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ADAM FERGUSON ON PARTISANSHIP, PARTY CONFLICT, AND POPULAR PARTICIPATION*

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Adam Ferguson has usually been portrayed as an advocate of conflict, political parties, and factional strife. This article demonstrates that this is a rather unbalanced reading. A careful investigation of Ferguson's works and correspondence in context reveal a man deeply troubled by both turbulence and party politics. He consistently expressed fears of what he saw as the tumultuous populace, and the willingness of party leaders to rise on the shoulders of the mob. This could ultimately lead to military despotism, something he dreaded. While Ferguson's theory of antagonistic sociability was original, this article shows that we should not take for granted that it implied an approval of party conflict in a broad sense. Indeed, he was highly critical of opposition parties seeking to replace the government. He did tolerate a regulated form of contest between different orders in the state under a mixed constitution, but it is here argued that he is much better understood as a Christian Stoic promoting stability and order than a supporter of party struggle.

A self-described “war-like philosopher,” Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) was perhaps the most significant theorist of conflict in the Scottish Enlightenment.¹ Commentators have often

* Thanks are due to Janet Chan, Robin Douglass, Tim Hochstrasser, Robin Mills, Johan Olsthoorn, Evangelos Sakkas, and Ian Stewart who have read earlier drafts of this article. The usual disclaimers apply. I have presented earlier versions of this material at the annual conference of the British Society for Eighteenth Century Studies in Oxford in January 2016 and at the Cambridge Graduate Conference in Political Thought & Intellectual History in May 2016. At the latter event, I benefited from having John Robertson as a discussant.

portrayed him as an uncomplicated supporter of political conflict.² It is also commonly claimed that Ferguson was a defender of party contest and even factions.³ Politically, Ferguson has been described as a “constitutional Whig” and sometimes more anachronistically as a “conservative Whig,” whose practical politics were not too dissimilar from those of his friends and contemporaries David Hume and Adam Smith.⁴ It is true that

Finally, I would like to thank *MIH*'s anonymous reviewers and Duncan Kelly. Eighteenth-century spelling has been kept in quotations throughout as have inconsistencies in spelling.

¹ Ferguson to John McPherson, 14 May 1798, in *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle, 2 vols. (London, 1995), 2: 433. (Hence: *Correspondence*.)

² Lisa Hill, “Eighteenth-Century Anticipations of the Sociology of Conflict: The Case of Adam Ferguson,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 281-99; Andreas Kalyvas and Ira Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings: Making a Republic for the Moderns* (New York, 2008), 51-87; Silvia Sebastiani, “Beyond Ancient Virtues: Civil Society and Passions in the Scottish Enlightenment,” *History of Political Thought*, 32 (2011), 837-8; Marco Guena, “Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Case of Adam Ferguson,” in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2002), 2: 177-96, at 178, 187, 191-2; Christopher Berry, *Hume, Hegel and Human Nature* (The Hague, 1982), 183.

³ Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Roman past and Europe's Future* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2013), 79; Lisa Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht, 2006), esp. 17, 128-31; idem, “Anticipations of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Social Thought in the Work of Adam Ferguson,” *European Journal of Sociology* 37 (1996), 203-28, at 217-19; Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1995), 114, 310; David Kettler, “History and Theory in Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*: A Reconsideration,” *Political Theory* 5 (1977), 452-3; David Thomson, “The Conception of Party in England, in the period 1740 to 1783” (unpublished D. Phil. thesis, Cambridge, 1938), 179, 210-11.

⁴ For Ferguson as a “constitutional” or “conservative Whig,” see Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment*, 94, 109; Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate*

Ferguson consciously belonged to a different *philosophical* camp from Hume and Smith, and was a much more passionate champion of the establishment of a national militia.⁵

Nevertheless, his politics had a comparable Whig establishment orientation with defense of the Hanoverian settlement, the Act of Union, the mixed constitution, acceptance of commercial society, and emphasis on moderation and gradual change at the core.⁶ Ferguson's alleged support for conflict, however, would seem to set him apart from many of his fellow Scots.⁷

The role of political parties was a prominent theme in British political debate in the eighteenth century.⁸ Internal division had traditionally been condemned in the history of

Literati of Edinburgh (1985), (Edinburgh, 2nd ed., 2015), 23-44, 187-212; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (1959), (Indianapolis, IN, 2004), 194. The similarity between Ferguson, Hume, and Smith can be overstressed, however, and the latter two are better defined as exponents of "skeptical Whiggism," which to some extent set them apart from Ferguson and the members of the so-called moderate literati of Edinburgh. On this, see Duncan Forbes, "Skeptical Whiggism, Commerce and Liberty," in Andrew Skinner and Thomas Wilson, eds., *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1975), 179-201.

⁵ Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1996), 64; John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh, 1985), 74-91, 200-32, *passim*. As Robertson stresses, Hume was more positive about militias than Smith was.

⁶ For Ferguson on commerce, see Guena, "Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment"; Iain McDaniel, "Enlightened History and the Decline of Nations: Ferguson, Raynal, and the Contested Legacies of the Dutch Republic," *History of European Ideas*, 36 (2010), 203-16.

⁷ Hill, *The Passionate Society*, 17, 128-31; Guena, "Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment," 178; Sebastiani, "Beyond Ancient Virtues," 837-8.

⁸ Pasi Ihalainen, *The Discourse on Political Pluralism in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Helsinki, 1999); Terence Ball, "Party," in Ball, James Farr, and Russell L Hanson, eds., *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change* (Cambridge, 1989); Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke* (Chicago and London, 1965); Caroline Robbins, "'Discordant Parties': A Study

Western political thought, until Machiavelli notoriously argued in *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (c. 1513-17) that tumult and discord between different orders of the state had been beneficial for the Roman republic.⁹ This “Machiavellian” argument was repeated in many eighteenth-century treatments of Rome, including those of Montesquieu and Ferguson himself.¹⁰ The argument in favor of disunion was generally contested in British eighteenth-century discourse, even though political parties had been at the heart of public life since the establishment of the Whig and Tory parties around the time of the Exclusion Crisis of 1679-81. Edmund Burke’s *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), which unapologetically argued for the usefulness of political parties, was a pivotal text in giving a more positive meaning to the concept of party.¹¹ Some of the groundwork preparing the way for a more balanced view had already been made by the French historian Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, who had claimed that equilibrium between Whig and Tory could help maintaining the proper balance between the popular and monarchical parts of Britain’s mixed

of the Acceptance of Party by Englishmen,” *Political Science Quarterly* 37 (1958), 505-29; Klaus von Beyme, “Partei, Fraktion,” in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 1972-92), vol. 4 (1978), 677- 733.

⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Chicago, 1998), Bk 1, Ch. 4-6, 16-23. Machiavelli himself differentiated between beneficial and harmful divisions in *Istorie Fiorentine* (c. 1525); see Nicolai Rubinstein, “Italian Political Thought, 1450-1530,” in J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700* (Cambridge, 1991), 30-65, at 57.

¹⁰ Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734), (Paris, 2008), 129; Ferguson, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1783), 5 vols. (Edinburgh, 1825), 1: 60, 2: 221-2. It should be noted, however, that Ferguson’s remarks in favor of discord are few and far between compared with all his comments about the danger and disorder party division brought on in Rome.

¹¹ Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015), 257-67.

constitution.¹² Also of significance was Bolingbroke, who had distinguished between party and faction, and made the case for the oppositional Country party in the 1730s.¹³ In the Scottish context, Hume has been described as a passionate enemy of party on the basis of his first batch of essays on British politics in the early 1740s.¹⁴ However, Hume's nuanced views are arguably better summarized by his own paradoxical statement that while the British parties often threatened the total dissolution of the government, they were also "the real causes of its permanent life and vigour."¹⁵ Smith appears to have been more negative, having privately written that "tho' a little faction now and then gives spirit to the nation the continuance of it obstructs all public business and puts it out of the power of [the] best Minister to do much good," making explicit reference to Bolingbroke's opposition to Sir Robert Walpole's ministry.¹⁶

The place of Ferguson in this eighteenth-century debate about party has not been properly explained.¹⁷ While it is true that Ferguson's theory of human nature and sociability held division and partisanship to be inevitable, what tends to be forgotten when he is misleadingly portrayed as a simple promoter of party conflict is that he shared Smith's

¹² Rapin, *Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Torys* (The Hague, 1717), 181-3.

¹³ Max Skjönsberg, "Lord Bolingbroke's Theory of Party and Opposition," *Historical Journal* 59 (2016), 947-73.

¹⁴ Nicholas Phillipson, *David Hume: The Philosopher as Historian* (1989), (London, 2011), 59.

¹⁵ Hume, *The History of England* (1754-62), 6 vols. (Indianapolis, IN, 1983), 5: 556 (Note [J]).

¹⁶ Smith to Lord Fitzmaurice, 21 February 1759, in *The Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis, IN, 1987), 28. See also Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), 2 vols. (Indianapolis, IN, 1981), 1: 886.

¹⁷ By contrast, external conflict in Ferguson's writings has been dealt with recently; see Iain McDaniel, "Unsocial Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment: Ferguson and Kames on War, Sociability, and the Foundations of Patriotism," *History of European Ideas*, 41 (2015), 662-82.

scornful attitude towards parties and party politicians motivated by private ambition. Like Hume, Ferguson only condoned party struggle with severe qualifications. However, unlike Hume, whose main worry was parties of principles, especially religious, as opposed to parties of interest,¹⁸ Ferguson was especially concerned about the self-interested side of party politics. Ferguson did believe that parties in a loose sense had a role to play in a mixed constitution, such as the British, by protecting the interests of different orders in the state, provided they were kept within constitutional bounds and were restricted to the visible powers in the state, i.e. monarch, lords, and commons. As soon as such “parties” stepped outside of the constitutional framework, they became an acute danger. More precisely, in the process of the present examination, we shall see that Ferguson was worried and warned about the rise of organized opposition parties, especially those appealing to popular discontent “out-of-doors” and were intent on replacing the government. This will become particularly clear when Ferguson’s views on the Rockingham Whigs are considered. He was convinced that such parties posed a threat to civil liberty rightly understood, i.e. to the peace and order of society. This article challenges the prevalent interpretation of Ferguson as an unequivocal advocate of conflict, and instead shows that he was more concerned with promoting security, stability, law and order.¹⁹ This outlook is fully compatible with his Calvinist worldview:

¹⁸ David Hume, “Of Parties in General,” in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN, 1987), 54-63. This is one of the most controversial parts of Hume’s contribution to this debate, since, as J. G. A. Pocock reminds us, “[p]arty was for most men tolerable only when it embodied principle and so was capable of virtue,” whereas parties representing interests were seen as perpetuating “the reign of corruption”; see *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975), (Princeton, 2003), 483-4.

¹⁹ The emphasis of the present text differs from that of Duncan Forbes, who argued that Ferguson’s “whole philosophy was designed for an age whose danger, as he saw it, consisted in the absence of danger.” See Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. Forbes (Edinburgh, 1966), introduction, xxxvi.

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nothing human could alter the divine plan, but disruption and strife could be seen as portents of God's disfavor.²⁰

²⁰ This was particularly the case with the Jacobite rebellion/invasion of 1745-6; see Ferguson, A *Sermon preached in the Ersh [Gaelic] Language to his Majesty's first Highland Regiment of foot, commanded by Lord John Murray, at their cantonment at Camberwell, on the 18th day of December, 1745* (London, 1746).

PARTISANSHIP AND CONFLICT IN HUMAN NATURE

Ferguson spent most of his academic career as a professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University and regarded “human nature” as his main object of study.²¹ He rose to literary fame after the success of the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). It is in Ferguson’s theoretical works, in the *Essay* and his later *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792), where we find his most positive evaluations of political conflict. This may explain why many of his readers have ended up with a fairly one-sided take on this topic. As we shall see, however, the Stoic element of Ferguson’s ethics complicates to some extent the place of party and partisanship in his moral and political thought.²² The *Essay* and the *Principles* are sometimes treated separately and the latter, written after the French Revolution of which Ferguson strongly disapproved, is sometimes seen as a more moderate and cautious work.²³ On the subject of party, however, they are compatible and complementary. Ferguson never departed from his views expressed in the *Essay*. Having made fairly extensive alterations in

²¹ Ferguson’s project can be seen within the wider preoccupation with a “science of man” in the Scottish Enlightenment. On the “science of man,” see the work of Nicholas Phillipson, notably *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (London, 2010).

²² It should be noted, however, that the two modern Stoic philosophers Ferguson most often referred to disagreed on the subject of party and partisanship; compare Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (2nd ed., 1726), ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis, IN, 2008), 141, with Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, “Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend” (1709), in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), 53.

²³ Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment*, 103, 116. For Ferguson’s response to the French Revolution, see Anna Plassart, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the French Revolution* (Cambridge 2015), 57-8, 125-55.

1768 and 1773, but no changes with direct impact on the present discussion, he wrote to his publisher that it “must remain in its original form” ahead of its sixth edition in 1793.²⁴

Ferguson considered human beings prone to both union and discord, to amity as well as enmity. “[I]n treating human affairs,” he said, “we would draw every consequence from a principle of union, or a principle of dissension.”²⁵ While he considered humans to be naturally prone to conflict, Ferguson’s depiction of human nature was overtly anti-Hobbesian as he believed in natural sociability.²⁶ He also explicitly rejected Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s unsocial view of the state of nature; indeed, he did not have time for the concept of a state of nature, viewing humans as social animals.²⁷ Man’s natural sociability means that human beings will invariably be found in societies and political communities, but in separate communities rather than in one community of mankind. Our attachment to our own community is strengthened by animosity towards other communities.²⁸ The internal space

²⁴ Ferguson to Thomas Cadell, 16 Nov 1792, in *Correspondence*, 2: 350.

²⁵ Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge, 2007), 21. (Hence: *Essay*). See also the following passage from his later work: “Persons may assemble for contest, as well as for concord. And there are few individuals who have not their enemies as well as their friends,” in *Principles of Moral and Political Science: being chiefly a Retrospect of Lectures delivered in the College of Edinburgh* 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1792), 1: 24. (Hence: *Principles*).

²⁶ For Ferguson’s very distinct take on sociability, see McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 64-91. Crucially, Ferguson’s theory of sociability should be distinguished from Hume’s and Smith’s commercial sociability. On this, see Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2005), esp. introduction.

²⁷ For Ferguson’s critique of Rousseau, see *Essay*, 7-16; idem, *Principles*, 1: 198. See also Iain McDaniel, “Philosophical History and the Science of Man in Scotland: Adam Ferguson’s Response to Rousseau,” *Modern Intellectual History*, 10 (2013), 543-68.

²⁸ Ferguson, *Essay*, 9, 25; idem, *Principles*, 1: 33; idem, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy: for the use of Students in the College of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1769), 25-6. (Hence: *Institutes*.)

itself is not a scene of absolute harmony, however, as people are naturally inclined to divide and form “sects” in opposition to others within the community. Our attachment to such a party “seems often to derive much of its force from an animosity conceived to an opposite one” as well as “from a desire to vindicate the rights of our party,” Ferguson wrote in the *Essay*.²⁹

Ferguson’s analysis of human nature further entailed that man was disposed to active engagements and happy in active pursuits whilst unhappy in sloth, which is highly relevant for the present topic.³⁰ He was critical of thinkers who did not sufficiently consider the importance of activity, making “repose” the object of government.³¹ His fear was that models that “prevent agitation and bustle...by the barriers they raise against the evil actions of men, would prevent them from acting at all.”³² Association and public causes are important outlets for man’s active nature. “In his relations to other men he has indefinite scope for the exercise of his active dispositions,” Ferguson argued.³³ Ferguson emphasized the importance of ambition: “The suppression...of ambition, of *party-animosity*, and of public envy, is probably, in every such case, not a reformation, but a symptom of weakness, and a prelude to more sordid pursuits, and ruinous amusements.”³⁴

As Richard Sher has pointed out, however, Ferguson was more interested in explaining *what ought to be* rather than simply *what is*, even if he believed that the former

²⁹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 21.

³⁰ Ibid, 13, 45, 185, 199; idem, *Institutes*, 150; idem, *Principles*, 1: 185.

³¹ As Iain McDaniel has pointed out, this might be an implicit criticism of Smith, who had emphasized “tranquility” in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), (Indianapolis, IN, 1982), 37, 120, 149, 230-2.

³² Ferguson, *Essay*, 209.

³³ Ferguson, *Principles*, 1: 124.

³⁴ Ferguson, *Essay*, 244-5. (My emphasis.)

could only be ascertained on the basis of the latter.³⁵ Ferguson duly argued that in order to achieve happiness in accordance with human nature, “benevolent affections” and “just opinions” had to be appended to active engagements.³⁶ His view of human nature was explicitly Stoic in this regard as he saw himself as taking his cue particularly from Cicero among the ancient Stoics and the Christian neo-Stoic and moral sense philosopher Francis Hutcheson, while criticizing the modern Epicureanism, or the “selfish philosophy” of Mandeville, as well as the moral skepticism of Hume.³⁷ Notably, Hutcheson had stressed the importance of disinterested virtue and “Love of Benevolence.”³⁸ While often described as a

³⁵ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 166-7; Ferguson, *Principles*, 1: 5.

³⁶ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 155.

³⁷ For Ferguson’s critique of Mandeville, see *Essay*, 36-7; idem, *Institutes*, 103. For skepticism, see note 5 and idem, “Of the Principle of Moral Estimation. A Discourse between David Hume, Robert Clerk and Adam Smith” (1801-6), in *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, ed. Vincenzo Merolle (London, 2006), 207-15. Both introductions to the two volumes of the *Principles* presented a comparison between Epicureanism and Stoicism, in a manner strongly approvingly of the latter. Ferguson included his hero Montesquieu along with Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and James Harris among the modern Stoics; see idem, *Principles*, 1: 8. Ferguson also compared the two philosophical “sects” when contrasting the characters of Caesar and Cato the Younger in *The History of the Roman Republic*, 2: 347-57. On Stoicism in the history of political thought, see Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, 2012).

³⁸ Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, 103. “Benevolence” was the key concept for Hutcheson, professor in moral philosophy at Glasgow and sometimes referred to as the father of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ferguson used the term frequently and added the following passage to the revised edition of his *Institutes*: “Benevolence, or the love of mankind, is the greatest perfection; it is likewise the source of greatest enjoyment.” See *Institutes* (Edinburgh, 2nd ed., 1773), 143. See also *Principles*, 2: 344. It is also interesting to note that Ferguson borrowed a copy of Hutcheson’s *Inquiry* from his university library in 1766; see J. B. Fagg, “Ferguson’s Use of the Edinburgh University Library: 1764-1806,” in Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle, eds., *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature* (London, 2008), 39-64, at 60.

quintessentially cosmopolitan philosophy, Cicero had been clear that Stoicism did not preclude partial associations, states and patriotism, although the universe was “virtually a single city.”³⁹ Moreover, Stoicism of the Roman kind promoted by Cicero was by no means adverse to the active life. On the contrary, Cicero’s *De officiis* celebrated public life as superior to any other way of life.⁴⁰ This also appears to have been a common perception of Stoicism in the eighteenth century; David Hume referred to “the Stoic” as “the man of action or virtue.”⁴¹ Ferguson defined the Stoic as the person who “enlisted himself, as a willing instrument in the hand of God, for the good of his fellow-creatures.”⁴²

In the context of his discussion of Stoicism, meanwhile, Ferguson expressed a strong dislike of many aspects of party competition. He argued that “habits of jealousy and envy, of fear and malice” were not only “hostile to the welfare of mankind” but also “destructible of our own enjoyments.”⁴³ It would accordingly be a mistake, he claimed, to “think our felicity is placed in subjects for which our fellow-creatures are rivals and competitors.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Ferguson wrote that judgements of right and wrong are, in “rude minds,” often “disturbed by violent passions, whether of *partial attachment*, jealousy, and cruel revenge.”⁴⁵ Party contest, while providing an outlet for man’s active nature, thus appears as a source of corruption, unhappiness and injustice, according to Ferguson. In short, he believed that “[t]he ingenuous differ from the malicious; the first conceiving mankind as copartners and friends, the other in

³⁹ Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, ed. Julia Annas (Cambridge, 2012), Bk 3, 85.

⁴⁰ Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge, 2015), Bk 1, 28-9.

⁴¹ Hume, “The Stoic” (1742), in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 146 (note).

⁴² Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 4.

⁴³ Ferguson, *Essay*, 54.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Ferguson, *Principles*, 1: 301. (My emphasis.)

conceiving them as rivals and enemies.”⁴⁶ This prominent Stoic strand in Ferguson makes him come across as a much less straightforward champion of competition and conflict – and by extension political parties, whose *modus operandi* consisted of such activities. All this should not lead us to conclude that Ferguson’s thought is contradictory or lacks coherence, a route taken by earlier readers of Ferguson.⁴⁷ Rather, Ferguson intentionally stressed that man’s nature itself is contradictory, or double, with its propensity for discord as well as union, war as well as peace. What is more, Ferguson saw the principles of union and dissension as mutually reinforcing and argued that great acts of benevolence could be realized in conflictual situations.⁴⁸

Ferguson also stressed that the Stoic ideal was not attainable for everyone. He thought that it was desirable to seek “to instil into the breast of private men sentiments of candour toward their fellow-creatures, and a disposition to humanity and justice.”⁴⁹ At the same time, he was clear that “it is vain to expect that we can give to the multitude of a people a sense of union among themselves, without admitting hostility to those who oppose them.”⁵⁰ The moral is straightforward: Stoicism is for elites; for the masses, partisanship is a much more reliable principle of cohesion and co-operation. Although party conflict was inevitable, Ferguson believed that its worst effects could be mitigated: “The pacific may do what they can to allay the animosities, and to reconcile the opinions, of men; and it will be happy if they can

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Principles*, 1: 139.

⁴⁷ David Kettler has written of the “conflict between activist and passivist elements in Ferguson’s conception of virtue”; see *Adam Ferguson: His Social and Political Thought* (1965), (New Brunswick and London, new ed. 2005), 198.

⁴⁸ Ferguson, *Essay*, 28-9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

succeed in repressing their crimes, and in calming the worst of their passions.”⁵¹ He stressed, however, that this mitigation of party animosity must not turn into suppression, as “[n]othing...but corruption or slavery can suppress the debates that subsist among men of integrity.”⁵² This article will now turn to the political implications of the present discussion.

⁵¹ Ibid, 63.

⁵² Ibid.

PARTY AND PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

The argument that parties are unavoidable because of the human propensity to partisanship and ambition was an upshot of Ferguson's theory of human nature. More controversial was his view that conflict between parties could produce political benefits in mixed governments, although it was probably an argument with which his favorite author Montesquieu would have gone along. Montesquieu's importance for Ferguson and his generation of Scottish thinkers can hardly be exaggerated.⁵³ Ferguson drew on "President Montesquieu" for many of his political positions and the chapter heading entitled "Of political law" in the otherwise scarcely footnoted *Institutes* (1769) has a footnote referring to *De l'esprit des loix* (1748).⁵⁴ There are important differences between Montesquieu and Ferguson in their respective descriptions of party division in Britain, however. Whereas Montesquieu had focused on the parties of the executive and legislative, corresponding roughly to government and opposition, Ferguson's treatment concentrated on parties representing different orders in the state. Moreover, as we shall see in the following section, Ferguson was much more alarmed than Montesquieu about the pernicious potential of mob violence and demagogues in Britain.

Like that of Montesquieu, Ferguson's discussion of politics hinged on the political character of a people and the belief that different characters had different governmental needs, and *vice versa*.⁵⁵ That is why Ferguson thought it would be vain to search for the best form of government: "[o]ne people is unfit to govern, or be governed, in the same manner

⁵³ Richard B. Sher, "From Troglodytes to Americas: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce," in David Wootton, ed., *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776* (Stanford, 1994), 368-402.

⁵⁴ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 282; idem, *Essay*, 66.

⁵⁵ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 413-19.

with another,” as he put it.⁵⁶ Republican and monarchical governments required different political character; in short, “[t]he republican must be popular, and the courtier polite.”⁵⁷ The spirit of party was much more menacing in a republican than in a monarchical one: “The spirit of faction that in republics constituted corruption, in monarchies tends to prevent a greater corruption, servility to those in power.”⁵⁸ In short, the “influence of the crown” represented in a simple monarchy what the “faction of the people” did in a republic: the major threat to the constitution.⁵⁹ Neither case, however, was strictly applicable to the mixed monarchy of Britain.

Montesquieu had written about the British constitution in two long chapters of his *De l'esprit des loix* (1748). After having described the British constitution (or the English constitution, as he called it) in book eleven of his *chef-d'œuvre*, Montesquieu proceeded in the final chapter of book nineteen to adumbrate how Britain was perpetually divided into two “parties,” one inclining to the executive and the other to the legislative power, the two visible powers in the state.⁶⁰ With the power of patronage, “all those who would obtain something from [the executive] would be inclined to move to that side, and it could be attacked by all those who could expect nothing from it.”⁶¹ The competition will generate “hatred, envy, jealousy, and the ardor for enriching and distinguishing oneself...to the full extent.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 291.

⁵⁷ Ferguson, *Essay*, 182.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 313.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Miller and Harold Stone (Cambridge, 2015), Part 3, Bk 19, Ch. 27, 325.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

However, since liberty is the principle of the British constitution, “if this were otherwise, the state would be like a man who, laid low by disease, has no passions because he has no strength.”⁶³ Besides, the hatred between the two parties would be “powerless,” Montesquieu claimed: “As these parties are made up of free men, if one party gained too much, the effect of liberty would be to lower it while the citizens would come and raise the other party like hands rescuing the body.”⁶⁴ As the citizen would be afraid to lose their free constitution, they “would believe themselves to be in danger even at the safest of moments.”⁶⁵ Those in opposition to the executive would be unable to admit their self-interested motives and desire for office, and would instead seek to enflame the public fear. This would have the good effect of making the people attentive to avoid “the real perils to which they might sometimes be exposed.”⁶⁶ Finally, as the representatives of the legislative body are more enlightened than the people, they could calm down stormy sentiments and commotion.⁶⁷

Ferguson appears to have agreed with Montesquieu, and indeed Hume,⁶⁸ that party division in mixed governments provided politics with life and vigor. Unbridled party strife was not to Ferguson’s taste, but nor did he think that the British could afford to be politically supine. The British possessed the right to partake in legislation, and “[p]olitical rights, when neglected, are always invaded.”⁶⁹ Ferguson’s main discussion of parties, however, was not overtly about government and opposition parties but rather about “parties” representing

⁶³ Ibid, Part 3, Bk 19, Ch. 27, 325; Part 2, Bk 11, Ch. 5, 156.

⁶⁴ Ibid, Part 3, Bk 19, Ch. 27, 325-6.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 326.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See note 15.

⁶⁹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 202-3.

different orders in the state. The reason why the British enjoyed more security than any other people at any time in history, as Ferguson wrote in a pamphlet published in response to Richard Price in 1776, was that their constitution gave “to all the different orders of the state a power to reject or amend every law that is likely to be grievous on themselves.”⁷⁰ “Amidst the contentions of party” in such a mixed constitution, Ferguson conceded, “the interests of the public, even the maxims of justice and candour, are sometimes forgotten.”⁷¹ His larger point, however, was a different one:

The public interest is often secure, not because individuals are disposed to regard it as the end of their conduct, but because each, in his place, is determined to preserve his own. Liberty is maintained by the continued differences and oppositions of numbers, not by their concurring zeal in behalf of equitable government. In free states [often equivalent with mixed governments in the eighteenth century], therefore, the wisest laws are never, perhaps, dictated by the interest and spirit of any order of men: they are moved, they are opposed, or amended, by different hands; and come at last to express that medium

⁷⁰ 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 Gentlemen in the Country to a Member of Parliament* (London, 1776), 13. (Hence: *Remarks*.) On Ferguson’s admiration for the British constitution, see also his *Sermon preached in the Ersh Language*, 11-12. On the value of orders guarding and promoting their interest, “as far as is consistent with the welfare of the whole,” in a mixed system of government, see *Principles*, 1: 303-4, 2: 464.

⁷¹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 124.

and composition which contending parties have forced one another to adopt.⁷²

This clash between different orders of the state neither represented the Tory and Whig parties in Britain, nor different Whig factions, all of which had representatives among the Commons as well as the Lords.⁷³ It is also doubtful whether it could be said to have neatly represented the Court and Country party division, since, as Thomas Reid remarked, the interest of the Lords was ‘not so considerable as to form a third Party but divides in to the other two [Court and Country].’⁷⁴ In contrast to Montesquieu,⁷⁵ Ferguson’s discussion of “parties” in this context seems very divorced from anything resembling the actual party

⁷² Ibid, 124-5. See also idem, *Principles*, 1: 303-4. These remarks are slightly at variance with his insistence that “[t]he *public spirit* due from every member of any community” included “[a] continual preference of public safety, and public good, to separate interests, or particle considerations,” in *Institutes*, 251. One might wonder why virtue is needed, and why Ferguson was so keen to promote it, when it looks as if interest is doing all the work in the block quote just cited. However, this is not something that would have troubled Ferguson, who saw virtue as the highest good independent of any function.

⁷³ The “Burkean” conception of party can be seen a way of the gentry and nobility counterweighing the king and his friends, and in that sense represent an order in the state; see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 752, 781. However, there is little textual evidence to suggest that Ferguson was here thinking in similar terms, and we shall see in the following section that he was particularly critical of Burke’s party connection, the Rockingham Whigs.

⁷⁴ *Thomas Reid on Society and Politics: Papers and Lectures*, ed. Knud Haakonssen and Paul Wood (Edinburgh, 2015), 49. See also J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1689, 1776* (Princeton, 1980), introduction, 3-20, esp. 5.

⁷⁵ Montesquieu is likely to have derived his analysis from Bolingbroke’s discussion of Court and Country parties; see Robert Shackleton, *Montesquieu: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1961), 297-8.

conflict in Britain. Accordingly, on closer inspection, Ferguson's alleged positive views on party conflict look like praise of the theoretical workings of the mixed constitution. In other words, this is simply a eulogy of the checks and balances inherent in a mixed system of government rather than party conflict as such.⁷⁶ Besides, the context of the passage suggests that it is descriptive rather than prescriptive.⁷⁷ We also have to remind ourselves that party, then as now, carried more than one meaning, and it is at least possible that Ferguson was here using the word in the more general sense of one side engaged against another in a conflict, with little reference to intra-parliamentary party strife in Britain.⁷⁸

It remains clear, however, that Ferguson did defend a form of political conflict, which was intrinsic to the workings of a mixed constitution. The danger was that modern peoples of commercial states such as the British, while their "constitution indeed may be free...its members may likewise become unworthy of the freedom they possess, and unfit to preserve it."⁷⁹ This is not to say that Ferguson meant that there was a constant need to oppose government to protect *political* liberty, as he took radicals as Richard Price to argue. The way that Ferguson understood political or civil liberty – defining it as "the operation of just government, and the exemption from injury of any sort" – meant that he would have had

⁷⁶ For this doctrine, see David Wootton, "Liberty, Metaphor, and Mechanism: 'Checks and Balances' and the Origins of Modern Constitutionalism," in David Womersley, ed., *Liberty and American Experience in the Eighteenth Century* (Indianapolis, IN, 2006), 209-74.

⁷⁷ The passage was part of a section entitled "The History of political Establishment" in the second edition onwards, and "The History of Subordination" originally.

⁷⁸ Out of the eight definitions of "party" in Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), only one, the first, refers directly to political parties.

⁷⁹ Ferguson, *Essay*, 210.

a starkly different conception of what constituted legitimate oppositional practice.⁸⁰ From a mistaken notion of liberty, confusing it with independence and exemption from restraint as well as self-government, “the vulgar conceive a zeal for liberty to consist in opposition to government; take part with every refractory subject; and seem to think that whatever impairs the power of the magistrate must enlarge the freedom of the people.”⁸¹ By contrast, for Ferguson, “the establishment of a just and effectual government for the repression of crimes, is of all circumstances in civil society, the most essential to freedom.”⁸² This did not imply that government should have unbridled power and that opposition was never warranted, as Ferguson underlined that “every one is justly said to be free in proportion as the government under which he resides is sufficiently powerful to protect him, at the same time that it is sufficiently restrained and limited to prevent the abuse of its power.”⁸³

Ferguson was clear, however, that the possession of liberty necessarily entailed agitation. Accordingly, it would be wrong to “estimate the felicity of ages and nations by the seeming tranquillity and peace they enjoy.”⁸⁴ Legislative assemblies, whether collective or representative, “may be censured as exposing men to all the inconveniences of faction or party division.”⁸⁵ However, “if these inconveniences are to be dreaded,” Ferguson continued, “they necessarily may be fairly hazarded, for the sake of the end to be obtained in free

⁸⁰ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 459; idem, *Institutes*, 288-9. He used the terms “political liberty” and “civil liberty” interchangeably. See also Yiftah Elazar, “Adam Ferguson on Modern Liberty and the Absurdity of Democracy,” *History of Political Thought*, 35 (2014), 768-87.

⁸¹ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 459.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 508.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

governments, the *safety* of the people, and the scope which is given to all the respectable faculties of the human mind.”⁸⁶

Moreover, in the final pages of the second volume of the *Principles*, Ferguson connected the argument in favour of allowing the inconveniences of party division with the active nature of man: “If we have not mistaken the interests of human nature, they consist more in the exercises of freedom...than in the possession of mere tranquillity.”⁸⁷ The “collisions of free society,” i.e. deliberation and debate in assemblies with parties, were “trials of ability.”⁸⁸ In the first volume of the same work, Ferguson had argued that

the attainment of a just political order otherwise so necessary to the welfare of mankind, is to be considered also as an occasion on which the principal steps of man’s progress are made, or in which a scene is opened that gives scope to his active disposition, and is fitted, like other parts of his lot, to improve his faculties by rendering the exercise of them necessary to his preservation and well-being.⁸⁹

Ferguson ridiculed those who were “checked in the[ir] commendation of free constitutions of government, by an observation that party divisions are most flagrant in such instances, and the turbulence of free states is contrasted with the seeming tranquility of

⁸⁶ Ibid. (My emphasis.) Ferguson was clear that people would better exercise their human faculties in boisterous than in tranquil environments, having earlier drawn a parallel between factional strife and the development of literature; see idem, *Essay*, 170-1.

⁸⁷ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 508.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 1: 265.

despotic government.”⁹⁰ For Ferguson, despotism “consists of injury all of one side, and which is followed by the denial of redress or impossibility of resistance.”⁹¹ Besides, despotic governments were only seemingly peaceful and in actuality in a constant state of war between oppressors and oppressed, Ferguson argued.⁹² Party struggle was thus a reasonable price to pay for freedom of participation, since “multitude of council is really in itself a greater public advantage than the talents of any single person, however great, can otherwise procure for his country.”⁹³ The error that resulted from the freedom of one person was best corrected by collective wisdom over time, Ferguson concluded.⁹⁴

Even if political participation was an important principle for Ferguson, he stressed the extreme danger of “confound[ing] this advantage with Civil and Political Liberty; for it may happen, that to extend the participation of power, is to destroy Liberty.”⁹⁵ The main example was Rome, where the emasculation of the senate and the increase of popular power led to the fall of the republic.⁹⁶ Political participation should accordingly not be confused with either

⁹⁰ Ibid, 2: 510. In his descriptions and condemnations of despotism, Ferguson was undoubtedly influenced by Montesquieu (see *Essay*, 66), who had famously conceptualized despotism as a distinct form of government. By contrast, Voltaire held that despotism was simply a corruption of monarchy; see *Political Writings*, ed. David Williams (Cambridge, 1994), 97-8.

⁹¹ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 510.

⁹² Ibid, 503.

⁹³ Ibid, 509

⁹⁴ Ibid, 510.

⁹⁵ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 14.

⁹⁶ Ibid. This is a crucial theme in Ferguson’s *History of the Roman Republic* (1783).

democracy or equality, according to Ferguson.⁹⁷ He agreed with Montesquieu that democracy of the ancient, participatory kind was only practicable in small states.⁹⁸ He also argued repeatedly that social inequality was inevitable and perfectly just, and that a political hierarchy, or “ranks” to use eighteenth-century parlance, was essential in all states.⁹⁹ In the *Essay*, Ferguson had argued that those who confine their views to their own subsistence or preservation could not be entrusted with the conduct of nations, as “[s]uch men, when admitted to deliberate on matters of state, bring to its councils confusion and tumult, or servility and corruption; and seldom suffer it to repose from ruinous factions, or the effect of resolutions ill formed or ill conducted.”¹⁰⁰ Unsurprisingly, he disagreed with Price over the importance of extending the franchise. In Britain’s mixed constitution, “[i]t is less material who elects, than who may be elected,” he concluded.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Sheila Mason mistakenly identifies “participatory democracy” as the political ideal for Ferguson; see “Ferguson and Montesquieu: Tacit Reproaches,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11 (1988), 193-204, at 201-2.

⁹⁸ Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 414-5, 468; idem, *Essay*, 125. See also Elazar, “Adam Ferguson on Modern Liberty and the Absurdity of Democracy,” 768-87.

⁹⁹ For Ferguson, as for John Millar (*The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, 1771), the history of subordination was the history of political establishment; see *Essay*, 118. See also *ibid.*, 63-4; idem, *Institutes*, 289-90; idem *Principles*, 1: 260, 2: 463; idem, *Roman Republic*, 1: 370. Moreover, Ferguson can helpfully be seen in the context of his friends among the moderate literati of Edinburgh, for whom “it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between submission to Providence and submission to the existing system of social ‘ranks’ and orders”; see Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 185.

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson, *Essay*, 178.

¹⁰¹ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 13. See also idem, *Principles*, 1: 303-4, 2: 367-75. In a letter to the reformer Christopher Wyvill in 1782, Ferguson emphasized the importance of being cautious if or when extending the franchise; see *Correspondence*, 2: 292.

While Ferguson consistently stressed the importance of participation and the need to avoid making politics a separate profession,¹⁰² extra-parliamentary discontent of the popular kind scared the living daylights out of him. His fears were connected with the potential of factional leaders to abuse a giddy populace and the danger of mob violence escalating into mob rule and eventually military government and despotism. The next section will explore Ferguson's reactions to the popular discontent and the new type of party strife that emerged in Britain in the 1760s and 1770s, in order to shed further light on Ferguson's views on the topic of party conflict.

¹⁰² On this, see Oz-Salzberger, "Ferguson's Politics of Action," in *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, 147-56.

FERGUSON VS. WILKES AND THE ROCKINGHAM WHIGS

Unlike Hume,¹⁰³ Ferguson never used the British party appellations – Whig and Tory – in his published writings.¹⁰⁴ This does not mean, however, that he should be regarded as a strictly theoretical thinker uninterested in the nitty-gritty of politics. On the contrary, he said that he “believe[d] what is done for today has more Effect than books that look big in the Shelve.”¹⁰⁵

Ferguson was involved in church party politics in Scotland as a member of the moderate party.¹⁰⁶ He also served the British state when called upon, for example, as member of a commission which negotiated with the Americans in Philadelphia during the revolutionary war. As noted, prior to his academic career, Ferguson had been chaplain to the Black Watch, a highland regiment with which he served in Flanders and Brittany. Moreover, he was, as we shall see, an active pamphleteer and corresponded with members of the British parliament. The only reason why he did not write more pamphlets was that he, as an Edinburgh professor, felt too far removed from the political scene in London and the City of Westminster. His remoteness did not make him doubt the soundness of his political convictions but he simply

¹⁰³ “Of the Parties of Great Britain” in *Essays, Moral and Political* (Edinburgh, 1741).

¹⁰⁴ We have to remember that the clearly defined two-party structure withered away around 1760; see J. C. D. Clark, “A General Theory of Party, Opposition and Government, 1688-1832,” *Historical Journal* 23 (1980), 295-325, esp. 305.

¹⁰⁵ Ferguson to John Macpherson, 1772, in *Correspondence*, 1: 96. Macpherson, who succeeded Warren Hastings as governor-general of India for a brief spell in 1785-6, was a former pupil of Ferguson and one of his most loyal correspondents.

¹⁰⁶ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 125. Rather than being connected with a grand Westminster party, the moderate party in the Scottish kirk owed its ascendancy, at least initially, to the patronage of the earl of Bute, who in turn had royal favor rather than party as his source of political power.

thought that he would be unable to keep abreast with new publications and consequently not quick enough to respond to attacks.¹⁰⁷

The Middlesex election dispute of 1768-70 furnishes a case study of Ferguson's views on popular tumult, party politics and the British constitution in practice.¹⁰⁸ Having been arrested for seditious libel after criticizing the king's speech in 1763 and declared an outlaw the following year, John Wilkes fled to France to avoid imprisonment both on these grounds as well as for the publication of the pornographic *Essay on Woman*. In 1768 he was compelled to return to England due to his financial situation and sought election to parliament in an attempt to obtain legal immunity. The Grafton ministry expelled him from parliament, but Wilkes was repeatedly re-elected and thrown out as a member of parliament for Middlesex in a series of by-elections, while himself being locked up in the King's Bench prison. The whole episode led to significant unrest and mob violence in London. The question of whether a majority of the House of Commons could rightfully disqualify a representative elected by the people raised constitutional questions, and commentators from all corners were eager to voice their opinions, from Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke to Jean-Jacques Rousseau.¹⁰⁹ In supporting expulsion, Ferguson's position was closer to the Tory Johnson than the Whig Burke.

¹⁰⁷ Ferguson to John Macpherson, 1772, in *Correspondence*, 1: 96.

¹⁰⁸ For the dispute, see John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (1976), (Cambridge, 1981), esp. 163-200.

¹⁰⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland and its projected Reformation* (1772), in *The Social Contract and other Later Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, 2012), 204. Rousseau's brief analysis was similar to that of Burke: Wilkes was a "trouble-maker," but expelling him would establish the bad precedent of only admitting members of parliament acceptable to the Court. For Johnson's and Burke's interventions, see J. C. D. Clark, *Samuel Johnson: Literature, Religion and English*

Ferguson did not write a pamphlet on the subject but spoke his mind in a series of letters to his friend the Scottish MP William (Johnstone) Pulteney,¹¹⁰ who voted with the opposition against expulsion of Wilkes. Like Burke, Ferguson purported to defend the integrity of Britain's mixed constitution, but whereas Burke believed that the democratic element of the constitution was under attack from royal influence, Ferguson held that liberty was threatened by the populace, or, to be more precise, by party politicians in opposition who used the mob as a tool to further their own private ambitions. The most coherent opposition party at this time, the Rockingham Whig connection, was co-operating with the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights in London, which supported the "Wilkite" cause.¹¹¹ According to Ferguson, the episode was a typical example of Montesquieu's description of an opposition party being unable to admit their self-interested motives and instead having to "increase even more the terrors of the people," who were not in real danger.¹¹² Ferguson singled out Burke's patron Charles Watson Wentworth, the second Marquis of Rockingham, as a culprit in his correspondence with Pulteney.¹¹³

Cultural Politics from the Restoration to Romanticism (Cambridge, 1994), 212-4, and Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 252-7, respectively.

¹¹⁰ The husband of Frances Pulteney, daughter and heiress of Daniel Pulteney (cousin of William Pulteney, 1st Earl of Bath). Ferguson and William Johnstone Pulteney were both early members of the Select Society and the Poker Club.

¹¹¹ Frank O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England: The Rockingham Whigs, 1760-82* (London, 1975), 231-57. The other main opposition group was the Chatham-Shelburne connection.

¹¹² Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Part 3, Bk 19, Ch. 27, 326.

¹¹³ Ferguson to Pulteney, 4 Jan 1770, in *Correspondence*, 1: 93. Ferguson also mentioned Sir George Savile, a member of the Rockinghamite cadre in parliament, in the same context. The Rockingham Whigs are believed to have consisted of fifty-five MPs after the 1768 election, and forty-three after the election of 1774, see O'Gorman, *The Rise of Party in England*, 320.

Ferguson was in good company in supporting the expulsion of the MP for Middlesex. Not only was Johnson appalled by the Wilkes unrest, Ferguson's compatriot David Hume was equally dismayed; indeed Hume referred to the London mob as "insolent Rascals."¹¹⁴ The Scottish literati's animosity towards Wilkes is often explained by the anti-Scottish tone of Wilkes's attacks on Lord Bute – a Scottish politician closely associated with George III and leader of the government in 1762-3 – in issue forty-five of his publication the *North Briton* in 1763.¹¹⁵ Ferguson, who had been employed as tutor to Lord Bute's sons in the late 1750s, believed that "[i]f the Populace of England Espoused his [Wilkes's] Cause for his virulence to Scotland I think the Populace of Scotland do right in wishing to have him disgraced."¹¹⁶ However, his fear of Wilkes and the London mob had more to do with their capacity to upset the delicate balance of Britain's mixed constitution. "Our Constitution knows of no Authority but that of King Lords & Commons," he wrote, "but we are now fostering a fourth Power in the State, That of the Populace of London, and at the time in which they are become most Corrupted we are inviting them to a share in the

¹¹⁴ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (1932), 2 vols. (Oxford, 2011), 2: 303. See also J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 137-8; Moritz Baumstark, "The End of Empire and the Death of Religion: a Reconsideration of Hume's Later Political Thought," in Ruth Savage, ed., *Philosophy and Religion in Enlightenment Britain: New Case Studies* (Oxford, 2012), 231-57.

¹¹⁵ Issue "forty-five" was also a reference to the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 with the insinuation that Bute, as a Scot whose surname was Stuart, was a closeted Jacobite. The *North Briton* (i.e. Scotland) was set up in reaction to the *Briton*, an administrative journal edited by the Scot Tobias Smollett. Lord Bute was said by Hume to have been a keen admirer of Ferguson's *Essay*; see Hume to Ferguson, 10 March 1767, in *Correspondence*, 1: 73.

¹¹⁶ Ferguson to Pulteney, 4 Jan 1770, in *Correspondence*, 1: 92.

Government.”¹¹⁷ Ferguson’s distinction between the commons and the populace of London may have run along similar lines as John Brown’s separation between the “people of the kingdom” and the “populace of the cities,” the former being “Those who send Representatives for the Counties to Parliament,”¹¹⁸ and the latter being essentially an uneducated and poor mob.¹¹⁹ Ferguson explicitly stressed that his beloved Montesquieu had underestimated the threat posed by the populace to the British constitution: “Our Government is said by Mr Montesquieu and others to be perfect. They only think of the dangers to Liberty that come from The Crown. They do not consider the dangers to Liberty that come from the Populace.”¹²⁰

The Wilkes affair and Ferguson’s dismay at the popular discontent in London are important for our present enquiry as Ferguson in effect argued against concerted opposition activity in his letters to Pulteney. “I should not have regretted most assuredly your Opposing the Measures of a Minister on any Particular occasion,” he said, “[b]ut if I understand the Term opposition, it is joining with a Party who are engaged in distressing the Government in all Possible ways, who will allow no body to differ from them in any point whatever Nor to serve the Public in any office but in Conjunction with themselves. With this meaning in my

¹¹⁷ Ferguson to Pulteney, 7 Nov 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 82. Ferguson echoes the sentiments of Samuel Johnson, who in *The False Alarm* (1770) criticized those who “are appealing from the Parliament to the rabble”; see *Political Writings*, ed. Donald J. Greene (Indianapolis, IN, 2000), 338. By contrast, Burke ridiculed the idea that the populace had become corrupted in his *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770).

¹¹⁸ I.e. ‘the landed *Gentry*, the benefited *Clergy*, many of the more considerable *Merchants* and Men in *Trade*, the substantial and industrious *Freeholders* or *Yeomen*’; see John Brown, *Thoughts on Civil Liberty, on Licentiousness, and Faction* (London, 2nd ed. 1765), 88.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 87-8, 111-15.

¹²⁰ Ferguson to Pulteney, 7 Nov 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 83.

head if I had been at London I should have prostrated myself at your feet to have hindered you forming any such Connection.”¹²¹ By the aid of concerted opposition activity, “Gamblers for Power” sought to “rise upon the shoulders of the Mob,” Ferguson argued.¹²² He would much rather have seen “a Natural Interest...formed by men of Property & Family to Ward off the Evils with which the Constitution is threatened in the Issue [sic] of a Contest between Mobs & Military Power.”¹²³ The Rockingham Whig party in opposition was pernicious because it was a “Party that wish[ed] for confusion & trouble” in order to further its own interest, Ferguson warned.¹²⁴ “Let your Virtuous opposition Speak. I know what they will chuse when it is their option to hurt administration without doing good to the Public or to do good to the Public without hurting Administration,” he said.¹²⁵

Ferguson continued his attack on the Rockinghamite opposition party six years later in his pamphlet in defense of Lord North’s policy in the American Revolutionary War. In brief, the Rockingham Whigs opposed the government’s war and advocated conciliation.¹²⁶ Ferguson conceded that the contest of parties was “undoubtedly one principle of life in our constitution,” but with the contest between the prerogative of the king and the privilege of

¹²¹ Ibid, 82. Edward Spelman had cursorily but staunchly defended “opposition” earlier in the eighteenth century; see *A Fragment out of the Sixth Book of Polybius* (London, 1743), viii. The most substantial argument in favor of opposition in the first half of the century had been put forward by Bolingbroke in *A Letter on the Spirit of Patriotism* (written in 1736, published in 1749).

¹²² Ferguson to Pulteney, 7 Nov 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 83.

¹²³ Ibid, 82-3.

¹²⁴ Ferguson to Pulteney, 1 Dec 1769, in *ibid*, 89.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 87.

¹²⁶ A year earlier, on 22 March 1775, Burke had delivered his first conciliation speech in parliament; see William Cobbett, ed., *Parliamentary History of England from the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the year 1803*, 36 vols. (London, 1813), 18: 478-540.

parliament long settled, “[i]n the contest of our times, the parties are the pretenders of office and the holders office.”¹²⁷ In the pamphlet – a response to Richard Price’s *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty* (1776) – Ferguson described party struggle in the 1770s as “[a] noble contest, though an ignoble cause.”¹²⁸ The Rockingham Whigs were still the fulcrum of the opposition, and Ferguson complained that “[t]he Americans may flatter themselves, that if the party that now opposes Government, were in power, they would obtain every favour and every concession,” yet adding that this was a vain hope.¹²⁹

Ferguson thus accepted that party contest was an important principle of the British constitution, as “[i]t leads one party to watch the motions of administration; and the other to be on their guard because they are watched.”¹³⁰ At the same time, however, Ferguson was very unhappy with the nature of opposition activity of the 1770s: “As the matter now stands, indeed, it is more the interest of opposition to stop the ordinary movement of government, than to prevent its *abuses*,” he complained.¹³¹ In other words, Ferguson appears to have propagated the old Country “not men, but measures” principle, which was only practicable if

¹²⁷ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 16. Ferguson wrote the pamphlet after he had been granted an annual government pension of £200; see Ferguson to John Home, 27 January 1776, in *Correspondence*, 1: 134. When denouncing the case made by Richard Price in favor of the American rebels, Ferguson was once again warning about the prospect of “military government,” “the fate that has ever attended Democracies attempted on too large a scale”; see *Remarks*, 23, 59. See also Ronald Hamowy, “Scottish thought and the American Revolution: Adam Ferguson’s Response to Richard Price,” in *Liberty and American Experience in the Eighteenth Century*, 348-87.

¹²⁸ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 31-2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 16-17.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 17.

opposition politicians were not seeking office in the manner of the Rockinghamites.¹³² “If they [the opposition] can stop the ordinary course of government, the minister must withdraw to make way for themselves: but in preventing abuses, they only oblige him to change ill measures for good, and by this means to take a firmer hold of his power,” Ferguson wrote.¹³³

The American Revolutionary War soon escalated, with France and Spain entering the war on the side of the Americans in 1778 and 1779 respectively. The North ministry’s policy changed from confrontation to negotiation. William Eden (later Lord Auckland), MP for Woodstock, stressed in his *Four Letters to the Earl of Carlisle* (1779) that the entry of France and Spain into the war was a game-changer. Eden along with Ferguson had been part of a commission led by Frederick Howard, earl of Carlisle, which had unsuccessfully negotiated with the American rebels in 1778.¹³⁴ After its failure, the commission made the case for peace negotiations public in a “Manifesto and Proclamation.”¹³⁵ Eden’s main intention in publishing his *Letters to Carlisle* may have been to defend the policy of negotiation, but interestingly for our present purposes, he also tackled “party spirit” as he appealed to national unity.¹³⁶ With the aid of borrowed phrases from both Hume and Bolingbroke, Eden sought to

¹³² One of the central tenets of the Rockingham program was that they would take office as a corps in order to secure independence. For “not men, but measures,” see Michael C. McGee, “‘Not Men, but Measures’: The Origins and Import of an Ideological Principle,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 64 (1978), 141-54.

¹³³ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 17.

¹³⁴ Ferguson’s inclusion in the commission obliged him to moderate his stance on the American policy, but he remained hawkish; see Hamowy, *Scottish Thought and the American Revolution*, 262-4; Ferguson to William Eden, 2 Jan 1780, in *Correspondence*, 1: 227.

¹³⁵ Rockingham identified Ferguson as its author in the House of Lords; see *Parliamentary History*, 20: 3.

¹³⁶ The first letter was entitled “On certain perversions of political reasoning; and on the nature, progress, and effect of party spirit and of parties.”

show that party struggle was particularly pernicious at a time of war.¹³⁷ Ferguson wrote a letter to Eden, in which he appears to have agreed with the main points put forward in the first *Letter to Carlisle*, applauding Eden for seeking to “rescue the Subject of Politics out of the Hands of Anonymous Party Writers.”¹³⁸ Ferguson emphasized that “our Constitution has Always engendered such Partys & Multiplied such Descriptions” and “[w]hile the Constitution is safe; Ambition & Faction will be Vigorous & Free, & we may owe to them very great & Material Favours.”¹³⁹ Yet, Ferguson was not prepared “to justify Faction in any Single Instance in which it made a Sacrifice of the Public Safety to Private Ambition or Interest.”¹⁴⁰ He continued:

I have heard People talk as if it were understood that because Faction is a Physical appendage of in [sic] our Constitution, that therefore every degree of Faction is to be morally Licensed, & that we are so far to forget the Distinction of Right and wrong as to hold, that to be streight in Politics, which we hold to be crooked in Private Life. I mean Evading & Dissfiguring the Truth of Serving the Ennemys of our Countrey in order to hurt our Rivals in Power.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Eden, *Four Letters to the Earl of Carlisle from William Eden, Esq.* (London, 1779), 21, 22, 31, passim.

¹³⁸ Ferguson to Eden, 2 Jan 1780, in *Correspondence*, 1: 226.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 226-7. Ferguson echoed Hume who had forty years earlier argued that “Honour is a great check upon mankind: But where a considerable body of men act together, this check is, in a great measure, removed”; see Hume, “Of the Independency of Parliament” (1741), in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, 43.

In his letter to Eden, Ferguson applauded his friend George Dempster of Dunnichen, Scottish MP and a member of the Poker Club,¹⁴² for abandoning the Rockingham Whigs to join the government side, while “[c]ondemn[ing] Others for Persisting in Opposition to the very Brink of National Destruction.”¹⁴³ In other words, Ferguson was not arguing against all types of opposition activity, but against the particular activities and form of organization of the Rockinghamite opposition party.¹⁴⁴ It is important to stress that Ferguson was “angry” with the new type of party connection embodied by the Rockingham Whigs and defended by their spokesperson Edmund Burke, i.e. the party connection that saw individuals and measures as interlinked rather than separate.¹⁴⁵ Neither in private nor in public did Ferguson advocate anything like the abolition of parties, which would have been both futile, seeing his view of human nature, and highly inconsistent with his views on political freedom and participation explained in the previous sections. “I know that many ill consequences might be imputed to the state of our parties; but I am not for removing any one safe-guard to freedom, until we have found a better,” he stressed in the *Remarks*.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Club founded by Ferguson in 1762 “to stir the flames of enthusiasm for a Scottish militia”; see Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, 118.

¹⁴³ Ferguson to Eden, 2 Jan 1780, in *Correspondence*, 1: 226.

¹⁴⁴ After the publication of Eden’s “sequel,” *A Fifth Letter to the Earl of Carlisle* (1780), Ferguson wrote to Eden again, saying: “I am much Obligated to you for your fifth Letter & see with great Pleasure the same Tendency as in the former Letters to remove the gloomy Colours which Party is throwing upon our National Affairs.” See *Correspondence*, 1: 235.

¹⁴⁵ Edmund Buke, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford et al. 9 vols. to date (Oxford, 1981-), 2: 241-323, esp. 312-21.

¹⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 17.

To return to the Middlesex election dispute, Ferguson had argued that a party that came to power as a body of men and supported by the London populace would be an unpalatable and dangerous prospect. “A Popular Party in the house having the Majority within & the Cry without may proceed to the fury of mere Party expulsions,” he said.¹⁴⁷ This was a much more pernicious prospect than that of “a Corrupt Minister [who] will be glad to sneak through with his Majority & will surely avoid the odium of expelling any worthy man when by the very supposition of a majority he can go on without any such measure.”¹⁴⁸ In short, Ferguson distinguished between plurality of opinions and the politics of party: “I should be very sorry to see men all of one mind in Parliament: but either this manner of Party or the State itself I am perswaded cannot last.”¹⁴⁹

In lieu of party connection, Ferguson suggested to Pulteney many of the familiar Country proposals to deal with executive influence over the legislative, known as “corruption” in eighteenth-century parlance. These included expulsion or at least a severe reduction of MPs in the government’s pay and shorter parliaments of not more than three years –reform proposals which Burke rejected in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* and instead proposed party connection as the catch-all solution.¹⁵⁰ In 1776, however, Ferguson advanced a “Humean” defense of executive influence over the

¹⁴⁷ Ferguson to Pulteney, 1 Dec 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 87.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Samuel Johnson referred to the “rage of party” in his intervention in the Wilkes debate; see *Political Writings*, 338.

¹⁵⁰ Ferguson to Pulteney, 1 Dec 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 86. Burke and the Rockinghamites would later champion “economical reform,” i.e. a reduction of MPs dependent on the crown; see Bourke, *Empire and Revolution*, 419-32.

legislative.¹⁵¹ Having repeated the argument that “it is proper that the executive should have a voice in the legislature” in the *Principles*, we should not overstress his belief in the feasibility of these traditional Country reforms.¹⁵² Ferguson is better described as an exponent of a Scottish form of establishment Whiggism.¹⁵³ Tellingly, Ferguson never proposed instructions from constituents, stressing that “[i]t is the Spirit of our constitution that Members of Parliament should be well chosen but that being chosen they should be Masters.”¹⁵⁴

It is clear that Ferguson agreed with Hume that extra-constitutional violence would in the end lead to military despotism.¹⁵⁵ More specifically, what he feared was that the London mob would make the government resort to military government to restore law and order, alternatively that a popular leader, a modern-day Caesar or Oliver Cromwell, would rise on the shoulders of the mob and put an end to political liberty.¹⁵⁶ Rockingham may have been one of the “Gamblers for Power,” but Ferguson concurred with Hume that the real threat from this perspective was posed by Chatham (William Pitt the Elder).¹⁵⁷ “I enter my Caution against not only the means that tend to a Dissolution of Parliament but even a change of

¹⁵¹ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 16. The classical formulation of the defense of corruption is found in David Hume’s essay “Of the Independency of Parliament” (1741). It may well have been the case, however, that Hume had “borrowed” this argument from the ministerial press of the 1730s; see Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (1968), (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 123-4.

¹⁵² Ferguson, *Principles*, 2: 488.

¹⁵³ Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 187-212; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 252-3, 260.

¹⁵⁴ Ferguson to Pulteney, 1 Dec 1769, in *Correspondence*, 1: 86.

¹⁵⁵ Hume, *The History of England*, 6: 54.

¹⁵⁶ This was a crucial theme in Ferguson’s *Reflections previous to the Establishment of a Militia* (London, 1756).

¹⁵⁷ Hume to Hugh Blair, 28 March 1769, in *The Letters of David Hume*, 2: 197.

Ministers, Untill this contest between Mobbing & Government has ceased & untill that designing & Dangerous Demagogue L-Chatham has again taken the Gout,” Ferguson wrote in his last surviving letter to Pulteney on the matter.¹⁵⁸

Later in January 1770, the Duke of Grafton resigned, marking the end of the sixth ministry of the turbulent 1760s, and made way for Lord North, for whom Ferguson composed his pamphlet against Richard Price. The hysteria around Wilkes died down,¹⁵⁹ but Ferguson’s fear of the “mob” and popular discontent remained. When the anti-Catholic Gordon riots broke out ten years later, he proposed the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act so that the government could effectively put down public disturbances.¹⁶⁰ If the government allowed “systematic or repeated riots near the vitals of Government,” it could lead to “the start of order that prevails at Constantinople,” i.e. “Asiatic” despotism, Ferguson argued.¹⁶¹ His hardline approach to political disorder was perfectly consistent with his theoretical writings. As we have seen, the goal of civil government was to secure the people from crime and chaos, and it was in this security that “modern” liberty consisted, according to Ferguson.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Ferguson to Pulteney, 4 January 1770, in *Correspondence*, 1: 92.

¹⁵⁹ Wilkes continued to be debarred from the parliament elected in 1768, but was allowed to retain his seat when re-elected in 1774.

¹⁶⁰ Ferguson to [John Macpherson], 12 June 1780, in *Correspondence*, 1: 239.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Montesquieu had been the great influence on the subject of Asiatic despotism and slavery; see *The Spirit of the Laws*, 27-30, Part 1, Bk 3, Ch. 8-11, 59-67; Bk 5, Ch. 13-17, 211-12; Part 2, Bk 12, Ch. 29-30, 264-84, Bk 16-17. See also Franco Venturi, “Oriental Despotism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24 (1963), 133-42.

¹⁶² Ferguson was arguably at one with Hume and the mainstream of the Scottish Enlightenment with regards to the interpretation and evaluation of “modern” liberty; see the preceding section. This is not to say that Ferguson and Hume agreed about everything; for important differences between the two thinkers, see David

He had earlier written the following in the *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769): “In times of occasional tumult, popular frenzy, or rebellion, it may be necessary to treat those who commit such crimes, not as subjects amenable to the laws, but as enemies, who, by disturbing the public peace, have deprived every citizen of his safety, and who therefore cannot have the benefit of laws until the public has recovered its security.”¹⁶³ Accordingly, Ferguson may have seen himself as following in the footsteps of Cicero who had condoned tyrannicide on the basis that “if the wildness and monstrosity of a beast appears in human form, it must be removed from the human community.”¹⁶⁴

Raynor, “Why Did David Hume Dislike Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society?*,” in Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle, eds., *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society* (London, 2009), 45-72.

¹⁶³ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 303.

¹⁶⁴ Cicero, *On Duties*, Bk 3, 111.

CONCLUSION

The common denominator in all of Ferguson's writings was his fear of the populace and the prospect of a demagogue rising on the shoulders of a popular "party" to establish military government.¹⁶⁵ This fear makes him come across as a less straightforward advocate of political conflict than often portrayed. Popular parties are always a political evil, according to Ferguson, since, as he expressed it in his reply to Richard Price, "the power of the people is not the good of the people."¹⁶⁶ Political liberty rightly understood, i.e. security under the rule of law, was usually undermined when popular discontent flared up. Some might have thought that the Rockingham party connection, with its aristocratic bias and attachment to the Court Whig tradition, would have been the kind of party that Ferguson could tolerate.¹⁶⁷ A recovery of Ferguson's responses to the John Wilkes episode in 1768-70 and the American rebellion shows, however, that Ferguson was appalled by the Rockinghamites' willingness to tap into popular discontent and democratic frenzy.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, this article has demonstrated that Ferguson disagreed with the Rockingham Whigs not only in matter of policy but also with

¹⁶⁵ Ferguson claimed that democracy and despotism, although complete opposite in spirit, were often similar in terms of form: "In either, a single person may rule with unlimited sway; and in both, the populace may break down every barrier of order, and restraint of law." See *Essay*, 72.

¹⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Remarks*, 52.

¹⁶⁷ As has been seen, Ferguson also had many acquaintances associated with the Rockinghamite party. For Burke, the Rockinghamites and the Court Whig tradition, see Reed Browning, "The Origin of Burke's Idea Revisited," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 18 (1984), 57-71; c.f. Warren M. Elofson, "The Rockingham Whigs and the Country Tradition," *Parliamentary History* 8 (1989), 90-115.

¹⁶⁸ As became clear after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Burke shared the fear of popular commotion and the power of demagogues. On this, see Richard Bourke, "Popular Sovereignty and Political Representation: Edmund Burke in the Context of Eighteenth-Century Thought," in Bourke and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2016), 211-35, esp. 228-35.

their *modus operandi* as an organized opposition party seeking to take power as a “body of men” – the form of political party defended by Edmund Burke.

The intention of the present article has not been to add Ferguson’s name to the long list of anti-party thinkers of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁹ Ferguson never believed in the possibility – or indeed the desirability – of eradicating parties and differences in politics. Ferguson admired the gregarious, generous and benevolent character of the Christian Stoic. At the same time, he understood that this was a route only available to a precious few. Another necessary ingredient for happiness was activity, which for the “citizen class” could take the form of participation in politics, something Ferguson in turn viewed as inevitably conflictual because of how he interpreted human nature. Party politics was thus inescapable and potentially advantageous, since it provided an avenue for action.

Ferguson also agreed with Montesquieu and Hume that party struggle had the potential to give life to the British constitution, even if we have seen that he seems to have had different “parties” in mind. Montesquieu and Hume made more explicit references to parties of government and opposition, or Court and Country parties, whereas the only type of party conflict of which Ferguson unequivocally approved amounted to little more than the checking and balancing of the different parts of the mixed constitution. Ferguson stressed, however, that participation and party competition in this limited form made citizens attentive and engaged. Without such “agitation and troubles,” citizens of commercial nations risked losing their vitality and becoming unworthy of the freedom they possessed, he warned.

For all the reasons discussed in the present article, Ferguson emphasized that it was imperative that the contest under the British constitution was confined to the visible powers

¹⁶⁹ For the anti-party tradition, see Nancy Rosenblum, *On the Side of the Angels: An Appreciation of Parties and Partisanship* (Princeton and Oxford, 2008), 25-107.

of the state: monarch, lords, and commons. He was vehemently opposed to a “fourth estate” of the populace impressing their views on their representatives and involving themselves directly in government, and thereby creating disorder and tumult.¹⁷⁰ This does not make Ferguson a reactionary; he saw himself as supporting a mixed system of government that he alongside most of the Scottish moderate literati regarded as progressive, but fragile. He feared that if British politicians bowed to popular pressures, or worse, if they sought to exploit such pressures to promote their self-interests, which was how Ferguson conceived of the Rockingham Whigs, Britain could expect a similar fate as that of Rome, when the ascendancy of the popular party and the emasculation of the aristocratic party led to the destruction of liberty for all and the rise of military government.¹⁷¹

Even if he sometimes used the words interchangeably, we can thus conclude that Ferguson made a conceptual distinction between “parties,” which represented the different parts of the constitution and protected genuine interests, and “factions,” which sacrificed the public safety to ambition and private interest. This type of distinction was, at least since Bolingbroke, fairly commonplace in eighteenth-century British discourse.¹⁷² The Ferguson who emerges from this investigation is indeed much more a product of his own day and

¹⁷⁰ Ferguson believed that the “people” were in principle represented under the British constitution, and while exclusions from voting based on sex, age or fortune were indeed arbitrary, liberty was more dependent on the quality of the representatives than the number of voters; see *Principles*, 2: 467-75.

¹⁷¹ There has not been space to deal with Ferguson’s *History of the Roman Republic* at length in the present study. For this and the theme of “Caesarism” generally, see the work of Iain McDaniel, esp. “Ferguson, Roman History and the Threat of Military Government in Modern Europe,” in *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, 115-30. See also note 10.

¹⁷² One of the innovative approaches of Hume was to reject such a distinction in opposition to Bolingbroke. By contrast, Thomas Reid followed Bolingbroke in making such a distinction; see *Thomas Reid on Society and Politics*, 50.

intellectual environment than the maverick who “approv[ed] of factional conflict” and “anticipated” both Max Weber and Carl Schmitt in his analysis of conflict.¹⁷³ While Ferguson was certainly no crude anti-party thinker, it is very unlikely that he would have accepted descriptions of himself as an advocate of internal discord. He ends up somewhere between Burke’s defense of organized parliamentary parties and Rousseau’s outright ban on partial interests.¹⁷⁴ Ferguson’s views were eclectic but characteristically moderate, and not entirely dissimilar from the mainstream and sometimes hysterical anti-party rhetoric of the eighteenth century.

¹⁷³ Hill, *The Passionate Society*, 17; Kalyvas and Katznelson, *Liberal Beginnings*, 71, 73.

¹⁷⁴ Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 60. Although Ferguson did not engage as closely with *Du contrat social* (1762) as with Rousseau’s first and second *Discourse* (1750 and 1754-5), he presumably read it as he referred to it when discussing “original compact” theories; see *Principles*, 2: 218. The relative silence on *Du contrat social* in eighteenth-century Scotland is a fascinating subject.