

¹⁸ The Black Watch was a regiment of Scottish Highlanders in the British military that, at that time, was stationed in continental Europe.

¹⁹ Fagg, xxv.

It was during his period of wandering that Ferguson decided to leave the ministry, a decision that would further differentiate him from the other moderates.²⁰ While traveling, Ferguson also developed a restless spirit that would plague him for his entire life. Unlike his fellow moderates, Ferguson needed constant activity and was unable to stay in one place, or occupational post, for long periods of time. Prior to being appointed a professor at the University of Edinburgh, Ferguson had a string of positions, some of which lasted only a few short months. His friends despaired of him ever settling down.²¹ Even after accepting the position at Edinburgh, he would occasionally abandon his wife, family, and teaching position to pursue other interests.²² Ferguson's restless and energetic spirit impacted more than just his daily life, though. It is also evident in much of his writings, particularly those on human nature and citizenship. The common thread throughout these writings is an emphasis on activity and man's need to constantly progress. Ferguson firmly believed that almost all of society's problems would be solved if man could channel this natural energy toward the good of society. He also believed that political activity in the form of vigorous and contentious political debate was necessary in order to have a virtuous polity. The other members of the moderate literati encouraged Ferguson in his intellectual pursuits, but their own beliefs often contradicted those of Ferguson. Where Ferguson wanted a robust, mildly turbulent polity, other moderates wanted tranquility and peacefulness. They did not agree that conflict and continuous activity were necessary for virtue or stability.²³ When Ferguson is not studied

²⁰ While the other moderates took on a variety of jobs (Robertson was principal at Edinburgh, Home was a playwright), all continued to be ministers. Ferguson could not rightly claim that title after 1754. Even though he never demitted and continued to be active in church governance during his life, his tenure with the Black Watch was his only ecclesiastical post.

²¹ Fagg, xxv.

²² Ibid, cxxxvii-cxl.

²³ Sher, 23-147.

separately from the other members of the moderate literati, these fundamental differences in thought can be overlooked. In order to present an accurate representation, this methodology must be abandoned and Ferguson must be studied independent of the moderates.

The goal of this paper is to provide a nuanced understanding of Ferguson that takes into account how he diverged from more familiar Scottish Enlightenment thought. This will be done by examining his tenure as professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. At a time when political activity and participation generally required direct action, Ferguson attempted to indirectly enact political change by transforming his professorship into a platform for political activism. His primary goal was to save Britain from the social ills that accompanied economic prosperity. Ferguson worried that wealth, luxury, and the pursuit of material goods was making Britain a less virtuous society. Although almost every notable eighteenth-century Scottish intellectual discussed the problems brought about by rapid economic development, Ferguson was particularly aggressive in his attempts to save British society from what he viewed as certain ruin. Ferguson sought to correct the problems he perceived in British society one student at a time. By teaching his students, who would one day go on to become social and political leaders, to realize his vision of citizenship and activity in the public sphere, Ferguson hoped to spare Britain further moral decay.

Chapter Two: *Professor of Moral Philosophy*

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the University of Edinburgh was suffering from centuries of neglect and intellectual stagnation. Over the course of the century, though, the university benefited from the economic and intellectual revitalization that accompanied Scotland's union with England. By the mid-1760s, the University of Edinburgh was a respected academic institution and the center of the Scottish Enlightenment. Many factors, including the effects of union, contributed to this change, but it was the efforts of a group of moderate clergymen that proved most beneficial. The moderates breathed new life into the university by instituting critical administrative changes and hiring new and innovative faculty members. Adam Ferguson, Edinburgh's professor of moral philosophy, was one of the new hires who contributed to the rising prestige of the university. During his tenure, Ferguson altered the way moral philosophy was taught and transformed his course into one of the most popular at the university. The moderates had hoped for this level of success, but, what they did not anticipate was Ferguson pursuing an agenda in the classroom that did not mirror their own. Instead, Ferguson took advantage of his popularity and introduced his vision for a new and virtuous polity to the people who would one day govern Great Britain.

The problems facing the University of Edinburgh during the first part of the eighteenth century were numerous and pervasive. Professors were overburdened, underpaid, and generally uninterested in teaching. The largest obstacle to effective teaching was the regent system which required professors to remain with the same group of students from matriculation to completion, teaching all courses along the way. Not

only did this hinder faculty specialization, it also served to dampen the professor's enthusiasm since they were required to teach subjects in which they had little interest or knowledge.¹ Furthermore, the instructors were not generally lauded for their teaching skills as most classes consisted of the professor reading directly from notes in Latin. Besides being "arid" and "dull," this teaching method was pedagogically unsound given that most students did not possess sufficient knowledge of Latin to follow course lectures.² To make matters worse, the only classical language the university taught was Greek, so, unless the student was particularly self-motivated, it was unlikely he would ever fully understand lectures.³ Despite these problems, the university administration was reluctant to part from centuries of tradition.⁴ All of this combined to create a stifled and lethargic academic environment that was in desperate need of change.

Reforms to the university began under the direction of Principal William Carstares, but the severity of Edinburgh's situation was such that it required decades to solve all problems.⁵ Among the more important changes that occurred during the first half of the eighteenth century was the abolishment of the regent system in 1708 in favor of chairs of individual departments. This allowed for professorial specialization.⁶ For some courses, the university also instituted the practice of professors directly collecting student fees, thus providing professors with an incentive to attract students to their

¹ H. Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: R&R Clark, Ltd., 1950), 448-450.

² Ibid, 463.

³ Ibid, 452-455.

⁴ To be fair, the university lacked the funds that would have been necessary to enact any type of major reform.

⁵ Carstares was principal from 1703-1716.

⁶ Graham, 452.

courses.⁷ And, ever so slowly, some professors began to teach in English.⁸ These reforms were certainly a step in the right direction, but, even in the 1740s, some courses at the university were known to be ordeals of “exceptional dullness” with little academic merit.⁹ Edinburgh’s reputation truly began to change, though, once the effects of Scotland’s political union with England began to be felt.

Following the Treaty of Union in 1707, Scotland dissolved its parliament in exchange for a small fraction of seats in the new British Parliament at Westminster. As a result, most of the wealthier members of the nobility left Scotland for London, leaving the country without its traditional ruling class.¹⁰ Scotland, and particularly Edinburgh, suffered greatly from this loss. Homes that had been occupied by members of the upper classes fell into disrepair, social gatherings became infrequent, and merchants who had previously catered to the needs of the nobility moved away.¹¹ The void in society created by the exodus of the nobility was not filled until the middle of the eighteenth century when Scottish thinkers and members of the landed gentry began to assume the social and political roles formerly occupied by members of the upper echelons of society.¹² It is not surprising that members of the landed gentry played an important role in post-Union

⁷ Richard Sher, “Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), 90.

⁸ This was not mandated by the university, but was rather something professor’s chose on an individual basis. According to H. Grey Graham, “as a rule, the duller and more pedantic the professor was,...the more tenaciously he kept to this time-honoured custom.” Graham, 454.

⁹ *Ibid*, 467.

¹⁰ Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History*, (London: Pimlico, 1991), 318.

¹¹ Nicholas Phillipson, “Culture and Society in the Eighteenth-Century Province: The Case of Edinburgh and the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *The University in Society: Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 420-421.

¹² *Ibid*, 411.

Scottish governance. Although they did not have titles and, more often than not, were not particularly wealthy, they owned land and were viewed as having a stake in society.

Their close collaboration with Scottish thinkers, however, was highly unusual. Scottish thinkers were a varied group consisting of professors, “students and ex-students from the university, young ministers, doctors, and lawyers from the ranks of the...bourgeoisie, and poorer classes.”¹³ By assuming such a critical role in society, the Scottish thinkers inverted many traditional notions of social hierarchy. In France, for example, it would have been inconceivable that professors, yet alone members of the “poorer classes,” could achieve any measure of cultural authority.¹⁴ The French often viewed professors and academics as unrefined pedants who were incapable of fully integrating into polite society. This was not true in Scotland. Due to their work with the members of the landed gentry, the Scottish thinkers were respected and valued members of society. This collaboration proved fruitful. In their roles as social and political leaders, the Scottish thinkers and landed gentry emphasized modernization and improvement, eventually ushering in a period of unprecedented intellectual activity.¹⁵

The University of Edinburgh was at the center of this new socio-political order. Not only did the university serve as a central hub for intellectual exchange and debate, but it was also the common factor that united the thinkers and members of the landed gentry. Most of the prominent thinkers in Edinburgh were associated with the university,

¹³ Ibid, 425.

¹⁴ Ibid, 425, 447.

¹⁵ Ibid, 438.

either as faculty members or administrators.¹⁶ It was the responsibility of the university to educate the members of the landed gentry, so the university became a place where the two social groups could mix. In their roles as professors, the thinkers solidified their importance in post-union Scotland because they had the ability to influence how the members of the landed gentry thought about all manner of issues, including governance, citizenship, commerce, and the need for improvement within Scotland. The university benefited greatly from this association with the two groups that comprised Edinburgh's "dominant elite."¹⁷ Since the professors and administrators at the university were respected and granted a social status that few of their predecessors ever enjoyed, they were able to make changes and reforms that their predecessors could not. At the helm of the university during these heady years was a group of moderate clergymen, who are frequently referred to as the "moderate literati of Edinburgh."¹⁸

The moderate literati of Edinburgh included William Robertson, Hugh Blair, John Home, Alexander Carlyle, and Adam Ferguson. All of these men entered the clergy in the 1740s and were connected by similar familial and educational backgrounds.¹⁹ The name "moderate" arose as a result of the group having founded the moderate party within the Scottish church's governing body. The moderates rejected the traditional fire and

¹⁶ The one notable exception to this was David Hume. Despite many attempts at acquiring a university chair, the fact that he was an atheist prevented him from ever being hired by the university.

¹⁷ Phillipson, 410.

¹⁸ Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57. Although this point was made in chapter one, it should be re-emphasized that, in many cases, the term "moderate" is a misnomer when applied to Ferguson, as will be explained further in later sections. While Ferguson was technically a moderate, inasmuch that he counted himself a member of the moderate party of the national assembly, in matters political and social, he often differed from the other members of the group. More often than not, the moderates were joined together through bonds of friendship and not necessarily identical ideologies.

brimstone teachings of the Kirk in favor of an emphasis on morality and redemption. They valued learning, culture, polite society, and eventually became leaders within the Scottish Enlightenment. Prior to their involvement at the University of Edinburgh, the moderates encouraged all manner of cultural and intellectual growth, going so far as to reject many of the church laws that hindered involvement in the arts.²⁰ It was after solidifying their influence within the church that the moderates turned their attention toward the university.

While their predecessors were able to make basic changes in the university infrastructure, the moderates had the public support and resources that were needed to transform the university into a dynamic and rigorous institution. The moderates, led by Principal William Robertson, increased faculty wages and hired young, innovative scholars to revive dead or dying chairs.²¹ By the mid-1760s, the only area in which Edinburgh lagged behind its peer institutions was moral philosophy. The University of Glasgow could claim Gershom Carmichael (1672-1729), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) and Adam Smith (1723-1790), all of whom had garnered acclaim in the field, but the University of Edinburgh had not fared nearly as well.²² Indeed, the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh was occupied by mediocre professors who had no great love of

²⁰ Perhaps the most famous instance of this was the *Douglas* affair of 1755-57. *Douglas* was a play written by John Home about virtue and patriotism. Home staged the play in Edinburgh, even though he had not obtained the requisite license and church law forbid clerical participation in the theatre. A pamphlet war ensued and, at its peak, members of the moderate party were brought before the church on religious charges. For more information, see Sher's *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, especially pages 74-86.

²¹ Sher, *Church and University*, 139-141. Most of the new hires were connected in some way to the moderates. While this was blatant nepotism, the new faculty members were very well qualified for their positions and contributed greatly to the prestige of the university.

²² Adam Smith, though technically never a chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow, did contribute substantially to the field with the publication of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759.

the subject matter and proved a source of “embarrassment” for the university.²³ Due to the nature of academic appointments in the eighteenth century, this was not an easy problem to correct. Appointments were a matter of patronage and James Balfour, the chair of moral philosophy between 1754 and 1764, “had extensive kinship ties within the Whig-Presbyterian world” of eighteenth-century Scotland.²⁴ Once he was appointed, it became clear that Balfour, who was content to continue Edinburgh’s tradition of mediocrity in moral philosophy, had not been a good choice. He did nothing to distinguish himself as a professor, choosing instead to devote considerable class time to methodically disproving David Hume’s writings and not to a discussion of moral philosophy.²⁵ Once hired, though, Balfour could not be dismissed since professorial appointments were life-long.²⁶ The moderates believed that “the reputation of the university was suffering from [Balfour’s] ineptitude” and tried many different tactics to encourage him to voluntarily vacate the chair. In 1761, Balfour was offered an appointment as a commissary clerk, plus “additional compensation.”²⁷ He refused. The town council, which was responsible for approving university appointments, joined forces with Lord Milton, “the most powerful local figure of the day,” and put more pressure on Balfour to resign.²⁸ Again, he refused. In 1764, the council presented an opportunity that Balfour could not decline. He was appointed to Edinburgh’s chair of public law and given an annual salary of two hundred pounds. Not only did this

²³ Sher, “Professors of Virtue,” 113.

²⁴ Ibid, 109.

²⁵ Ibid, 110-111.

²⁶ Ibid, 114.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 113.

arrangement double the salary that Balfour received as chair of moral philosophy, but his appointment to the chair of public law also freed him of all teaching duties.²⁹ The moderates were finally able to appoint a man whom they believed possessed “that rare blend of learning and scholarship, pedagogical dedication and charisma, enlightened principles, polite manners, and Whig Presbyterian values.”³⁰ In 1764, the town council and Principal William Robertson appointed Adam Ferguson, a fellow moderate and the university’s chair of natural philosophy, to the position. Within the span of a few short years, Ferguson transformed the moral philosophy course from an embarrassment to the capstone of an Edinburgh education.

During his tenure as professor of natural philosophy, Ferguson honed his teaching skills and adapted the role of professor to fit his naturally energetic and lively personality. Ferguson believed teaching to be his “calling,” a belief that is reflected in his devotion to improving how university courses were taught.³¹ Far from being pedantic and dull, Ferguson lectured in English and rarely read from his notes, choosing instead to speak extemporaneously. He also frequently revised and published lecture outlines for the benefit of his pupils.³² His most innovative classroom addition, though, was the assignment and discussion of student essays, a relatively unusual practice. Occasionally, Ferguson would devote an entire class meeting to discussing student essays of particular interest. As original as some of Ferguson’s teaching methods undoubtedly were, the

²⁹ Ibid, 116.

³⁰ Ibid, 113.

³¹ Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), v.

³² Sher, “Professors of Virtue,” 116.

substance of what Ferguson taught was far more important than the manner in which he taught it.

Ferguson did not believe, as one of his predecessors to the chair of moral philosophy did, that the sole purpose of teaching was to prepare students to think for themselves.³³ Instead, borrowing heavily from Francis Hutcheson, Ferguson treated his classroom like a pulpit, preaching to his students about morality, virtue, citizenship, and governance.³⁴ Ferguson wanted to prepare his students for lives “of useful observations and worthy conduct.”³⁵ In order to attain this goal, he taught his students the moral, political, and social norms to which they should commit themselves. This approach proved to be very popular. Several years after completing their education at Edinburgh, some of Ferguson’s former students reflected fondly on their professor, whom they remembered as “the first philosopher of his day” who possessed an ability to deliver lectures that enthralled and interested even those “not much addicted to study.”³⁶ Enrollment in the course also speaks volumes about Ferguson’s popularity. In 1764 only thirty nine students were registered for moral philosophy, but by 1766, one hundred thirteen students were enrolled in his course.³⁷ This spike in attendance meant many things. First and foremost, it signified a change in fortune for the professor. Ferguson was permitted to collect fees from all of his students and, at the height of his career, these

³³ Ibid, 107. I am referring here to William Cleghorn, who held the chair of moral philosophy from 1745 until his death in 1754. In his lectures, he told his students that “the design of this course is to set you a thinking by your selves.”

³⁴ Ibid, 94-99.

³⁵ Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, (New York: Garland Publishers, 1978) 108-109.

³⁶ Sher, “Professors of Virtue,” 119.

³⁷ Jane B. Fagg, “Introduction,” *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), xxxvii.

fees more than doubled his base university salary. The change in attendance also indicated that the chair of moral philosophy was no longer an embarrassment, but had instead become one of the central components of an Edinburgh education. With the appointment of Ferguson, the moderates were able to raise the chair “to new heights of popularity and prestige.”³⁸ While the moderates had hoped for this outcome, there were also some unintended consequences of appointing Ferguson to the chair.

The goal of an Edinburgh education under the moderates was to transform students into educated, patriotic, and religiously moderate men.³⁹ All of these goals were certainly important to Ferguson, but it is equally true that he intended to encourage social and political change through his teaching. He had the perfect audience for such a lofty goal. The students at the University of Edinburgh in the mid-eighteenth century came from a wide variety of backgrounds, but, after graduation, a large portion went on to careers within civic institutions, including the church, courts, university system, and posts within the Scottish and British government.⁴⁰ Through teaching, Ferguson hoped to instruct Britain’s future leaders on how to solve the problems he saw in Britain. He was convinced that Britain’s emerging commercial society was leading the country toward ruin. Luxury and wealth had bred greed and a variety of other social ills. A man’s character was no longer measured by personal merit, but was instead determined by what he owned and whether or not he was a member of polite society. Worst of all, people had become so focused on attaining material goods that they often forgot to fulfill their duties

³⁸ Sher, *Profs of Virtue*, 125.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 113.

⁴⁰ Graham, 455.

as citizens.⁴¹ He aimed to correct these problems by teaching his students how to be virtuous citizens and how to act in the public sphere.

Ferguson's notions of citizenship were based largely on classical republican ideology. He expected citizens to actively take part in the affairs of the state, placing the needs of the state above any individual desires. Ferguson believed that citizens should be willing to sacrifice their individual wants and, if necessary, their lives to ensure the success and safety of the state.⁴² Additionally, the public sphere in which citizens acted should be robust and mildly turbulent. These ideas were not innocuous. Although not always noted by historians, what Ferguson taught often contradicted traditional moderate ideology.⁴³ While the moderates acknowledged that wealth and luxury could have negative effects, they also believed that some of the effects of wealth and luxury, such as the emergence of polite society, had a positive civilizing effect.⁴⁴ They certainly did not believe that the problems caused by economic prosperity necessitated the rigorous and demanding solution that Ferguson proposed. The moderates also believed that tranquility, and not turbulence, should be hoped for in the public sphere. For Ferguson, though, tranquility and complaisance only led to corruption.⁴⁵ As professor of one of the most popular courses at the university, Ferguson was in a position to spread these ideas to

⁴¹ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995),42-57.

⁴² Adam Ferguson, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia*, (London: R. and J. Dodsley,1756).

⁴³ It is unclear how much the moderates knew about Ferguson's beliefs when they supported his appointment to the chair of moral philosophy. None of his major works that outline his beliefs about citizenship and governance had been published prior to his appointment, though.

⁴⁴ Mary Catherine Moran, "Between the Savage and the Civil: Dr. John Gregory's Natural History of Femininity," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 8-29.

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Essay*, 63.

a group of people who would, upon receiving their degrees, have the power to enact change. Although it can not be argued that Ferguson's use of his university position was a form of direct political action, he was, nonetheless, acting politically when he taught.

There were many ways in which one could act politically in the eighteenth century. Direct political action, meaning actions performed with the intent of directly influencing a specific aspect of the government or power structure, was a popular and, at times, "fashionable" means of agitating for change.⁴⁶ Direct political action could include writing pamphlets, petitioning parliament, and, in extreme cases, rioting.⁴⁷ Ferguson did occasionally engage in direct political action, mostly in the form of pamphlet writing. In 1757, he wrote a pamphlet that contested a Scottish church law that forbade stage plays, throughout the 1750s and 1760s he published several pamphlets about the Scottish militia debate and, during the American Revolution, he wrote a pamphlet that rejected all attempts to justify the actions of the rebellious colonies.⁴⁸ In general, though, Ferguson resisted participating in direct action, fearing that "it might jeopardize [the] stability" of the country.⁴⁹ Extreme forms of direct action, in Ferguson's mind, allowed "enthusiasm [to] rise above all considerations of reason...or public

⁴⁶ David Kettler, *The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1965), 86.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Adam Ferguson, *Morality of Stage Plays Seriously Considered* (Edinburgh, 1757). Adam Ferguson, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1756). Anonymous [Ferguson?], *The History of the proceedings in the case of Margaret, commonly called Peg, only Lawful sister to John Bull* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Adam Ferguson, *Remarks on a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr. Price, intitled, Observations on the Nature of civil liberty, the principles of government, and the Justice and Policy of the war with America, etc. in a letter from a Gentleman in the Country to a Member of Parliament* (London: T. Cadell, 1776).

⁴⁹ Kettler, 84.

order.”⁵⁰ Social stability and public order were of the utmost importance to Ferguson. He believed that any major changes to the British political or social system should occur when the courts and Parliament, not the common people, “decided to change it.”⁵¹ Due to these beliefs, indirect forms of political action were often more appealing to Ferguson than direct action. Ferguson wanted to take “an active part in shaping his world,” but only wanted to do so in ways that would not threaten the stability he held dear.⁵² Teaching was one way in which Ferguson could do this. Through teaching, Ferguson hoped to influence how his students thought about issues of citizenship and governance. Then, when they became members of the courts and Parliament, they would be more likely to legally and peacefully introduce the changes to British society that Ferguson found necessary. Ferguson’s ability to influence his students was greatly aided by the high social status that professors and other Scottish thinkers enjoyed as a result of Scotland’s union with England. The university’s professors were prominent and respected members of society whose ideas were taken seriously. When Scottish academics proposed new ideas, the rest of society listened.⁵³ Ferguson, and his political goals, greatly benefited from this historical situation. His students lived in a society that recognized and respected the contributions of his profession. Ferguson took advantage of this and used his position at the university as a means of disseminating ideas that he believed could improve Britain’s civic and political systems.

⁵⁰ Adam Ferguson, “Adam Ferguson to John Macpherson, January 10, 1780,” in *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995).

⁵¹ Kettler, 85-86.

⁵² Kettler, 83.

⁵³ This did not necessarily mean that they always agreed with or implemented the ideas of academics.

Given the deplorable condition of the University of Edinburgh at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is remarkable that, by the middle of the century, it had transformed into a highly regarded academic institution. This could not have occurred without the social and political changes that accompanied union with England. The moderates took advantage of Edinburgh's unique post-union environment in different ways. Some, including Principal William Robertson, used the high social status that Scottish thinkers enjoyed following the union to carry out much needed reforms to the university. While Adam Ferguson did his best to increase the prestige and reputation of the university, it is also true that he hoped to use his status as a professor to achieve bigger goals. Ferguson diverged from other moderates by attempting to use his position as chair of moral philosophy to propose solutions to the problems he perceived in British society. Central to Ferguson's solution for Britain's social and political problems was a version of citizenship that combined his understanding of human nature with classical republican ideology.

Chapter Three: *Teaching Citizenship*

The economic prosperity that characterized the eighteenth century in Britain necessitated an evaluation of the influences of wealth and luxury on the moral fiber of society. Although almost all thinkers acknowledged that prosperity was often accompanied by various social ills, there was some disagreement about whether this corruption was pernicious enough to warrant an attempt to change society. Adam Ferguson was one of the few who believed that the problems associated with wealth were serious enough to justify change. He believed that prosperity was often accompanied by avarice, selfishness, and a dereliction of civic duty. Ferguson wanted to save Britain from moral decay, but he did not intend to do so by advocating the total elimination of wealth and commerce. Instead, he sought to teach his students and reading public how to approximate the ideal citizen. His vision of the ideal citizen was firmly rooted in his own understanding of human nature and classical republican ideas about citizenship. By drawing on these influences, Ferguson was able to present a modernized concept of citizenship. Ferguson's ideal citizen was politically active, patriotic, educated, and unambiguously masculine.

The Path to Corruption

During the eighteenth century, Great Britain developed into a highly commercialized society, reaping the benefits of a booming economy and vast overseas empire. In just under a century, the country's total net income increased by 731 percent.¹ As a result of its ever expanding empire, trade also flourished. Exports increased by 577

¹ Jeremy Gregory and John Stevenson, eds. *The Longman Companion to Britain in the Eighteenth Century, 1688-1820*, (London: Pearson Education Limited, 1988), 267-269.

percent and, more importantly, imports increased by 598 percent, flooding the British market with new and novel products.² The accessibility and affordability of luxury goods and materials aided the creation of a new consumer culture, causing the British to buy and sell at unprecedented levels.³ Social transformation accompanied this economic prosperity, allowing more people to enter the “middling ranks” of society than ever before.⁴ For many, this was a golden period in which the previously rigid nature of British society gave way to a more flexible social fabric in which success and economic independence were more attainable.⁵ The rapidity and magnitude of these changes, however, was also a cause for concern. Many believed that commerce and wealth brought a variety of social and moral ills. Wealth and luxury bred avarice, selfishness, and a single-minded focus on attaining material goods. As citizens became more concerned about the luxuries that wealth could bring, they increasingly neglected their country and fellow countrymen. Many philosophers and thinkers of the period addressed these problems, trying to find a way to eradicate the vice that accompanied excessive wealth without eliminating all of the luxuries and comforts that accompanied economic prosperity. Scottish thinkers were particularly aggressive in their quest to find a balance between wealth and virtue. This devotion is not surprising given how dramatic Scotland’s economic transformation was in the eighteenth century.

² Gregory and Stevenson, 277.

³ The term “luxury,” as Ferguson correctly points out in his *Essay*, was applied in so many different ways during the eighteenth century that its definition was rather indeterminate. For the purposes of this paper, Ferguson’s definition will be used. He defined luxury as a “device for the ease and convenience of life.” This could include “buildings, furniture, equipage, cloathing...refinement of the table” and other things that made life easier and more convenient. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 231-232.

⁴ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain: 1640-1990*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 60.

⁵ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 68.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Scotland was on the brink of economic and political disaster. The country's government was sharply divided by factions and the failed Darien scheme had left many of Scotland's most powerful families bankrupt. The English parliament had also crippled Scottish industry with the Alien Act of 1705, which banned "the importation to England of the main articles of Scottish trade."⁶ In order to prevent certain ruin, the Scottish parliament agreed to an official union with England in 1707.⁷ After this, the country's fortunes slowly began to change. By the end of the century, the urban centers of Scotland possessed populations and businesses that rivaled those of England, an occurrence that would have seemed next to impossible given the dire situation in the early part of the century. Unlike England, though, which had a history of economic prosperity prior to the economic boom of the eighteenth century, Scotland achieved economic stability in a relatively short period of time. Such dramatic social upheaval invited debate and questioning about whether a society could be both wealthy and virtuous. Most eventually decided that wealth and luxury were acceptable so long as the pursuit of wealth did not prevent people from fulfilling their moral and social obligations. Recently, historians have questioned the sincerity with which some thinkers approached this question, arguing that many were prejudiced by the fact that they were reaping, and enjoying, the benefits of Britain's

⁶ John Stuart Shaw, *The Political History of Eighteenth Century Scotland*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 1-17. The Darien scheme was an attempt to establish a Scottish colony on a Panamanian isthmus at the turn of the eighteenth century. Scotland invested nearly a quarter of its liquid assets into the doomed enterprise. Despite several attempts to settle Darien, the land proved too swampy and fever-ridden to sustain a colony. The financial repercussions of this failed venture were enormous. For more information about the Darien scheme, see Michael Lynch's *Scotland: A New History*, especially pages 307-309.

⁷ Much has been written about the circumstances that led the Scottish parliament to agree to union. Many present especially harsh criticisms of the English, accusing them of bribery and, in some cases, holding them responsible for the failure of Darien. For more, see chapter one of Shaw's *The Political History of Eighteenth-Century Scotland*.

economic prosperity.⁸ Although this critique may be well founded for some Scots, it does not hold true for Ferguson, who was intensely concerned that luxury and the desire for wealth had put Britain on the path to corruption.

According to Ferguson's *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1783), one of the principal reasons for the fall of the Roman Republic was that citizens began to place personal desires for wealth, opulence, and luxury ahead of the needs of the state. This eventually corrupted the entire society and led to its downfall.⁹ Although he noted that Britain had not advanced that far, Ferguson thought that the British needed to alter their behavior or suffer the same fate. Luxury and wealth had changed society, and not for the better. "The desire of profit" had stifled man's natural tendency toward progress and perfection.¹⁰ No longer were the "characters of men" determinant of personal worth and honor. Society instead equated personal nobility with how one dressed or the style in which a person lived.¹¹ Ferguson found Britain to be fixated on "titles, equipages, and distinctions."¹² Accompanying this obsession with status, wealth, and rank was a growing emphasis on polite behavior. Candor and frankness were not encouraged. It was much more important to appear polite and well bred at all times, even if that meant assuming a public persona that bore little resemblance to the private person. Ferguson believed that when love of material goods and wealth combined with this new stress on polite behavior, people often became so

⁸ John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1985) 147.

⁹ Lisa Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political, and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson*, (Dordrecht: Springer Press, 2006) 164.

¹⁰ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 206.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 42.

¹² *Ibid*, 43.

involved in pursuing their own goals and desires that they forgot their duties as citizens.¹³ Some, most notably Bernard Mandeville, theorized that this type of self-centered behavior ultimately led to the betterment of society. Ferguson, on the other hand, argued that all that resulted from selfish behavior was an “effeminate,” “sensual,” and weak country.¹⁴ Change was necessary in order to prevent further moral decay. Although Ferguson most likely wanted to see all forms of luxury and opulence removed from British society, he was more realistic in his goals. Ferguson recognized that it was unlikely that British society would eliminate the comforts that accompanied economic prosperity. They had come to enjoy them too much. Ferguson instead emphasized good citizenship. Wealth and luxury could be permitted in society, so long as the British people were good citizens and did not consider “conveniences as the principal objects of human life.”¹⁵ On the surface, this approach does not appear radically different from anything espoused by other Scottish thinkers. Ferguson’s devotion to finding and implementing a solution to this problem is what set him apart from his contemporaries. Almost all of Ferguson’s writings discuss regaining virtue through citizenship and, as professor of moral philosophy, much of his teaching was directed at molding Britain’s future leaders in accord with his vision of the ideal citizen. This vision for citizenship, although unique in many ways, was strongly influenced by his beliefs about human nature and his modernization of the classical republican tradition.

¹³ Ibid, 57.

¹⁴ Ibid, 237.

In *Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville “depicted human society as a beehive of selfish individuals, unintentionally promoting the public welfare through the economic outcomes of their self-seeking acts.” Fania Oz-Salberger, “Introduction,” in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Adam Ferguson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) xxx.

¹⁵ Ferguson, *Essay*, 234.

The Nature of Man and Society

The characteristics of natural man were a subject of great debate among Enlightenment era thinkers. Although beliefs about man's natural state varied, most agreed that natural man, having been altered by social, political, and religious customs, no longer existed in contemporary society. Natural man was considered to be "possessed of mere animal sensibility," immensely aggressive, and inclined toward "perpetual wars."¹⁶ By progressing toward civilization and refinement, man left this hostile natural state.¹⁷ The theories that were developed about man's nature were based on conjectures, not facts. Ferguson found this practice to be troubling, especially because, in all other areas of inquiry, natural historians were "obliged to collect facts" prior to making any theories.¹⁸ It was only in the study of humans that natural historians were inclined to speculate and "substitute hypothesis instead of reality."¹⁹ When Ferguson did apply a more scientific method to the study of man, many of the conclusions he reached stood in direct contradiction to the theories of his fellow philosophers.

Ferguson agreed with the notion that man progressed from a state of savagery to one of refinement. He need only look at the increasingly commercialized and civilized world in which he lived to confirm this fact. Where Ferguson diverged from conventional thought, though, was in his assertion that this progression did not remove man from his natural state. Ferguson argued that man, regardless of rudeness or refinement, was entirely natural. As man progressed from savagery and barbarism to a

¹⁶ Ferguson, *Essay*, 7-8.

¹⁷ These theories were accepted and devised by many of his contemporary philosophers, including John Millar (1735-1801), Adam Smith (1723-1790), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). For more information about what each of these thinkers believed, see Millar's *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and Rousseau's *Discourses*. Although all three agreed that man had left his natural state, Rousseau was the only one to believe this departure was not an entirely positive occurrence.

¹⁸ Ferguson, *Essay*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

state of refinement, he built upon the discoveries and innovations of the past. Instinct allowed man to make the changes necessary for improvement. As Ferguson notes, the instinct that pushed man to build a cottage when he lived in a hut was the same instinct that inspired him to build a palace.²⁰ Contrary to traditional arguments, Ferguson believed that refinement and the desire for improvement did not indicate a break with nature.²¹ In all that man does, he follows his inclinations and instincts, using only the powers that nature has given him. Included among these inclinations and instincts was man's tendency to form into groups.

Ferguson believed that men should not be viewed solely as individuals, but should instead be "taken in groups" since men naturally organized themselves into societies.²² Ferguson thought that society, in and of itself, was natural and positive, a belief that further reflects his unique perspective on the nature of man. Many eighteenth-century writers discussed the potentially harmful effects of society, but Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the most outspoken critic about the pernicious effects of society. Rousseau believed contemporary society to be an unnatural and artificial creation that ultimately resulted in the corruption of its members.²³ Men would be better off remaining in their natural, solitary state. Ferguson, in accordance with his belief that everything was natural, heartily disagreed with this assessment. To emphasize his point, he made a comparison to sensory organs that had never received their appropriate impulses, such as an eye never

²⁰ Ibid, 13.

²¹ In order to understand the "rude" state of man, Ferguson relied heavily on travel literature, particularly that of Lafitau and Charlevoix, who wrote about North American Indian tribes. Although rarely referenced in his writings, Ferguson must have also made observations about pre-civilized man during his frequent encounters with the clans of the Scottish Highlands, who were themselves considered to live in a state of barbarity.

²² Ibid, 10.

²³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on Political Economy," *Rousseau's Political Writings*, ed. Alan Ritter (New York: Norton, 1988), 59.

exposed to light.²⁴ These organs would not be more pure than those that had received sensations. In fact, they would be considered defective and unable to carry out their proper function. A man who lived a solitary, “natural,” life would be similarly afflicted and would have a heart that never experienced “the emotions that pertain to society.”²⁵ The true natural man, in Ferguson’s estimation, was one who lived in society and constantly felt the need to progress and seek improvement.

In his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Ferguson asserted that man was like a “passing stream,” always moving and always progressing.²⁶ He believed that man possessed a “restless disposition” and was naturally active.²⁷ Ferguson also maintained that happiness was dependent upon constant activity, as it was the pursuit of a goal, and not the realization of that goal, that man found most fulfilling.²⁸ If men were inactive, existence would be a “burden” and “torment.”²⁹ This, in and of itself, was not an especially new idea. Many other Enlightenment writers expressed similar sentiments about man’s natural inclination to be active.³⁰ What distinguished Ferguson’s ideas from those of his contemporaries was the unique way he melded the central tenets of republican citizenship with his beliefs about human nature. Ferguson’s ideal citizen would be a man who could channel his active nature into political and civic outlets.

²⁴ Ferguson, *Essay*, 9-10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See especially Hugh Blair’s *Sermons*. This was not an idea that first emerged during the Enlightenment. It can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Ethics* in which Aristotle argued that “the life that is man’s ‘function’ is to be understood as an activity.” David Bostock, *Aristotle’s Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19.

The Republican Tradition

While there have been many variations on republicanism, its central tenets are always the same. Republicanism required the active participation of citizens who were virtuous, patriotic, and fully involved in the affairs of the state. Fulfilling the duties of citizenship required an intense commitment to the state because failing could potentially lead to corruption or the collapse of the polity. Hence, citizenship was not granted to many people. In order to attain citizen status, a person had to meet the rigorous requirements for citizenship, most of which were based on Aristotle's political writings.

Being free to act in the political sphere was the most important requirement for Aristotelian citizenship. A common laborer could not be a citizen, since a person would not be able to focus all of his attention on the good of the polity if labor was required for his economic survival.³¹ Aristotle also thought it necessary to exclude "vulgar persons," meaning those who were artisans or directly involved in business, from citizenship for the same reason.³² Those who were legally barred from involvement in public and political spheres, such as women and slaves, were excluded from attaining citizenship as well. Requiring a person to have the freedom to act caused citizenship to be a very fluid concept because it meant that citizen status was not necessarily a lifelong distinction. Old age and infirmity, both of which could prevent someone from participating in state activities, could result in the loss of citizenship.

Freedom to act was only one part of citizenship, though. A citizen had to follow through and become involved in the affairs of the polity. Generally, a citizen's involvement in the state could not be an individual effort. It instead required working

³¹ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 92-94.

³² *Ibid*, 93.

closely with other citizens in order to effectively and collectively govern the state. To do this well, citizens had to be willing to subject all personal (particular) desires to the needs of the state (universal). This forced each citizen to “have the capacity both to be ruled and to rule.”³³ Corruption occurred when the balance between particular and universal was not maintained and one person or faction was allowed to pursue its own interests exclusively.³⁴ In this system, virtue was obtained by steadfast involvement and activity within the state, which resulted in the active, “political animal” being the only person who could be considered a “truly good man.”³⁵

The ideal implementation of republican standards for citizenship occurred, according to Ferguson, in the ancient society of Sparta. In Sparta, “the individual was nothing, and the public every thing.”³⁶ Spartans were taught from birth to be obedient and disciplined. Virtue, citizenship, and love of state allowed ancient Sparta to achieve “what other nations [were] fain to buy with their treasure.”³⁷ Britain would do well to aspire to such virtue and greatness.³⁸

His admiration for the successes of Sparta and other, mostly ancient, republican states caused Ferguson to accept most of the Aristotelian and classical republican parameters for citizenship. Some alterations were necessary, though, in order to accommodate the characteristics of the society in which he lived. As a strong believer in

³³ Ibid, 92.

³⁴ JGA Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 67-68.

³⁵ Ibid, 74.

³⁶ Ferguson, *Essay*, 57.

³⁷ Ibid, 142.

³⁸ It should be noted that, with the exception of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ferguson’s admiration of this ancient society was somewhat unusual for the eighteenth century. While most of his contemporary thinkers recognized that Sparta was powerful in its own time, they condemned Spartan policy as “violent and contrary to the more natural and usual course of things.” David Hume, *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 158.

hierarchy and social structure, Ferguson agreed that citizenship was not something to be granted to the masses.³⁹ He did, however, have a slightly broader interpretation of who qualified for citizenship than did Aristotle and earlier British republicans.⁴⁰ Ferguson did not limit citizenship to members of the landed elite, and instead included the “vulgar” members of society who had to earn their living, including professors, judges, lawyers, and other professionals. To be sure, Ferguson’s vision of citizenship continued to exclude the majority of the population, but it was broader than that of Aristotle.

Another way in which Ferguson modernized the ancient republican tradition was in his expansion of what constituted political activity. For those who faithfully adhered to classical republicanism, political activity meant holding a political office of some sort.⁴¹ This is practical when you live in a small republic in which all citizens have the ability to take a direct role in the governance of the state, but is not as useful in a mixed government in which official political power is in the hands of a limited number of people. Preparing students to take on political roles within Scotland necessitated the widening of means for political activity as well, since almost all government activity took place in London and not in Edinburgh.⁴² Ferguson had a fairly wide interpretation of what could be considered appropriate political activity for citizens. For Ferguson, political activity could include teaching, working within the legal system, involvement in civic organizations, or any other activity that allowed an individual to pursue the interests

³⁹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 63.

⁴⁰ The most prominent of the early English republicans was James Harrington who envisioned an agrarian based republicanism that would have had economic restrictions on citizenship that were similar to Aristotle’s (i.e. limited to wealthy, landed class)

⁴¹ Aristotle, 86-87.

⁴² Phillipson, “Culture and Society in the Eighteenth-Century Province,” 407-443.

of the state. In his own life, Ferguson provided his students an excellent example of the many ways a person could be an active citizen.

Preparing students to become good citizens was certainly Ferguson's most important political activity, but he did not limit his political participation to teaching. His natural inclinations for activity and his restlessness led Ferguson to pursue the interests of the state in a number of ways. In addition to teaching at the University of Edinburgh, Ferguson served as a chaplain in the British army, was a traveling tutor, journeyed to the United States of America in an attempt to reconcile Britain with its colonies, wrote several pamphlets that were critical of state policies, was a founding member of the Royal Society of Scotland, and was an active member of numerous societies for improvement.⁴³ Even in retirement, Ferguson did not allow himself to rest. He understood that preventing political corruption required constant vigilance and action.

Patriotism and Military Service

Given Ferguson's insistence on activity as a requirement of citizenship, it is unsurprising that his ideal citizen had to combine his active nature with a love of country in order to be appropriately patriotic. Patriotism was not passive. Citizens had to be willing and able to demonstrate their support of the country in which they lived. For Ferguson, the primary way of expressing one's patriotism was service in a citizens' militia, an idea that was not original to him. Like his beliefs on activity, it ultimately reflects the impact of the republican tradition on his thought and the ways in which he modernized the tradition to suit his needs.

In the fourteenth century, intellectuals in the republican Italian city states used the traditional Aristotelian concept of citizenship to promote participation in a citizens'

⁴³ Ferguson, *Essay*, xxvi-xxviii.

militia as a cornerstone of citizenship. Just as Ferguson would do centuries later, the Italians expanded Aristotle's notion of political activity, previously limited to holding political office, to include the active defense of the state. This was done because the practice of hiring mercenary soldiers for purposes of defense was becoming prevalent throughout Italy. Italian thinkers worried that mercenaries, who often did not have any real ties to the state, would be easily swayed or influenced by rival states. If military valor and service became essential elements of citizenship, though, the state would be protected by citizens imbued with patriotism, which was a much more reliable defense.⁴⁴ Connecting militia service to citizenship also appealed to the Italians for many of the reasons it would later appeal to Ferguson. During the fourteenth century, Italy was becoming increasingly commercialized, resulting in more sophisticated and, ultimately, corrupt cities. Many Italian citizens were more concerned with the newest luxury than with defending or participating in the state, causing a great deal of alarm for the intellectuals.⁴⁵ Calling for a renewal of the "classical concept of the armed citizen" was a way to solve some persistent social problems, while also reinvigorating ideas of patriotism and citizenship.⁴⁶

Ferguson could not completely adopt the Italian militia program, though, because the size of Britain and its empire made it nearly impossible to rely solely on a citizens' militia for national defense. For well over a century, the English had discussed the merits and problems of a standing army and a citizens' militia. The standing army appealed to many because it consisted of paid, professional soldiers who could focus solely on the

⁴⁴ John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1985), 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

defense of the country. The militia, as envisioned by its supporters, was to be comprised of citizens who would defend their country not for potential personal profit, but because they were true patriots. The militia, like the standing army, would be trained in the use of arms.⁴⁷ Those who became involved in this debate believed that a country should have either a standing army or a militia, not both. Ferguson disagreed. He envisioned the militia as a “school of virtue” and not a primary means of defense.⁴⁸ Although he may have pined for the days when citizens were eager to protect their country, Ferguson was aware that it was unlikely that the British standing army would be abolished. The empire was simply too vast to be defended by unpaid citizens, many of whom had careers that would prevent them from traveling about the world anyway. Ferguson accepted the standing army, albeit grudgingly, noting that Britain should be “ashamed” at how few people were willing to defend the country without pay.⁴⁹ As long as the standing army was limited to fighting on foreign soil and did not produce a drain on the economy, Ferguson was appeased. Developing virtuous citizens and preventing Britain from becoming morally corrupt was a much larger concern.

Participation in the militia would encourage “love of arms,” “confidence,” “courage,” and “discipline,” all worthy virtues for a citizen to possess.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, Scotland was prevented from having a citizens’ militia until the end of the eighteenth century.⁵¹ Because of this, and his firm belief that a militia would benefit society,

⁴⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁸ Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 219.

⁴⁹ Adam Ferguson, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia*, (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1756), 9.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 17-20.

⁵¹ To make matters worse, not only was Scotland not allowed a militia, it was specifically excluded from multiple British militia acts. England and Wales both had citizens’ militia by the middle of the eighteenth

Ferguson spent a great deal of his life agitating for the creation of a Scottish militia. His writings on the subject are intriguing in that they not only discuss the benefits of military participation as outlined above, but they also showcase Ferguson's fears that Scotland's lack of a citizens' militia was causing as much moral corruption as luxury and wealth.

In *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia* (1756), Ferguson's first pamphlet about the militia issue, the consequences of not having a militia are briefly outlined. Without a militia, Ferguson envisions a country that devotes a great deal of energy to acquiring wealth, but "neglects the means of defending it."⁵² The population would be "softened by a disuse of arms" and completely at the mercy of those who were trained in weaponry, be they British soldiers or foreign invaders.⁵³ In *Reflections*, though, Ferguson barely scratches the surface of his fears about an unarmed citizenry. It is with *The History of the proceedings in the case of Margaret, commonly called Peg, only Lawful sister to John Bull*, also referred to as *Sister Peg*, that Ferguson directly and forcefully describes the dire costs of not having a citizens' militia in Scotland.

Sister Peg (1761) was published anonymously and, as a result, authorship can not be irrefutably attributed to Ferguson. Although David Raynor argues that it was the work of David Hume, this has been discounted by many other historians. Raynor based this conclusion largely on the fact that Hume claimed to have written the pamphlet some years after its publication. It is now presumed, though, that he did this to protect Ferguson, although it is unclear just why Ferguson would have needed protection.⁵⁴

century. Scotland's exclusion from the militia bills was a source of anger and resentment amongst many Scottish Enlightenment thinkers.

⁵² Ferguson, *Reflections*, 12.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 15.

⁵⁴ It is entirely possible that Hume claimed *Sister Peg* as his own work solely because he enjoyed being contrary. This makes a more plausible explanation than the theory of protection because, from what is known of Ferguson, he would have not suffered unduly from acknowledging this work as his own.

Additionally, Sir Walter Scott's copy of *Sister Peg*, which was given to him by one of Ferguson's sons, includes a note acknowledging Ferguson as "the eminent author" as well as corrections written throughout the edition in Ferguson's handwriting.⁵⁵

Assuming that *Sister Peg* is indeed the work of Ferguson, it not only reveals a great deal about the hostilities that existed between Scotland and England in the middle of the eighteenth century, but also indicates Ferguson's growing concern that Scotland was on a path to destruction and ruin.

In *Sister Peg*, Ferguson characterized the relationship between Scotland and England as similar to a relationship between a brother, John (England) and sister, Peg (Scotland). John and Peg live in neighboring households and, after careful deliberation, Peg deems it prudent to combine her affairs with those of her brother "in hopes that her concerns would be equally looked after with his own."⁵⁶ Unfortunately, this arrangement did not go as Peg planned, for she found herself defenseless and distrusted. Taking several pages from the history of Scotland, Ferguson explains how Peg had to endure unwarranted attacks from rebels who occupied her home's garret.⁵⁷ Instead of sympathizing with her, though, John spoke "ill" of her and encouraged her children to view her as a "sad vixin" who encouraged and supported the rebel attacks.⁵⁸ This offense was compounded when John decided to arm his household and did not extend the same courtesy to Peg. Peg, being the "gentle and inoffensive" creature that she was, refrained

⁵⁵ Jane B. Fagg, "Introduction," *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), xxxv.

⁵⁶ Anonymous[Ferguson?], *The History of the proceedings in the case of Margaret, commonly called Peg, only Lawful sister to John Bull*, ed. David Raynor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 77.

⁵⁷ This is a direct reference to the Jacobite rebellions that periodically plagued Scotland from 1715 to 1745. The Jacobites unsuccessfully sought to return a member of the Stuart royal line to the thrones of England and Scotland. Fear of arming former rebels was frequently cited by the British Parliament as justification for excluding Scotland from militia bills and preventing the majority of Scots from owning any type of weapons.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Sister Peg*, 58-59.

from criticizing John, thinking that he had just forgotten about her welfare.⁵⁹ Peg continued to “make advances of kindness and respect” until it became apparent that her household’s security was at risk, when she directly appealed to John.⁶⁰ Once he was alerted to the danger, Ferguson makes it clear that John’s inattention to his sister’s needs was inexcusable.⁶¹ The parallels to Scottish history continue throughout the pamphlet and Ferguson’s comments about England and the British Parliament become increasingly barbed as the pamphlet progresses.

The language of *Sister Peg* is heavily gendered. An unarmed Scotland is described as a woman. Peg is without weapons and depends entirely on a man (England) for defense. Not being able to possess weapons or train in methods of defense had emasculated Scotland. Further, Peg could not even draw forth enough strength to demand her natural right to protect her subjects and interests.⁶² The image of Scotland that emerges in *Sister Peg* is that of a weak, passive, and dependent woman. Being allowed access to weapons and martial training would go a long way toward correcting many of these problems. It would also allow Scottish men to fulfill their obligations as citizens. Through participation in the militia and the state, Ferguson hoped that citizens would begin to devote less time to the enjoyment of wealth and luxury and focus more on the needs of their country. This only solved part of the problem, though. While the pursuit of material goods was of primary concern to Ferguson, he was also worried about the culture of politeness that accompanied Britain’s economic prosperity. A proper

⁵⁹ Ibid, 78.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 81.

⁶² Ibid, 78. This is also a direct rebuke of those Scots who were perfectly happy to rely on England for all defense.

education that emphasized honesty would temper the negative effects of extreme politeness.

Proper Education

A growing emphasis on polite behavior accompanied the economic prosperity of the eighteenth century and the expansion of the British middle class.⁶³ Politeness in eighteenth-century Britain was defined in a way that far exceeds our modern understanding of the term, as being polite required more than manners. It was a state of being. Being a member of polite society, something which many aspired to, meant that one possessed “intellectual and aesthetic” taste, understood the intricacies of social decorum, such as the appropriate time and manner in which to dine, and knew how to converse.⁶⁴ Polite conversation came with its own set of rules and expectations. It was of the utmost importance that those engaged in conversation not offend each other. This required people to moderate their speech and behavior and to constantly guard their true thoughts and opinions. Success in polite society required the approval of those with whom one interacted, so it was often necessary to assume a public identity that did not always resemble the private person. For many, being able to consider themselves a member of polite society was worth the dissimulation. As the century progressed, though, this manner of living increasingly came under attack for being dishonest. These disparate feelings about politeness are reflected in the two prevailing notions of what constituted appropriate male education in the eighteenth century. One curriculum, represented by Lord Chesterfield in his *Letters to His Son* and *Letters to His Godson*, was highly influenced by French culture and emphasized the cultivation of politeness and

⁶³ Langford, 61-68.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 70-71.

refinement in education. Conversely, David Fordyce's *Dialogues Concerning Education* argued that education should enable men to "resist French seduction" through inculcating them with a sense of British-ness and honesty.⁶⁵ Each approach was a result of how the author appraised the culture of politeness.

Lord Chesterfield, as a member of the British aristocracy, wanted his son (and later his godson) to be educated to take his rightful place in polite society. In order to "be beloved and well received in company" it was necessary to be well bred and educated in the arts of conversation, dancing, and dissimulation.⁶⁶ Chesterfield, like many other members of British polite society, looked primarily to the French as examples of "good breeding and good manners."⁶⁷ The properly educated gentleman would, in Chesterfield's estimation, know how "to please" and make himself "agreeable" to those around him.⁶⁸ Chesterfield was not overly concerned that this behavior often meant assuming a public persona and being insincere. It was more important to have the approval of those around you than to behave genuinely.⁶⁹ It should be noted that Chesterfield did not entirely neglect traditional academic subjects. He expected his heirs to be well versed in history, politics, and languages. This type of knowledge, however, was "mere pedantry" unless accompanied by refinement.⁷⁰ Fordyce, a professor at the University of Edinburgh in the early part of the eighteenth century, offered a very different program of study.

⁶⁵ Michele Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 49.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 44-45.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 44.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁶⁹ Ibid. These types of beliefs caused Samuel Johnson to remark that Chesterfield's *Letters* taught "the morals of a whore."

⁷⁰ Ibid, 44.

Fordyce did not entirely reject Chesterfield's idea that developing polite behavior was an important aspect of a young man's education. Instead, he decried any "enslavement to foreign manners" and insisted on a British form of politeness and manners.⁷¹ Men should be taught how to converse with others, but they should do so honestly and virtuously. Dissimulation and insincerity did not serve any useful function. Furthermore, this type of behavior was too "servile," feminine, and French to suit Fordyce.⁷² A proper, British education should emphasize "toughening exercises," "plain speaking," and an appreciation of the "excellence of virtue."⁷³ Those who successfully completed this regimen would be "men of civic virtue," imbued with a "spirit of patriotism" and an "invincible love of liberty."⁷⁴ Although Ferguson never directly commented on either Chesterfield or Fordyce's treatises on education, his troubled relationship with the Chesterfield family and concerns about the culture of politeness indicate that his idea of proper education would have resembled the curriculum set forth by Fordyce.

In 1773, Ferguson was appointed as a traveling tutor to Philip Stanhope, 5th earl of Chesterfield, and heir to the aforementioned Lord Chesterfield.⁷⁵ Though Lord Chesterfield had died shortly before Ferguson's appointment, the young heir's guardians were appointed by him. As the guardians were entrusted with the young man's education, it can be assumed that someone who was as concerned with education as Lord Chesterfield would have taken great pains to choose guardians who shared his views on

⁷¹ Ibid, 47.

⁷² Ibid, 48.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 49-50.

⁷⁵ Fagg, xlv. Philip Stanhope was Lord Chesterfield's godson, to whom the *Letters to His Godson*, are addressed. His own son died young and, was unable to fulfill the grand plans his father had for him.

the proper education of a gentleman. This idea is further supported by the fact that the young Lord Chesterfield was promptly sent away from England to complete his education in continental Europe.⁷⁶ Ferguson accompanied Lord Chesterfield in these travels, but was abruptly released from his employment in 1775. After losing his job, Ferguson spent the next five years fighting Lord Chesterfield and his guardians for the annuity that had been promised to him.⁷⁷ The evidence currently available does not indicate what caused Ferguson's abrupt departure, but it is possible (and probable) that Ferguson resisted the course of study that would have been demanded by Chesterfield's guardians. Given that Ferguson believed excessive politeness and manners to be one of the problems that society faced in the eighteenth century, it is easy to imagine that Ferguson would not have been enthusiastic about teaching someone who was brought up to believe that a dancing master was the most important contributor to education.⁷⁸ Ferguson would not have wanted to focus the young earl's education solely on politeness and other matters he deemed frivolous.

While Ferguson did not advocate bad manners or rude behavior, he was very much opposed to the kind of politeness of which Chesterfield was so fond. Like Fordyce, he found excessive politeness to often be a barrier to expressing a person's true self and a means of softening a man. A virtuous man would want to be known for his "candour" and not his ability to placate and please those around him.⁷⁹ If politeness came at the expense of transparency and honesty, then it was not worth cultivating. Politeness also required the moderation of one's speech and behavior. According to Ferguson,

⁷⁶ Ibid, xlv.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, 45.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 189.

moderation was not a sign of character, but generally indicated “indifference.”⁸⁰ Ferguson expected citizens to be zealous and vigorous, not indifferent. Additionally, Ferguson, as well as Fordyce, associated the excesses of politeness with France. British students should not try to reproduce French manners and customs. Imitation such as this prevented ingenuity and did not advance education or learning.⁸¹ Furthermore, Ferguson believed the goal of education was not to cultivate manners, but was rather to instill virtue and teach citizenship. Education was essential if men were to develop into good citizens who knew how to behave virtuously and perform their duty to the state. This manner of British, masculine education, when combined with the other elements of citizenship, would also correct the feminization that Ferguson perceived in Britain.

Masculine Virtues

When describing the problems he saw in British society, Ferguson frequently used highly gendered language, essentially equating effeminacy and other stereotypically feminine characteristics with corruption. The specific terms that Ferguson used in his writings, such as “soft,” “sensual,” and “weak,” reflect common beliefs about the nature of women, most of which were based on ancient writings about the sexes. A number of eighteenth-century writers used these long-held beliefs about women to describe the problems with commercial society. As the century progressed, though, many writers, especially those in Scotland, began to view the softening of men as a sign of civilization, not ruin. Ferguson, however, held fast to his beliefs about the unfortunate consequences of feminine influence. This is reflected in his writings about citizenship, all of which describe an unambiguously masculine citizen.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 206.

Although there were numerous texts from antiquity that discussed the nature of women, the most influential were the writings of Aristotle and Galen. The descriptions of women outlined in their works proved to be pervasive and very difficult to discredit. Aristotle described women as “soft,” “envious,” “easily deceived,” passive, “more given to falsehood,” highly imaginative, and ruled by their passions.⁸² Women did not possess any traits that would have been viewed as entirely positive. Differences between the sexes were explained based on the idea of complementary traits. If a woman possessed one trait, such as weakness, then men were seen as possessing the complementary trait, in this case strength. The medical writings of Galen further illustrated women’s “nature.” He found women to be cold, moist, and humid. These ideas contributed to the development of basic assumptions about women’s nature. Women were viewed as soft, weak, imaginative, and passive receptors. Natural deficiencies made women delicate and more suitable to passive activities and the private sphere. In the eighteenth century, nature was a dominant force. As a result, each of the sexes was expected to act naturally and remain in its appropriate sphere. Any deviation from what was considered natural was greeted with condemnation. These cultural and social beliefs made accusations of effeminacy a powerful rhetorical device for Ferguson.

In the eighteenth century, images of femininity were most frequently used to illustrate the negative effects of luxury, wealth, and politeness. Femininity was associated with these corruptive forces for many reasons. In classical critiques, luxury “was almost inevitably linked with its supposed softness.”⁸³ Softness, a distinctly

⁸² Aristotle, *The History of Animals*, in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson (London: Routledge, 1995), 43-47.

⁸³ Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.

feminine trait, was viewed as something that undermined “the masculine qualities of *virtus*.”⁸⁴ It was also believed that “luxury operated in a world governed...by passion.”⁸⁵ Luxury was the imagination set loose. As women were thought to be highly imaginative and governed entirely by their passions, and not by reason, they became synonymous with luxury. Women were also seen as the consumers who created the demand for luxury.⁸⁶ Women’s bodies, through clothing, jewelry, and other aspects of appearance, were often used as a canvas to display the wealth and prosperity of their family. This provided those who condemned luxury with a scapegoat for their censure.⁸⁷ Money was also viewed in feminine terms. Polite society was also viewed as a feminine realm since it emphasized skills that were viewed as “natural” to women, such as conversation and an ability to easily dissimulate.⁸⁸ One of the writers who used gendered language in this manner was Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1731), a vocal critic of the excesses that accompanied an expanding consumer and polite society. In his writings, “‘effeminacy’...was a derogatory term” used to signify “weakness” in men and the danger that Britain was facing.⁸⁹ If excesses were allowed to continue, the country would undoubtedly degenerate into an effeminate nation. The obvious foil for much of Shaftesbury’s criticisms was France, a country he believed to be the example of what could happen if Britain did not gain control of luxury. There were many others, including Ferguson, who echoed Shaftesbury’s concern. As the century progressed,

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain: 1640-1990*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 61.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Of course, this neglects the fact that men also enjoyed luxury goods and were, in some places, dressed as ostentatiously and elaborately as women.

⁸⁸ See David Hume’s “Of Essay Writing,” in his *Essays*, for a description of what women were thought to contribute to polite society.

⁸⁹ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 113.

however, the advances in polite society began to be viewed as signs of civilization and progress, which changed, for some, how gender was used in writings.

David Hume and Adam Smith both recognized that luxury and wealth had caused problems in society, but they also asserted that some good had come from Britain's new commercial society, namely politeness. For Hume, politeness was an "innocent luxury" that allowed social improvement and progress.⁹⁰ Women were seen as the arbiters and instructors of politeness. It was due to their softening influence that men were able to transform from brutish savages into civilized, refined gentlemen.⁹¹ For the first time, it was considered acceptable for a man to be more sensitive and refined. It would not lead to the downfall of society. In fact, it was argued that these developments in private life led to positive developments in public life.⁹² Conversing with women and making efforts at refinement led men to be more "humane," which was, for most, a good change.⁹³

Scottish historians viewed the developments in politeness as integral to their understanding of civilization, going so far as to argue that the treatment of women was a sign of how civilized a society had become.⁹⁴ Those who believed society's new emphasis on politeness to be a positive development began to treat women better, in hopes that their behavior would show how civilized they were.⁹⁵ These beliefs led many thinkers to fashion a new idea of masculinity that combined "toughness as well as

⁹⁰ Ibid, 134.

⁹¹ Mary Catherine Moran, "Between the Savage and the Civil: Dr. John Gregory's Natural History of Femininity," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 8-29, 9.

⁹² Barker-Benfield, 134.

⁹³ Ibid, 135.

⁹⁴ Silvia Sebastiani, "'Race,' Women and Progress in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 75-96.

Some of the historians who wrote on this subject were John Millar, Dr. John Gregory, and Lord Kames.

⁹⁵ Barbara Taylor, "Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, eds. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 30-52. It should be noted that this did not translate into any measure of real equality for women. Taylor argues that the gallantry that resulted from this actually was an offense to women.

tenderness.”⁹⁶ Ferguson did not support any of these ideas. He believed that excessive politeness could be a means of dissimulation and dishonesty, not a sign of civilization. What was for many a mark in women’s favor was for Ferguson another reason to justify using gendered language to indicate corruption and ruin. His use of female gendered terms in order to denote all things negative shows that Ferguson was worried about what he perceived as a growing feminine influence on the public sphere.

The only way to stop Britain from becoming “sunk in effeminacy” was to insist on citizenship that was thoroughly masculine.⁹⁷ This did not just mean forbidding women from claiming citizen status. Women had never been considered full citizens in Britain and yet the country was still becoming feminized. Legal exclusion was simply not enough. It was necessary to make the requirements of citizenship emphasize masculine virtues. By stressing the importance of activity, military service, and education for citizens, Ferguson did just this. This is not to say, though, that Ferguson disapproved of femininity in general. He believed that everything had its place. Ferguson believed that women should have a role in the private sphere.⁹⁸ What he did object to was a feminine influence outside of the private sphere. It signaled societal ruin when men became “effeminate” or “vain,” so Ferguson set out to correct the problems he saw in society. The only way to do this was to remove the feminine entirely from the public sphere and create unambiguously masculine, virtuous citizens.

⁹⁶ Barker-Benfield, 135.

⁹⁷ Ferguson, *Essay*, 113.

⁹⁸ Adam Ferguson, “Adam Ferguson to Katy Burnet, September, 1766,” in *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), 63-68. Ferguson never specifically mentions what role he expected his wife or daughters to have in the home. The only thing that is mentioned is a promise made during their courtship (and later written into their marriage contracts) that Katy Ferguson was to have free reign in decorating his home.

Ferguson believed that the problems created by luxury, wealth, and the emergence of polite society needed to be corrected in order to prevent political ruin and corruption. By drawing from his beliefs about human nature and the classical republican tradition, Ferguson was able to formulate a brand of citizenship that suited the society in which he lived. Ferguson's ideal citizen would be one who was politically active, patriotic, and properly educated. It was hoped that this rigorous type of citizenship would put an end to the corruption and vice that was associated with modern, commercial society.

Chapter Four: *Envisioning the Public Sphere*

Ferguson hoped to develop his students and readers into virtuous citizens who were prepared and fit to act within the public sphere. Contrary to prevailing beliefs about the nature of the public sphere, Ferguson believed that it should be a place of turbulence and contention. In the middle of the eighteenth century, conflict between political parties was the primary source of contention within the public sphere. Unlike many other “republicans” who viewed party conflict as a symptom of corruption, Ferguson viewed party conflict as a possible antidote. This antidote would only work, though, if party conflict was counter-balanced by the full participation of independent citizens within the public sphere. Ferguson envisioned a public sphere in which citizens actively and forcefully expressed their ideas about what was best for the country. Through acting in the public sphere, citizens would not only be able to channel their energetic natures into positive outlets, but they would also prevent some of the corruption caused by the division of labor in modern commercial societies.

British Political Parties

During the time in which Ferguson wrote, political parties were an integral element of the British political system.¹ Their rise to political importance began with the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Although there were organizations united around similar political goals prior to this date, their influence was limited by the irregularity of

¹ The term “party” can mean many different things. Although, as will be noted later in the section, the influence and power of political parties extended well beyond the walls of parliament, in the context of this paper, the term “party” refers to organizations that consisted of members of parliament who were united by similar interests or political beliefs.

parliamentary sessions.² Once parliament became regularized upon the accession of William and Mary, though, political parties were able to develop into legitimate “political institutions.”³ Traditionally, there were two parties within parliament. The majority party was responsible for most political appointments and legislation and the second, minority party operated as an opposition.⁴ The power and influence of the parties was not, however, limited to the confines of parliament. Extensive patronage networks guaranteed that party influence would be felt far outside of Westminster.

In the eighteenth century, the Whigs and Tories were the two parties that dominated British political life. The Tories enjoyed a considerable parliamentary majority in the early years of the eighteenth century, but upon the Hanoverian succession in 1714, the Whigs took control and the Tory party began to decline.⁵ Between 1715 and 1760, inter-party conflict was at a minimum. Some argue that this was because “all accepted the political reality of Hanoverian rule, and unite[d] in a concern for just government and British liberty.”⁶ This is, perhaps, too simplistic an explanation. Instead it seems that the lack of conflict was caused by many different factors, with the primary one being that party members lacked a clear understanding of their goals and beliefs. As John Brewer points out, prior to 1760, party members may have known what they did not stand for, but, at the same time, “they knew not what they were.”⁷ It is difficult to mount

² Brian Hill, *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain, 1688-1832* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 203. Some information about Country and Town factions and the lack of parliament until 1688

³ *Ibid*, 197.

⁴ There were a few members of parliament who did not align themselves with any particular party, but they were the exception to the rule.

⁵ The change that occurred upon George I's accession is quite remarkable. As John Brewer notes, “in the last parliament under Anne there were 358 Tories and 200 Whigs; after the election of 1715 the numbers were 217 and 341 respectively.” John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 41.

⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

⁷ *Ibid*, 43.

an effective opposition if you are unsure of what your party stands for or what you are trying to achieve. For several years, the Seven Years War (1756-1763) also limited party conflict since most were united behind the war effort. George III (r. 1760-1801) believed himself to be responsible for “non-party government” and did his best to continue the spirit of bipartisanship that existed at the time of his succession.⁸ Despite the King’s good intentions, party conflict flared up again in 1761, just one year after his accession to the throne.⁹ There were numerous reasons for party conflict, ranging from perceived favoritism on the part of the monarch, ideological differences, and accusations of Jacobitism.¹⁰ In the second half of the eighteenth century, disagreements between parties resulted in a conflict ridden and tumultuous legislature. This conflict provoked a discussion, both in and outside of Great Britain about whether parties, and the political turbulence they caused, were beneficial to a country.

In *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu expresses a great deal of concern over the potentially dangerous nature of the British system of political parties. He believed that British political institutions were dominated by “egoistic passions” and consisted of people who constantly shifted their political allegiances “according to the necessities...of party conflicts.”¹¹ Constant change and turbulence could, in his opinion, result in the country being “led by its passions” and not by “reason.”¹² Many others within France were harsher in their criticism of the British system, finding it “bizarre”

⁸ George III proclaimed himself to be “monarch of the *British Islands*, not King of a despicable party.” To emphasize his feelings, he had his Prime Minister, the Earl of Bute, appoint several Tories to the royal household. Ibid, 47.

⁹ Ibid, 48.

¹⁰ Ibid, 48-50.

¹¹ Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 174.

¹² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, eds. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 327. The irony of Montesquieu’s comments is that they were written during a period when Britain experienced relatively little party conflict.

and “profoundly threatening.”¹³ Within Britain, opinions were more mixed and discussion often centered on whether or not parties pursued policies that were in the best interest of the state.

In *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents: Party* (1770), Edmund Burke “maintained that parties were inherently beneficial to the body politic” so long as they did not degenerate into “faction.”¹⁴ For others, including Arthur Onslow (Speaker of the House of Commons, 1728-1761), parties could never be anything more than factions. Furthermore, party members preyed upon “honest men, who were recruited [to] a cause they thought genuine.”¹⁵ David Hume, one of the few Scots who directly addressed the issue of political parties, acknowledged that, even though parties often pursued their own “interest,” they were destined to exist, so long as Britain was “governed by a limited monarchy.”¹⁶ It is unclear how members of the moderate literati felt about British political parties, since few commented on how the British political system functioned. Ferguson was, however, vocal about his beliefs, arguing that multiple political parties secured Britain’s liberty.

Ferguson recognized that many members of British political parties were guided by self-interest and “not disposed to regard [the public interest] as the end of their conduct.”¹⁷ Given Ferguson’s strong adherence to republican ideology, one would expect him to have been a critic of political parties. He was not. Instead, he modernized the republican tradition to allow for political factions and contestation. The primary aim

¹³ Baker, 173.

¹⁴ Brewer, 71-73. According to Burke, a faction was “a body of men pursuing their own private interests at the expense of the national good.”

¹⁵ Ibid, 56-57.

¹⁶ David Hume, *Selected Essays*, eds. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 32-33.

¹⁷ Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995),124-125.

of republicanism was to prevent political and moral corruption within society through requiring the citizen to place the needs of the state above self-interest. Corruption occurred when self-interest was allowed to take priority over the public good. Based on this definition of republicanism, political parties, with their tendency to pursue self-interest at the expense of the public good, were a source of corruption. Ferguson did not view them in this manner, though. Instead, he contended that political parties could be a positive force in society.

Ferguson believed the “mutual jealousies” that existed between parties led to the “balance of power.”¹⁸ By constantly opposing the political ambitions of the rival party, political parties were preventing a concentration of power. The “continued differences and oppositions” between parties allowed for political liberty.¹⁹ Although this was not what party members intended, their pursuit of individual desires ultimately safeguarded the country. This was “a quite radical departure” from conventional justifications for political party. Nearly all previous discussion of parties “emphasized the importance of *intentions* in assessing the political virtue and constitutional propriety of opposition.”²⁰ This is not to say, however, that Ferguson believed that eighteenth-century British political parties worked perfectly. Ideally, party members would not “abuse their power” or act in any manner that could be deemed “corrupt.”²¹ Ideally, their actions as political leaders would be guided by the purest of intentions. Unfortunately, this was not how

¹⁸ Ibid, 117.

¹⁹ Ibid, 124-125. Ferguson expresses similar sentiments in *Remarks on a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr. Price, intitled, Observations on the Nature of civil liberty, the principles of government, and the Justice and Policy of the war with America, etc. in a letter from a Gentleman in the Country to a Member of Parliament* (London: T. Cadell, 1776). See especially, pages 16-17.

²⁰ Brewer, 75.

²¹ Adam Ferguson, “Adam Ferguson to William Pulteney, December 1, 1769,” in *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), 86-87. Ferguson also believed that Parliament had the authority to expel any members who behaved in an extremely corrupt manner.

most British politicians behaved in the eighteenth century. Self-interest, patronage, and party allegiance were often more important than national interest when deciding legislative issues. Ferguson's acceptance of political parties reflects a pragmatism about political issues. His support for British political parties was due to his belief that the public sphere should be mildly turbulent. Conflict between political parties led to turbulence and debate, both of which Ferguson found to be inherently beneficial to society. While his British contemporaries appeared to have tolerated a degree of turbulence because they believed political parties to be necessary, Ferguson believed the opposite. He tolerated political parties because they produced the turbulence and conflict that he deemed essential for society.

A Turbulent Public Sphere

As Ferguson repeatedly noted in his writings, many in the eighteenth century viewed public and political tranquility as a positive condition. "Peace and tranquility" were viewed as conducive to happiness and stability. To achieve this ideal, those in power tried to "model their governments, not merely to prevent injustice and error, but to prevent agitation and bustle."²² This was, in Ferguson's estimation, a disastrous idea. On the surface, tranquility in the public sphere would appear to indicate consensus or general approval of the actions of the government. Based on Ferguson's understanding of human nature, though, this kind of consensus was not possible. Men were, by nature, prone to disagreement and "distinction."²³ It was natural for man to place himself in opposition to others, even if there was no "material subject of controversy."²⁴ If the public sphere was tranquil, it was not due to consensus, but was rather due to

²² Ferguson, *Essay*, 62-63, 209.

²³ *Ibid*, 26

²⁴ *Ibid*.

“complaisance” or “corruption.”²⁵ If a result of “complaisance,” tranquility signaled that men were being politically lazy and submitting to the opinions of others “without examination.”²⁶ If tranquility was caused by “corruption,” it meant that society’s voice was not being heard because politicians were more concerned about ensuring the physical safety, and not political liberty, of citizens. Politicians feared the “disorder” that might ensue if turbulence were expected within the public sphere, so they prevented citizens from expressing themselves.²⁷ Whatever the cause, a tranquil public sphere was cause for worry. Instead, society should strive for a bustling and tumultuous public sphere. This appealed to Ferguson for many reasons.

As previously mentioned, Ferguson believed man was, by nature, prone to discontent and disagreement. By encouraging debate, discussion, and disagreement within the public sphere, men would have a productive outlet for these natural tendencies. More importantly, though, the inclusion and active participation of all citizens within the public sphere would have also prevented the negative results that accompanied the division of labor in modern commercial societies. In the mechanical arts, Ferguson recognized that the division of labor could prove beneficial for society.²⁸ Problems arose, however, when labor became specialized and subdivided within a country’s government. Ferguson believed that separating the arts which form the “citizen and the statesman” would ultimately “dismember the human character.”²⁹ Citizens should not quietly allow others to determine the course of the country. Instead, they should keep a

²⁵ Ibid, 63.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 209.

²⁸ Ibid, 172-173. Ferguson recognized that the division of labor within the mechanical arts was often beneficial, but, he also notes that this division inevitably leads to subordination and inequality within society.

²⁹ Ibid, 218.

“vigilant eye on the proceedings” of formal government and be prepared to make their voice heard when they did not approve of those proceedings.³⁰ Since consensus was unlikely in society, this would naturally lead to debate and conflict. This stance is surprising considering Ferguson’s beliefs about the importance for stability in society. A turbulent public sphere does not seem to encourage political and social stability. To prevent complete chaos, Ferguson had very specific notions of what it meant to have a turbulent public sphere and who had the right to participate.

For Ferguson, conflict and turbulence were the foundations upon which civil and political liberty rested. This being said, turbulence was neither unstructured chaos nor an invitation to criticize every aspect of formal government. A turbulent public sphere meant that citizens had the opportunity, and took advantage of said opportunity, to debate ideas, discuss legislation, and have their grievances publicly addressed.³¹ Although Ferguson was not concerned about the intentions behind the actions of political party members, intent was an important aspect of his vision for the ideal turbulent public sphere. Citizens should not create conflict and turbulence unless they were doing so out of a concern for the state’s best interest. It was not acceptable to act as a “refractory subject” who indiscriminately combats every law.³² Ferguson felt that the “vulgar” masses, which were inclined toward enthusiasm and rash actions, would be more inclined to act in such a manner.³³ Therefore, the public sphere should not be open to everyone. In letters to William Pulteney, Ferguson repeatedly expressed his distrust of a group he

³⁰ Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 468.

³¹ *Ibid*, 502.

³² *Ibid*, 459.

³³ *Ibid*, 459.

refers to both as the “populace” and as the “mob.”³⁴ He did not intend for the masses to take part in the public sphere. This was the group that needed to be “governed.”³⁵

Ferguson only wanted *citizens* to take part in the public sphere. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Ferguson had rigorous requirements for citizenship that resulted in the majority of the population, including women and the lower classes of society, being excluded from citizenship. To be fair to Ferguson, though, it would have represented a substantial change in British society if citizens participated in the public sphere as he envisioned.

The turbulence and conflict that did exist in eighteenth-century Britain society was a result of party conflict. As a result, members of political parties were the primary participants in debates and conflicts about politics, legislation, and governance.³⁶ Debate also tended to be limited geographically to London and other large urban centers. Ferguson envisioned something much larger and more inclusive than this.

Rejecting Traditional Ideals

Ferguson’s ideas about the public sphere represent an understanding of the goal of government and citizens that contrasted greatly with the more prevalent rationalist and natural law traditions of the eighteenth century. The “rationalist” theory emphasized a public sphere in which an enlightened public, through open and rational discussion, moved toward public consensus. Natural law theorists, conversely, stressed the ascendancy of the private sphere over the public. They argued that it was not necessary

³⁴ Adam Ferguson, “Adam Ferguson to William Pulteney, January 4, 1770,” in *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson: Volume I*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), 90.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ There were, of course, notable exceptions to this, including newspapers and coffee houses. Both served as places in which ideas could be discussed and debated. Brian Hill, *The Early Parties and Politics in Britain: 1688-1832* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 121-122.

for all citizens to participate in the public sphere. Instead, citizens should be free to pursue their own private interests without any mandatory or expected participation within the public sphere. Ferguson disagreed with both of these approaches, stressing not only the importance of action within the public sphere, but also the need for debate solely for the sake of debate.

The rationalist understanding of the public sphere developed in France as a solution to the “arbitrariness” associated with the Old Regime.³⁷ It was thought that “open, public” discussion amongst enlightened individuals would eventually lead to “rational consensus” and the establishment of “public opinion.”³⁸ Public opinion was interpreted in a wide variety of ways in the latter part of the eighteenth century, but, for the rationalists, it signified a “collective judgment” that had political force.³⁹ Writing in 1770, the Abbe Raynal described “public opinion as the rule of government,” noting that the “government must never act against it without giving public reasons.”⁴⁰ The government should follow the will of the public once it had achieved consensus on any given subject since consensus represented a collective awareness of truth. Open, public discussion was required in order for this to occur. These discussions, however, had to be void of “passions,” “factions,” and “conflicts.”⁴¹ Each member of the public had to, in a state of rational autonomy, make decisions on his own. The individual nature of this process was very important. Participation in a political party, or any other type of group, resulted in a loss of autonomy. Intellectual and social progress would be measured by the public’s ability to achieve consensus in this rational manner. Ferguson agreed that

³⁷ Baker, 169.

³⁸ Ibid, 187, 196.

³⁹ Ibid, 187.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 196.

government should be responsive to the demands of citizens, but, on all other points, he disagreed with the rationalists. Not only did the rationalist approach remove conflict and turmoil from the public sphere in favor of rational, passionless discussion, it also operated on the assumption that public consensus was possible and positive. Ferguson did not believe consensus was possible. There was no rational truth of which everyone would become aware if only allowed enough time and proper, non-passionate discussion. The public sphere should be a place of passion and contestation in which individuals defended their beliefs and listened to the beliefs of others. Social progress, therefore, was not measured by society's ability to reach a consensus, but was rather determined by the ability of citizens, either as individuals or as members of political parties, to freely debate and disagree with each other.

The ideal public sphere proposed by those who adhered to natural law theory was equally problematic for Ferguson. According to J.G.A. Pocock, the natural law theorists of the eighteenth century were in many ways "apologists of commerce."⁴² They were polite men "of commercial and cultivated society" who looked upon past historical eras as times in which the passions were not properly socialized and moderated.⁴³ It was the "perceived function of property and commerce" to appropriately socialize the passions.⁴⁴ For these "modern" men, commerce and property ownership had the ability to fundamentally change man's nature. If allowed to freely pursue commercial ventures, man would become civilized and properly socialized. This idea had some important political implications. Unlike men of antiquity who could be wholly political beings,

⁴² J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 115.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 117.

modern man was too involved in commercial undertakings to be undivided between the private and the public. Modern man “related to [the] government only through a series of social relationships” and could not be expected to take an active part in the public sphere.⁴⁵ “Unity of personality in political action” was archaic and entirely unsuitable to a modern, commercial society.⁴⁶

Many within Britain, including Adam Smith, adhered to this tradition. Smith believed that citizens should be free to pursue their own interests, so long as they abided by the rules of law. By pursuing their own interests, citizens “frequently promote[d] [the interest] of society more effectually than when they really intended to promote it.”⁴⁷ Smith preferred “tranquility” and “complaisance” in the public sphere over turbulence and conflict because he believed it was possible to “fulfill...public/political duties passively.”⁴⁸ What benefit did society gain by citizens constantly bickering amongst themselves? Society would, in Smith’s opinion, be much better served if citizens supported the “established government” and focused their attention inward.⁴⁹ Tumult and conflict would lead to chaos and, ultimately, not do “much good” for the society.⁵⁰ Ferguson rejected this understanding of society and the public sphere. Having a society based on the universal, unchecked pursuit of self-interest would lead to corruption and ruin, not the unintended public good.

Even though few people shared Ferguson’s vision for a robust, contentious political sphere, he believed it would safeguard Britain’s liberty and allow citizen’s to

⁴⁵ Ibid, 121.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 122.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 163.

⁴⁸ Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 161.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 163.

take an active role in their society. In the eighteenth century, the conflict that existed between members of different political parties was the closest thing Britain had to a tumultuous public sphere. Ferguson accepted political parties because of their ability to create conflict and friction, but hoped for something more. He did not want debate limited to members of parties. Instead, he wanted all citizens to actively express their ideas and debate their fellow citizens within the public sphere.

Conclusion

Adam Ferguson hoped that his teachings could spare Britain future moral and political decay. Although earnest and steadfast in his work, this goal proved to be too grand for one professor to achieve. While the extent of Britain's "decay" is debatable, it is undeniable that Britain did not follow the path to virtue that Ferguson laid out in his teachings and writings. In the decades and centuries following Ferguson's life, Britain continued to modernize and commercialize. As a result, citizens became increasingly disconnected from their government and the individual's responsibilities to state and society became less important than an individual's right to pursue private interests. This is not to say, however, that Ferguson's work was all for naught. Letters written by his former students indicate that Ferguson did indeed impact their lives in a positive manner, causing them to strive for lives of "virtuous actions."¹ Ferguson could not change the course of British history, but he was able to change the lives of some of his students. Upon his death in 1816, Sir Walter Scott acknowledged Ferguson's contributions to society by penning the epitaph on Ferguson's headstone. Scott wrote:

"Here rest the mortal remains of Adam Ferguson LLD, Professor of moral philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. He was born at Logieward in the county of Perth on the 20th June 1723 and died in this city of St. Andrews on the 22nd day of February 1816. He employed the interval betwixt his childhood and grave with unostentatious and steady perseverance in acquiring and in diffusing knowledge and in the practice of public and of domestic virtue. To his venerated memory this monument is erected by his children, that they may record his piety to God and benevolence to man, and commemorate the eloquence and energy with which he inculcated the precepts of morality and prepared the youthful mind for virtuous actions. But a more imperishable

¹ Richard Sher, "Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), 119. Roy Sorensen, "Fame as the Forgotten Philosopher: Meditations on the Headstone of Adam Ferguson," *Philosophy* 77 (January 2002), 109.

memorial to his genius exists in his philosophical and historical works, where classic elegance, strength of reasoning and clearness of detail secured the applause of the age in which he lived, and will long continue to deserve the gratitude and command the admiration of posterity.”²

Despite Scott’s belief that Ferguson’s work would be “imperishable” and venerated by posterity, his influence was only felt through the early decades of the nineteenth century.³ For reasons yet unknown, Ferguson fell out of favor with intellectuals and historians by the middle of the nineteenth century. Perhaps his ideas about virtuous, public-minded citizens were viewed as too antiquated for a modern, commercial society. No matter the reason for his fall from grace, continuing to portray Ferguson as a minor historical figure, or viewing him as representative of Scottish Enlightenment ideology, is historically inaccurate. It is hoped that, through exploring his career at the University of Edinburgh, this paper has, in some small way, rehabilitated Ferguson and shown that he is indeed a figure worth studying.

² Sorensen, 109.

³ Ibid.

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