

# Politics in the Classroom: Ferguson as a Professor in the Age of Revolution

Michael Brown

Adam Ferguson had an unusually long, varied, and colourful career. In his early twenties, Ferguson became military chaplain in the Black Watch – where he was rumoured to have seen action at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745 (he did not, but he was present at an operation at Port l’Orient in September 1746 and in the retreat from Flanders that year).<sup>1</sup> Throughout his career he mentored the sons of nobility. Examples include his service as a tutor to sons of the Earl of Bute and as a guide for Charles Earl of Chesterfield on a European grand tour (during which he met with Voltaire). While moving from his military chaplaincy to a future academic career in Edinburgh, Ferguson spent a year as the Keeper of the Advocates Library (succeeding David Hume). Shortly thereafter he took up an appointment as a professor of natural philosophy at the University of Edinburgh (1759–1764), occupied the Chair of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy (1764–1785), and was nominally a professor of mathematics following his retirement from active teaching in 1785.<sup>2</sup> He was also actively engaged in civic affairs. He was secretary to the Carlisle commission, which tried and failed to negotiate a settlement of the American conflict in 1778 after the defeat at Saratoga, and he may have served for a time as Lord Milton’s private secretary.<sup>3</sup> Military man, private tutor, librarian, professor, and politician, it is little wonder he sought to reconcile the

---

<sup>1</sup> For details of Ferguson’s military experience see Bruce Buchan, ‘Adam Ferguson, the 43<sup>rd</sup> and the Fictions of Fontenoy’ in Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 25–43.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Brown, ‘Dugald Stewart and the Problem of Teaching Politics in the 1790s’, *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 1.1 (2007), 87–126. Ferguson’s tenure as Chair of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy was clearly his most significant professional academic achievement. Dugald Stewart succeeded him as the moral philosophy chair.

<sup>3</sup> J.B.Fagg, ‘An Ingenious Literary Production’: Adam Ferguson and the Carlisle Commission Manifesto’, *Scotia*, 24 (2000), 1–14.

varied passions of mankind in a holistic system. In so doing he emphasised the need to maintain the virtues of both ‘rude’ and ‘refined’ nations.<sup>4</sup>

In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Ferguson is particularly concerned with explicating the nature of these virtues. Mapping out the stadal development of human society, he narrates his story using a series of key devices. Most frequently deployed in Marxist readings of the *Essay* is the sequential development of the means of production: moving from tribes of hunter-gatherers through agrarian communities to complex commercial societies.<sup>5</sup> There is also a second reading or background story, which has received attention in the Cambridge School’s treatment of the Scottish Enlightenment—with its own concern for formal political structures and jurisprudence. This measures an incline from savage peoples (who have no idea of property) to barbarous communities (who do have an idea of personal property but have not yet developed a legal system to organise its management), and subsequently to polished nations whose legal systems are fully operational.<sup>6</sup>

Ferguson’s *Essay* is imbued with an abiding concern that in the transition from one form of social organisation to another some of the primary passions of humanity are stunted, to the ultimate detriment of the emergent society. The final section of the *Essay* indeed, can be read as a Jeremiad against the corruption and effeminacy of commercial society, expressing the fear that the dissolution of the society will follow.<sup>7</sup> The problem raised there was whether it was possible to bridge the conceptual divide between rude (savage and barbarous) societies and polite nations. How might the virtues found in the former be sustained in the latter? This is the conundrum upon which this paper turns, and in doing so, it raises (and hopefully answers) questions concerning

<sup>4</sup> Detail from this paragraph comes from the ‘Chronology of Ferguson’s Life’ in Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on Civil Society*, Fania Oz-Salzberger, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xxvi–xxviii. Ferguson employed the terms ‘rude’ and ‘refined’ to refer to the two major forms of social organization that become manifest in the history of civil society in his famous *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. The category ‘rude’ refers to groups of people who were then commonly labelled as ‘savage’ or ‘barbarian,’ while the term ‘refined’ pertained to groups of people in polite, genteel, relatively modern societies.

<sup>5</sup> R.L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 150–5.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Jack Hill for highlighting the importance of this narrative: see Jack A. Hill, ‘Adam Ferguson’s Discourse on “Rude Nations” in the *Essay* and the Critique of Despotism’, *Scottish Journal of Historical Studies*, 38/1 (May 2018), 104–20. See also Ferguson, *Essay*, 82.

<sup>7</sup> For a wider discussion of the structure of the *Essay* see Christopher Finlay, ‘Rhetoric and Citizenship in Adam Ferguson’s *Essay on the History of Civil Society*’, *History of Political Thought*, 27 (2006), 27–49.

Ferguson's commitment to the classroom and, by default, his perception of contemporary political events and the challenges they contained.

### Valour

Scholarship has rightly attended to the role of military valour in Ferguson's answer to the problem of retaining virtue. In the *Essay* Ferguson identifies as the first of his 'general characteristics of human nature' the trait of 'self-preservation.' This, he further observes, operates 'prior to the perception of pleasure and pain, and prior to the experience of what is pernicious and useful.'<sup>8</sup> The dispositions toward self-preservation, Ferguson contends, are 'nearly the same in man that they are in the other animals,' however, he adds that in human development:

They are sooner or later combined with reflection and foresight; they give rise to his apprehension on the subject of property, and make him acquainted with that object of care which he calls his interest. Without the instincts which teach the beaver and the squirrel, the ant and the bee, to make up their little hoards for winter, at first improvident, and, where no immediate object of passion is near, addicted to sloth, he [the human] becomes, in process of time, the great storemaster among animals.<sup>9</sup>

Property and acquisition, the twin engines of progress, are derived from a pre-rational instinct to survive. Moreover, the survival impulse underpins two subsidiary characteristics Ferguson observes in humankind: the tendency to congregate in groups and for those groups to compete with each other. As Lisa Hill has highlighted, conflict is built into Ferguson's anthropology.<sup>10</sup>

The propensity of human groups to come into conflict with each other prioritises the natural attribute of physical prowess and the concomitant mental attribute of courage. It also underscores the need for military organisation.<sup>11</sup> It is here that Ferguson's biography becomes pertinent: his involvement in the Black Watch and his experience of battle; his mobilisation of the Poker Club in

<sup>8</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Hill, 'Eighteenth-Century Anticipations of a Sociology of Conflict', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 62 (2001), 281–99. *Idem*, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht: Springer Press, 2006), 123–38.

<sup>11</sup> It is the perception of the need for military organization that prompts Ferguson's favouring of Sparta over Athens in the *Essay*. See Alexander Broadie, 'Adam Ferguson on Sparta, Rome and the Fragility of Civil Liberties', in this volume.

1762 to campaign for the extension of a militia into Scotland and the pamphlet five years earlier arguing in favour of a select, voluntary militia in England all fall under the command of the militaristic composition of his thought.<sup>12</sup> It is in his arguments for a Scottish militia force that Ferguson most clearly enunciated the equation he constructed between military valour and civic virtue.<sup>13</sup> Asserting that ‘We do not propose to give up our liberties; we propose to gain a situation where we may better defend them,’ he laid out a series of measures to heighten the merit attached in Britain to serving in the militia. Ferguson hoped that ‘from such a distribution of honours it may be expected that the military character will rise in the esteem of the public, and the arms of the nation settle in the hands of those who deserve its confidence, on account of their personal spirit, the property and interest in its preservation.’<sup>14</sup> Among the numerous benefits his militia scheme would incur would be the ability of the elite – he speaks of a ‘select band’ in counterpoise of a ‘promiscuous multitude’ – to make a personal investment in the country, and a reduction in the likelihood of faction.<sup>15</sup> In a passage redolent of the wider Scottish literati’s memory of the fall of Edinburgh to the Jacobite forces in 1745, he argued:

Whilst the body of our people is disarmed, and pacific to a degree which tempts an invasion, we have reason to apprehend danger even from a few, whom the spirit of faction continues to stimulate. A few banditti from the mountains, trained by their situation to a warlike disposition might overrun the country . . . When the lovers of freedom and their country have an equal use of arms, the cause of a pretender to the dominion and property of this island is from that moment desperate.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast he closed by expressing his confidence that ‘if we rest our militia upon its proper basis, a general use of arms and the love of honour, we shall

---

<sup>12</sup> On the Poker club see R.B.Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 231–7.

<sup>13</sup> For treatment of this text and its wider context see John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: John Donald Press, 1985) and R. B. Sher, ‘Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith and the Problem of National Defense’, *Journal of Modern History*, 61 (1989), 240–68.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia* (London, 1756), 30, 41.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, 47. See also David Raynor, ‘Ferguson’s *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia*’ in Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 70.

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson, *Reflections Previous*, 24–5. See Sher, *Church and University*, 37–44 for a treatment of the effect of the 1745 Rising on the Moderate party literati.

find men hardy enough to serve their country; that duty will employ the most deserving of our people, whose sword, without alarming the public liberty, will be a sure defence against a foreign enemy.<sup>17</sup> Honour, duty, liberty and defence: the militia was Ferguson's venue for valour and virtue.<sup>18</sup>

### Senates

However important this trope of military valour is to Ferguson, it was from the early pages of the *Essay* entwined with a second register which has received rather less scholarly attention. As well as asserting the existence of a 'set of dispositions' that prompt self-preservation, the same sentence acknowledges 'another which lead to society'. While these principles of 'union' can, 'by enlisting him [the natural man] on the side of one tribe or community, frequently engage him in war and contention with the rest of mankind' they also manifest themselves in affection and in social concord.<sup>19</sup> 'The social union is not founded on self-interest, but emanates from 'mutual discoveries of generosity, joint trials of fortitude [which] redouble the ardours of friendship, and kindle a flame in the human breast, which the considerations of personal interest and safety cannot suppress.'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Ferguson asserts that 'men are so far from valuing society on account of its mere external conveniences that they are commonly most attached where those conveniences are least frequent; and are there most faithful where the tribute of their allegiance is paid in blood.'<sup>21</sup> From hence Ferguson derives the spirit of patriotism, which alone 'can account for the obstinate attachment of a savage to his unsettled and defenceless tribe.'<sup>22</sup> The moralist in Ferguson contends that it is, in fact, in commercial society that man 'may be supposed to have experienced, in its full extent, the interests which

---

<sup>17</sup> Ferguson, *Reflections Previous*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> In this I concur with R. B. Sher who argued the militia was, for Ferguson, 'first and foremost a school for virtue'. Sher, *Church and University*, 219. See however David Raynor who writes 'I can find no basis in *Reflections* for such an interpretation, and believe it would be more accurate to say that for Ferguson the militia was first and foremost a formidable and potentially invincible system of national defence, but to be so it had to be restricted to those who were *already* virtuous. The lower orders of society are not virtuous and can never become virtuous, so must be excluded from the militia.' Raynor, 'Ferguson's *Reflections*', 71.

<sup>19</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

individuals have in the preservation of their country.<sup>23</sup> And yet Ferguson adds a cautionary observation regarding social interaction in commercial society:

It is here indeed, if ever, that man is sometimes found a detached and solitary being; he has found an object which sets him in competition with his fellow-creatures, and he deals with them as he does with his cattle and his soil, for the sake of the profits they bring. The mighty engine which we suppose to have formed society, only tends to set its members at variance, or to continue their intercourse after the bands of affection are broken.<sup>24</sup>

Commerce, when coupled with political vices, is seen as corrupting; alienating the individual from his peers through the pursuit of material self-interest.<sup>25</sup>

This creates difficulty for how one should account for states coming to identify general interests, and how they experience what Ferguson terms ‘National Felicity.’<sup>26</sup> It leads him, openly following Montesquieu, to divide states into types and to pronounce on their varied motivations. Three basic modes exist: despotism, monarchies, and republics, the last of these being themselves divided into aristocracies and democracies. Monarchies are energised by a pursuit of honour, which comes by way of recognition from the crown. In contrast, citizens of democracies ‘must love equality; they must respect the rights of their fellow-citizens; they must unite by common ties of affection to the state.’<sup>27</sup> Aristocracies appear in large part to follow the same deliberative system as democracies, for ‘the most perfect equality of rights can never exclude the ascent of superior minds, nor the assemblies of a collective body govern without the direction of select councils.’<sup>28</sup> Yet aristocracy inhibits the choice of office holder by insisting that social privilege trumps meritocracy, ensuring that the government relies on an elegant facade. In a passage with a resonance for his later reflections on revolution (to which we are yet to turn) he writes of how

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> His chapter on ‘luxury’ was no blanket condemnation; he allowed that as well as being censured, luxury has been praised as a means of adding ‘national lustre and felicity’. What this chapter’s balance-sheet approach reveals is an awareness on Ferguson’s part that the meaning of ‘luxury’ has become too fluid.’ Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory and the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>26</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

The elevation of one class is moderated arrogance, the submission of the other a limited deference. The first must be careful, by concealing the invidious part of their distinction, to palliate what is grievous in the public arrangement, and by their education, their cultivated manners and improved talents to appear qualified for the stations they occupy. The other must be taught to yield, from respect and personal attachment, what could not otherwise be extorted by force. When this moderation fails on either side the constitution totters.<sup>29</sup>

This suggests, that senates gain their legitimacy from the extensive nature of their deliberative scope. Ferguson shares a common eighteenth-century anxiety about the influence of factionalism upon national politics: a fear of the cabal, the double cabinet (Edmund Burke's bitter term). In monarchies, he alleges 'the name of senate is unknown' even when 'every individual, in his separate capacity in some measure, deliberates for his country'.<sup>30</sup> The separation spoken of here is what disables monarchy from effectively identifying the common good, even as it enables the efficient enactment of executive authority.

Senatorial deliberation, and its capacity to identify the common good, is vital to the manifestation of the principles of union. Only through wise and broad counsel can the state fend off factionalism and the dangers of self-interest. Again the biography is of relevance here. The Carlisle Commission was motivated by the pursuit of a general good between warring factions, Britain and America. Ferguson may have deemed it a senatorial duty to accept the invitation to join the commission, even as he swithered between advocating a military solution and one based on the establishment of an American senate. Even in his most belligerent formulation, in a letter to John Macpherson dated 15 January 1778, when he mooted a campaign 'to have the exclusive possession of the Hudsons River and the Lakes' thereby destroying colonial resistance, he moderated the tone by reflecting 'Lord have mercy on those who expect any good in this business without sufficient instruments of terror in one hand and of moderation and justice in the other.' He further deflated his view by concluding 'so much for the opinion of us here who govern the world at our own firesides'.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 68–9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 70, 70–1.

<sup>31</sup> Ferguson to [John Macpherson], Edinburgh, 15 January 1778 in Vincenzo Merolle (ed.), *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson* (2 vols; London: William Pickering, 1995), I: 162.

Thus, alongside the valour that combats external threats and expresses patriotic virtue, Ferguson lauds a second form of courage, that of intellectual fearlessness: the ability to speak capaciously about the general good without fear of consequence from vested, parochial if powerful interests within the state. In a lengthy but important passage which concerns the origins of the senate as a form of government, Ferguson observed:

In these happy, though informal proceedings, where age alone gives a place in the council; where youth, ardour and valour in the field, give a title to the station of leader; where the whole community is assembled on any alarming occasion, we may venture to say that we have found the origin of the senate, the executive power and the assembly of the people; institutions for which ancient legislators have been so much renowned. The senate among the Greeks as well as the Latins, appears from the etymology of its name, to have been originally composed of elderly men. The military leader at Rome, in a manner not unlike to that of the American warrior, proclaimed his levies, and the citizen prepared for the field in consequence of a voluntary engagement. The suggestions of nature, which directed the policy of nations in the wilds of America, were followed before on the banks of the Euetas and the Tyber; and Lycurgas and Romulus found the model of their institutions where the members of every rude nation find the earliest mode of uniting their talents and combining their forces.<sup>32</sup>

Conrad Brunström has drawn attention to this passage, writing of how Ferguson imagined a ‘native North American male . . . characterized by an independence that makes him fit for both the battlefield and the general assembly. One does not’, Brunström continues, ‘discard the occupation of a hunter in favour of the occupation of a senator although one’s senatorial strengths are likely to be cultivated in proportion to one’s physical decay.’<sup>33</sup>

This conceit is developed further in an unpublished essay entitled ‘Of Statesmen and Warriors’. While much of the focus of this work is on the position of the warrior in society, Ferguson contends that ‘the function of war may have been for youth that of the state for mature age’ while also acknowledging how ‘in families of rank the quick are destined for parliament

---

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 84–5.

<sup>33</sup> Conrad Brunström, *Thomas Sheridan’s Career and Influence: An Actor in Earnest* (Lanham, Maryland: Bucknell University Press, 2011), 71.



[while] the slow will make do for the army'.<sup>34</sup> While worried that this 'choice is prejudicial to the military department' he accepted that 'Writing and speaking are the qualities of statesmen. The forms of parade and review those of the warrior. An officer who has been drilled and drilling all his life is a reputed master of his trade. A tongue in debate and hand for the pen in office is a man of business in the state.'<sup>35</sup> As such, 'when the principal honours of the state are as in Great Britain made the prize of civil or political merits, genius is directed chiefly into this channel and men come into publick view with the single talent of speech-making as sufficient to ensure their fortunes.'<sup>36</sup> While Ferguson is critical in this respect of the separation of the roles of statesman and warrior in contemporary society, this passage highlights the centrality of the spoken word in his thinking about statecraft and civil virtue. In a rude world, in which roles are not delimited, the aging process slowly shifts the kind of contribution that can be made to the community. If the militia is a young man's game, Ferguson seems to be suggesting, physical deterioration is compensated for by an increase in wisdom: the senate is necessarily 'composed of elderly men'.

### Oratory

The ability to flourish in an assembly relies not on physical prowess but on oratorical ability. The senator or parliamentarian can only influence proceedings by force of argument, by eloquence, by the passion of his interventions and the reasonableness of his argumentation. As a consequence, many eighteenth-century commentators assumed a correlation between the health of political oratory and that of the body politic. Freedom of speech was commensurate with political liberty. Thomas Sheridan, whose *Lectures on Elocution* (1762) derived from a fashionably attended series of talks in Edinburgh exemplified such a presumption, as did both Adam Smith and Hugh Blair when they lectured on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in Glasgow and in the Scottish capital respectively. One focus of the debate that ranged around James Macpherson's Ossian sequence was the credibility apparently oral poetic traditions might enjoy when there was an inability to answer Samuel Johnson's loaded demand for the originals.

Just as Johnson evinced scepticism about Ossian's authenticity, so David Hume was, predictably, one of the few voices to question the neat equation

---

<sup>34</sup> Adam Ferguson, 'Of Statesmen and Warriors' in Vincenzo Merolle (ed.) *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson* (London: Pickering, 2006), 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

between oratory and liberty. His essay, 'Of Civil Liberty' was intentionally disruptive, stating only to undermine the common assumption:

It had been observed by the ancients, that all the arts and sciences arose among free nations . . . It had also been observed, that, when the GREEKS lost their liberty, though they increased mightily in riches, by means of the conquests of ALEXANDER; yet the arts, from that moment, declined among them, and have never since been able to raise their head in that climate. Learning was transplanted to ROME, the only free nation at that time in the universe; and having met with so favourable a soil, it made prodigious shoots for above a century; till the decay of liberty produced also the decay of letters, and spread a total barbarism over the world . . . But what would these writers have said, to the instances of modern ROME and of FLORENCE? Of which the former carried to perfection all the finer arts of sculpture, painting, and music, as well as poetry, though it groaned under tyranny, and under the tyranny of priests.<sup>37</sup>

This dissonance reverberated into a rueful observation of current cultural energies:

The most eminent instance of the flourishing of learning in absolute governments, is that of France, which scarcely ever enjoyed any established liberty, and yet has carried the arts and sciences as near perfection as any other nation . . . The elegance and propriety of style have been very much neglected among us. We have no dictionary of our language, and scarcely a tolerable grammar. The first polite prose we have, was writ by a man who is still alive . . . Men, in this country, have been so much occupied in the great disputes of Religion, Politics, and Philosophy, that they had no relish for the seemingly minute observations of grammar and criticism.<sup>38</sup>

This difference of opinion between Hume and Ferguson about using oratory as a political indicator may help account for Hume's muted response to the

---

<sup>37</sup> David Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty' in idem, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, Eugene F. Miller (ed.) (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 89–90.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–2.

*Essay on the History of Civil Society*, despite his praise for an earlier ‘Essay on Refinement’.<sup>39</sup>

Hume’s doubt did not dissuade his friend Ferguson. In line with stock eighteenth-century argument, Ferguson declared in *An Essay* that ‘Sentiment and fancy, the use of the hand or the head, are not inventions of particular men; and the flourishing of the arts that depend on them are, in the case of any people, a proof rather of political felicity at home, than of any instruction received from abroad, or of any natural superiority in point of industry or talents.’<sup>40</sup> Ferguson then chose to track the ‘History of Literature’ from its natural basis in poetry towards the abstract thinking of history writing such as that conducted by Hume and, later, by Ferguson himself.

Ferguson conjectured that the origins of literature lay with ‘poets or orators’ for, ‘occasioned, probably by the physical connection we have mentioned between the emotions of a heated imagination, and the impressions received by music and pathetic sounds, every tale among rude nations is repeated in verse, and is made to take the form of a song.’<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in a proto-Romantic idealisation he proposed that the poet ‘delivers the emotions of the heart, in words suggested by the heart, for he knows no other.’<sup>42</sup> And this capacity to transmit emotions was supplemented by the need to recall the event in an act of memory: ‘not having the advantage of writing’, he accepted, ‘they are obliged to bring the ear in the aid of memory, in order to facilitate the repetition and insure the preservation of their works.’<sup>43</sup>

Having postulated a natural inclination to oral communication, Ferguson elucidated a conjectural history of communication. While ‘every tribe of barbarians have their passionate or historic rhymes, which contain the superstition, the enthusiasm, and the admiration of glory’ and ‘when we attend to the language that savages employ on any solemn occasion, it appears that man is a poet by nature’.<sup>44</sup> It was only in advanced commercial society, which has developed writing, that abstract discourses of law and history emerge. However, in line with his thinking on the integration of commercial and military activity and his opposition to the division of labour, Ferguson was at pains to

---

<sup>39</sup> See also David Raynor, ‘Why did David Hume Dislike Adam Ferguson’s *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*?’ and Vincenzo Merolle, ‘Hume as Critic of Ferguson’s *Essay*’ both in Heath and Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy*, 45–72, 73–87.

<sup>40</sup> Ferguson, *Essay*, 163.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

insist that the development of artistic skill was not contradicted by the demands of mercantile or political life. Rather,

Although business is sometimes a rival to study, retirement and leisure are not the principal requisites to the improvement, perhaps or even to the exercise of literary talents. The most striking exertions of imagination and sentiment have a reference to mankind: they are excited by the presence and intercourse of men: they have the most vigour when actuated in the mind by the operation of its principal springs, by the emulations, the friendships and the oppositions which subsist among a forward and aspiring people.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, he concluded his remarks by reflecting on how, 'In whatever manner men are formed for the great efforts of elocution or conduct, it appears the most glaring of all other deceptions to look for the accomplishments of a human character in the mere attainments of speculation, whilst we neglect the qualities of fortitude and public affection, which are so necessary to render our knowledge an article of happiness or use.'<sup>46</sup> In line with such thinking, Ferguson's broad career can be understood to exist on what Brunström has described in relation to the elocutionist, actor, and theatre manager Thomas Sheridan as 'a continuum of concern linking the stage, the senate and the pulpit'.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of the stage, Ferguson was involved in the staging of the controversial production of John Home's *Douglas* (1756), which resulted in a pamphlet war and church proceedings against the ministerial author. Ferguson entered the lists in favour of his friend, arguing that 'if Plays are a poison, it is at least but slow in its operations.'<sup>48</sup> Rather he proposed if one availed of the morality of the stage as a barometer of social mores the indicators were optimistic for:

The stage has subsisted in Britain about two hundred years ... a certain degree of indecency and licentiousness once permitted is now rejected, and that plays more pure, and of a better moral tendency are either chosen

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>47</sup> Brunström, *Thomas Sheridan's Career*, 84.

<sup>48</sup> Adam Ferguson, *The Morality of Stage-Plays Seriously Considered* (Edinburgh, 1757), 3.

from our ancient stock, or that these qualities are at least expected from every writer of the present age.<sup>49</sup>

Theatre was a vital repository for a functioning society, being ‘founded on the best principles of human nature, the love of virtue and compassion to the distressed: for who would ever go to a tragedy if he had not a heart formed to pity and a mind susceptible of the admiration due to worthy characters.’<sup>50</sup> Ferguson recognised the possibility of corruption inherent in immoral performances, but in a passage redolent with the power of oratory he pronounced:

We know that the language of the theatre, or any other language whatever, may be employed either to recommend virtue or to insinuate folly and licentiousness. If licentious people alone frequent this entertainment they will perhaps encourage what they like to hear. But persons of sobriety, and regard to virtue, would make that entertainment form itself to a very different strain, and give the whole a very different influence on the manners of mankind.<sup>51</sup>

As for the senate, we can read both the pamphlet denouncing Richard Price (for using licentious political language amongst other charges) and the (co-) authored *Manifesto and Proclamation to the Members of Congress* (1778) as examples of the deliberative function of political oratory.<sup>52</sup> For instance, here is an extract from that second text which, while Yasuo Amoh calls it ‘an ultimatum issued to the American rebels by the Carlisle Commission’, presents their proposals as calm and reasoned.<sup>53</sup> It models an address to both the legislators and the wider political community, hoping to divide ‘the Americans into separate camps by offering a separate peace to each area’.<sup>54</sup>

Having amply and repeatedly made known to the Congress, and also having proclaimed to the inhabitants of North America in general, the benevolent overtures of Great Britain towards a reunion and collation with her colonies, we do not think it consistent either with the duty we owe

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2–3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 21–2.

<sup>52</sup> ‘It would seem Ferguson himself was singled out as the author.’ Buchan, ‘Adam Ferguson, the 43<sup>rd</sup> and the Fictions of Fontenoy’, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Yasuo Amoh, ‘Ferguson’s Views on the American and French Revolutions’ in Heath and Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: History*, 79.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 79.

to our country, or with a just regard to the characters we bear, to persist in holding out offers which in our estimation required only to be known to be most gratefully accepted . . . To the members of the Congress then, we again declare that we are ready to concur in all satisfactory and just arrangements for securing to them and their respective constituents, the re-establishment of peace, with the exemption from any imposition of taxes by the Parliament of Great-Britain, and the irrevocable enjoyment of every privilege consistent with that union of interests and force on which our mutual prosperity and the safety of our common religion and liberties depend.<sup>55</sup>

Yet the *Manifesto* also ‘seemed to threaten the imposition of severe military penalties on the Americans’ and prompted a parliamentary debate in Britain which concluded with the formal censure of the document by the House of Lords. The Commission itself ended in farcical failure, ‘as the Americans refused to recognise the Commission because the Commissioners refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Continental Congress.’<sup>56</sup>

With regard to the pulpit, a sermon Ferguson preached in Ersh to the Black Watch can be read through a lens not just of patriotic military valour, but also of the rousing power of religious oratory. Alongside a plea to recognise the political benefits of continued loyalty to the Hanoverian cause in the face of the Jacobite rising of 1745–6, Ferguson was not averse to making the conflict a decidedly religious war. He exhorted the troops ‘remember, you are men sworn to defend your country: Take courage and play the men for your people and for the cities of your God.’<sup>57</sup> He positioned the Jacobites as purveyors of secular and religious tyranny while admiring a constitution in which ‘our worship is not clogged with superstitious ceremonies, calculated to strike the simple with awe, or raise the power of a few designing men. We have no whimsical doctrines for which there is no foundation in scripture’.<sup>58</sup> Connecting Protestantism with liberty he avowed: ‘Every man may openly profess his own sentiments, unless manifestly subversive of the state, without any apprehensions of the rack or gibbet.’<sup>59</sup> He concluded by asking the troops to

<sup>55</sup> C. Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War* (2 vols., London, 1794), II: 58–9.

<sup>56</sup> Buchan, ‘Adam Ferguson, the 43<sup>rd</sup> and the Fictions of Fontenoy’, 40

<sup>57</sup> Adam Ferguson, *A Sermon Preached in the Ersh Language* (London, 1746), 22. Citing 2 Samuel 10.12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

'humble ourselves before God, pray that he would forgive our sins, that he would continue the light of the gospel amongst us, and strengthen our hands in the defence of our holy religion and happy privileges.'<sup>60</sup> Here Ferguson deploys oratory in defence of orthodoxy.

Taken together, Ferguson's prose evidences a concern for the location and purpose of oratory. The stage provides refecation on speech's capacity to create a community from an audience, the senate a citizenry from a populace, and the pulpit a congregation from a people. The social, political and ethical instrumentality of speech is embedded in Ferguson's oeuvre.

### Language

The origin of language receives its most extended treatment by Ferguson in the *Principles of Moral Political Science* (1792). He began by assuming that the exertion of speaking was the result of a natural human ability, suggesting that 'Everyone is disposed to communicate what he thinks, and to receive communication of what is thought by others.'<sup>61</sup> However, this communicative capacity could be subdivided into its constituent parts. Mirroring the narrative he offered of the changes to the means of production and to jurisprudence, he offered a three-stage history of communication, from mute signs, to speech and into written characters.<sup>62</sup> Of the first he assumed them to be 'fixed by nature, employed spontaneously, and understood or interpreted, by virtue of an original faculty, corresponding to the instinct which leads to the use of it and equally prior to any experience or instruction of any sort.'<sup>63</sup> These natural communicative signs included 'the smile and the frown' which Ferguson described as 'untaught and unpremeditated expressions of pleasure and displeasure. They are understood by the infant at the breast, and returned by him, before he has any knowledge of the organs or features on which they are traced.'<sup>64</sup> In line with then-prevalent theories of sensibility, Ferguson accepted that 'to the latest hour of human life, every passion, and every affection, give outwards signs of their existence, and often betray a state of mind, which the party concerned would wish to conceal.'<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>61</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (2 vols, Edinburgh and London: A Strahan, T Cadell and W Creech, 1792), I: 37.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., I: 39. See also Adam Ferguson, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (Edinburgh: A Kincaid and J. Bell, 1769), 46 for these categories.

<sup>63</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, I: 38.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. On sensibility theory, see Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); G.J. Barker Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century*

This original, instinctive desire to communicate through ‘mute signs’ was largely shared by animals. However, humans indicated one aspect of their distinctive nature by having more complex, arbitrary, if shared sounds to refer to objects, ideas and emotions: ‘We are apt to treat’ he wrote

the origin of language as we treat that of society itself, by supposing a time when neither existed; but from the facts now stated, we may venture to infer, that since mankind were fairly entered on this scene of human life there never was any such time; that both associating and speaking, in however rude a form, are coeval with the species of man.<sup>66</sup>

However, he observed that ‘language in its rudest state, furnished some means of expression, instinctive or casual: In its most accomplished state, the stock of expression is greatly enlarged’, so much so that,

In the use of this wonderful expedient, man is enabled to name every subject in nature and to mark its relations; or by mere inflections of sound to express the modulations of thought, sentiment and will to a degree of subtlety or nice discrimination, in numberless parts, which it becomes difficult for the grammarian, or the metaphysician, to arrange under the titles to which they belong.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the first two modes of communication, writing was unique in that it was ‘not universal’ in its usage, coming instead from a small number of highly developed societies. These in turn spread the skill to other communities. In this way, for instance, Europe shared a source for its manifold languages. In turn, written language was divisible between simple signifiers, in which ‘the written character is the sign of the word,’ and more abstract systems, where ‘the written character is not the sign of a subject, or of its name, but the mark of a simple sound ... such as we term verbs and consonants, in the construction of an alphabet.’<sup>68</sup> While the first form was ‘the more obvious invention’ the second had the advantage of being infinitely flexible, and ‘though setting out at a point more remote from its end, is in fact more easily learned and more effectual to its purpose.’ Although not developed in the *Principles*, Ferguson described this purpose succinctly in the *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (1769): ‘Writing preserves

---

*Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, I: 43.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 39–40.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 46.



the memory of past transactions, of observation and experience. It preserves literary productions, and tends to improve and to extend the use of speech.<sup>69</sup>

Ferguson expressed a high level of optimism about the progressive nature of language, arguing ‘communication extends from nation to nation, and from age to age, at any indefinite distance of place or time; and the society, or co-operations of men may be conceived as extended accordingly. The present age is perfecting what a former age began; or is now beginning what a future age is to perfect.’<sup>70</sup> However this cheerful view was coupled with a stated concern for the fate of particular languages, for he also acknowledged that ‘Living languages, if they do not improve, are disposed to decline, and not secured for change, even by the written monuments.’<sup>71</sup> The problem of linguistic decay, through misuse, was to find particular expression when Ferguson turned from generalising theories to occasional polemics.

### Revolutions

Ferguson lived through both the American and French Revolutions, and made observations on both.<sup>72</sup> As Yasuo Amoh has summarised, ‘It was Ferguson’s conviction that the British Empire should neither be dissolved by the American Colonists, nor defeated by France. Ferguson’s strategies were however different. The British army had to defeat the American rebels. By contrast, he thought Britain should not make war against the French Army in the throes of Revolution.’<sup>73</sup> As this suggests Ferguson was politically cautious, and disinclined to share the enthusiasm of many Whigs for the changes underway in Britain’s colonies or in the country’s nearest neighbour. In the first case, he treated the Colonists as protagonists in a British civil war, permitting the suspension of the norms of military conduct. As Amoh notes, ‘to support the authority of Britain by any means was Ferguson’s consistent stance during the Revolutionary war’ with America.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, as Michael Kugler has aptly observed of ‘Ferguson’s growing disenchantment in the later 1790s with a republican France ... [it] simultaneously reminded him of his beloved Roman Republic but threatened Britain in a terrible drawn out war’ in which ‘modern

---

<sup>69</sup> *Ferguson, Institutes*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> *Ferguson, Principles*, I: 47.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, I: 45.

<sup>72</sup> For a careful assessment of his political position see Hill, *The Passionate Society*, 215–31.

<sup>73</sup> Amoh, ‘Ferguson’s Views on the American and French Revolutions’, 86.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

and commercial Britain seemed destined to play out the role of Carthage to France's Rome.<sup>75</sup>

Taking the universal view, Ferguson remarked in the *Principles* that 'Opinions on the subject of public, no less than private good are of much importance to mankind. As error and mistake, relating to the one, involve the mind in folly, suffering and disappointment; so in relation to the other, they would involve whole nations in disorder, riot or scenes of degradation and oppression.'<sup>76</sup> More particularly, in both the American and the French cases, he partially traced those initial mistakes back to a problem with oratory; namely, the influence of flawed or fraudulent political analysis conveyed by deceitful or deluded political speech.<sup>77</sup>

Thus at the close of his pamphlet attacking Richard Price, which is largely concerned with an intricate discussion of the concept of liberty as confined within a regular and legitimate legal system, he accosts his antagonist for 'the language of independence which he has taught the Americans'.<sup>78</sup> Price was guilty of 'endeavour[ing] to flatter the Americans' both in relation to domestic support for the war in Britain and 'on the subject of their strength'.<sup>79</sup> The prospect for America was less tranquil than Price proposed for 'what title have they to hope for an exemption from the too common fate of mankind; the fate that has ever attended democracies attempted on too large a scale; that of plunging at once into military government?'<sup>80</sup> Price's flattery was intended to deceive, the burden of his fault being the intentional misdirection of his American audience in order that they might 'mistake independence and separation of commonwealth for liberty'.<sup>81</sup> Political language was being misused to promulgate sedition and warfare.

Similarly in an unpublished essay written in or after 1806 which encapsulated his thoughts on the French Revolution, Ferguson assailed the 'partizans

---

<sup>75</sup> Michael Kugler, 'Adam Ferguson and Enlightened Provincial Ideology in Scotland' in Heath and Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy*, 141.

<sup>76</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, II: 408.

<sup>77</sup> David Kettler has fruitfully offered the proposition that 'Ferguson's involvement in American affairs contributed to a political education that envisioned the possibility of encapsulating or hiving off the despotic elements inherent in imperial ventures and that taught the necessity of bargaining with even the most disorienting effects of revolution.' David Kettler, 'Political Education for Empire and Revolution' in Heath and Merolle (eds), *Adam Ferguson: History*, 88.

<sup>78</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Remarks on a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr Price* (London: T. Cadell, 1776), 59.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 55.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

of bounaparte' for precisely the same misinterpretation of the term liberty, asserting that they 'say he has given peace to the continent of Europe. What peace subjugation!'<sup>82</sup> He proceeds, 'What a triumph for France may not some vainglorious Frenchman say?' only to reply: 'Such a triumph as the reduction and spoil of distant provinces were to Italy; the means of pampering, corrupting and alluring its rulers to every enormity of profligacy, cruelty and vice most oppressive, tremendous and ruinous to those who were nearest at hand and most immediately subject to its hatred or caprice.'<sup>83</sup> This is the cost of misusing political language: the collapse of social order, the introduction of despotism, and the corruption of morality. The danger of demagogues is encapsulated in this sketchy passage of disjointed prose.

### Classrooms

If Ferguson's occasional remarks on the American and French Revolutions reflect his continuing concern about the misuse of speech in politics, the student training he provided in the classrooms of Edinburgh offers some insight into the knowledge he deemed a prerequisite for active citizens to contribute to the general good. As David Kettler has noted, he was presenting his thoughts to 'a student body many of whom he thought were destined for the emerging imperial civil service or professional army'.<sup>84</sup> In the perfunctory *Analysis of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy* – the published bullet points of his lectures that Ferguson issued to help students in 1766 – the perspective was very much one taken from the apex of the hierarchy. Declaring 'government is founded on subordination,' he observed 'institutional subordination is the actual distribution of power,' power being 'the force of the state committed to the direction of certain persons, for the performance of some public function.'<sup>85</sup> In this, the good of the state was thought to define and direct the commonweal of the people. Even if he accepted 'the result of wise legislation, jurisdiction and execution is public liberty', this was further defined to ensure that 'liberty is the security of rights'.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Adam Ferguson, 'Of the French Revolution' in Merolle (ed.) *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, 139.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Kettler, 'Political Education'. 88. Richard Sher has calculated that 'When Adam Ferguson was teaching ... average class size rose to sixty-four'. Richard B. Sher, 'Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century' in M.A. Stewart (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 122.

<sup>85</sup> Adam Ferguson, *Analysis of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy for the Use of Students in the College of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1766), 50, 51, 51.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

This model of positive liberty was embedded within the *Principles of Moral and Political Science* also, but in the later text – which drew on, expanded and solidified Ferguson’s lectures from across his career – the balance between the varied elements in the constitution was more equitable. He expressly stated ‘Establishments are meant for the good of the people, and the people also serve to support their establishment.’<sup>87</sup> This formulation has an echo of Montesquieu’s notion of a spirit of laws, in which the sentiments of the legislators are expressive of the manners of the people. Ferguson expresses it this way: ‘we thus contend for the propriety of manners adapted to the constitution of the state’.<sup>88</sup> In consequence, the defining element for all state systems was where they located power. Once again Ferguson divided states into three types: monarchies, republics, and despotisms. Republics were further subdivided into democracies, in which the people as a whole governed, and aristocracies, where an oligarchy gathered power to itself. If monarchy pursued the virtue of honour, and despotism was governed by the spirit of fear; republics were motivated by the pursuit of liberty (not however licentiousness, its degraded condition).

In Ferguson’s ontology of republics, and in particular, in democratic systems, ‘the habits of the statesman and the warrior are required as ordinary accomplishments of the citizen; and the individual is entitled to estimation only in proportion as he possesses these habits.’<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in aristocracies, he identified a prerequisite that citizens play their prescribed role, and contributed what the system asked of them. ‘Elevation and dignity are suited to the rank in person of one condition’, he opined, ‘deference and respect are suited to the rank in those of another’, he continued, before concluding that ‘without suitable distinction of character different orders of men would be disqualified from their situations, and a community so made up of discordant parts would be unfit to maintain the establishment in which the public order consists.’<sup>90</sup> Taken together these observations allow some sense to be made of Ferguson’s mandate as a Professor of Moral Philosophy. He deemed it necessary to inculcate his class in the virtues of the statesman, given their position at the apex of Edinburgh’s local, Scotland’s national, and Britain’s imperial state system. Accordingly, he informed them of how ‘the utmost to be expected among citizens in this state of disparity is that the superior should, by his noble qualities, merit the respect which is paid to him; or earn the returns of affection and gratitude by the good

<sup>87</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, II: 412.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 416.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 414.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 415–16.

he performs.<sup>91</sup> The students were to be worthy of the privileged standing in society into which they were about to make their entry. This moral imperative came with a warning, for Ferguson further asserted: ‘The want of a fit character, in public spirit, ability and vigour, prepares the state from within for immediate subversion, as a fabric is prepared to tumble or fall into ruin by the weakness or decay of the parts that compose it.’<sup>92</sup> Failure to lead would result in ‘revolutions of uncertain or dangerous issue.’<sup>93</sup> The students had a country to win, and a state to lose, and Ferguson was determined to inform them of the wager the society had taken on their moral and political capabilities.

### Conclusions

Finally, it is worth observing the primacy Ferguson placed on speech acts in his pedagogical practice. As Richard Sher has observed, ‘His lectures were lively and were usually spoken from outlines or unpolished lecture notes rather than read in a formal manner.’<sup>94</sup> A rationale for this practice was given by Ferguson in the introduction to the *Principles* – a text which drew on and expanded his lectures once his retirement allowed a degree of finality to be cast over the material. ‘Conceiving that discussion’, he wrote, ‘and even information, might come with more effect from a person that was making his own highest efforts of disquisition and judgement, than from one that might be languishing while he read, or repeated a lecture previously composed, he determined... to have no more in writing than the heads or short notes from which he was to speak.’<sup>95</sup> Indeed, he found that even after he published first the *Pneumatics* and then the *Institutes* as notebooks for his class ‘he nevertheless experienced that the course he was to follow... was subject to some variations; and as these appeared to be improvements, and served to enliven his own talk with some accessions of novelty, he did not attempt to check or restrain them.’<sup>96</sup> In sum, Ferguson believed that the spoken word was a better vehicle for exhortatory and emulative instruction than the written page.

Students understood this ambition and responded accordingly. One remarked ‘His was a manly spirited, practical philosophy, intended to rear active, useful and disinterested citizens, to attend to and promote the welfare of

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., II: 416.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., II: 415.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., II: 416.

<sup>94</sup> Sher, ‘Professors of Virtue’, 116.

<sup>95</sup> Ferguson, *Principles*, I: v.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., I: vi.

their country.<sup>97</sup> Ferguson himself explained, in closing the academic session of 1775-6 that he had ‘endeavoured to set the example of fair and unexceptional argument on particular subjects’ and ‘addressed my weak endeavours to the feelings of the mind as well as the understanding.’<sup>98</sup> He continued instructing the students: ‘now is your time to begin practices & lay the foundation of habits that may be of use to you in every condition and in every profession at least that is founded on a literary or Liberal education. Sapere & fari quae sentiat [To be discerning and to express what one thinks] are the great objects of literary education and study.’<sup>99</sup>

The above charge to his students captures something of the value for Ferguson of a moral education, and in doing so centralises the issue of clear, concise and persuasive expression. Indeed, by tracing the theme of oratory in the work of Adam Ferguson, a number of issues which may otherwise perplex became apparent. First, the moral value he placed on oratory helps to explain the dizzying variety of his activities. His work spans the range from the pulpit to the stage, from the senate to the classroom. In each case, however, oratory, and its moral purpose, is central. Second, in reading Ferguson through the lens of oratory, his work is positioned in a critical eighteenth-century debate that took in issues that are resonant through his wider corpus: primitivism, imperialism, the exemplar of the Roman republic, and the moral character of political debate. Third, oratory reconfigures Ferguson’s interventions on contemporary politics – notably the Revolutions in America and France – and relates his thoughts to a British debate about participatory politics and fear of the mob, the demagogue, and civil unrest.<sup>100</sup> Finally, the construction of oratory as a skill of the elderly, one which develops as physical ability declines, casts light on Ferguson didacticism as a Professor of Moral Philosophy. Sher has suggested that Ferguson was concerned

to mould teenage boys into virtuous, polite, tolerably learned, self-confident, upstanding, patriotic young gentlemen. They were to be moderate Christians, benevolent and responsible, but also prudent and proper, in accordance with the teachings of Cicero and the Stoics. They were also to be firm Whigs and good British citizens, loyal to the

---

<sup>97</sup> Sher, ‘Professors of Virtue’, 119.

<sup>98</sup> EUL vol1: DC I. 84; vol2 Dc I. 85. Quoted in Sher, ‘Professors of Virtue’, 117–18.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Here Ferguson is quoting Horace, *Epistles*, I, iv, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Don Herzog, *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Hanoverian regime and the constitution on which it was thought to be founded.<sup>101</sup>

All true, but the primacy of oratory in his pedagogy, and the role it plays in his thinking suggests something more: Ferguson was not teaching the young men who crowded his classroom about how to be young. That was what the militia was for. Rather, and more challenging in its ambition, he was instructing his students on how to be old.

---

<sup>101</sup> Sher, 'Professors of Virtue', 118.