

Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and the Division of Labour

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Introduction. Though Adam Smith (1723-1790) and Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) were neither the first nor last to discuss the effects of the division of labour,¹ it would not be an exaggeration to describe both accounts as groundbreaking, not only for the sociological depth of their respective analyses, but for their influence on later thinkers. Their observations apparently inspired Karl Marx (among others) though the similarities between the three sets of thought should not be over-estimated, as will be shown. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, neither should it be assumed that Ferguson and Smith were in agreement on all counts. While there were many overlaps (enough to inspire a disagreeable priority dispute between them) Ferguson was generally more negative in his attitude. He was also less interested in the economic effects of specialization. While Smith was by no means oblivious to the negative aspects of the division of labour, he seems more complacent about its long-term effects due to its ability to secure economic prosperity and personal autonomy.

The division of labour, and its social and economic effects, has been an important theme in the history of sociological thought. In this paper I

¹ It has even been suggested, for example, that Smith was inspired by Plato's treatment of the topic. See Vernard Foley: 'The Division of Labour in Plato and Smith', *History of Political Economy* 6 (2), 1974, pp. 221-2. For a reply to Foley see: Paul. J. McNulty, 'A Note on the Division of Labour in Plato and Smith', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 7 (3) 1975, pp. 372-389. Another author has even sought the 'roots' of Smith's work in Medieval Persia (Hosseini, Hamid, 'Seeking the Roots of Adam Smith's Division of Labour in Medieval Persia', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 30 (40 Winter 1998, pp.653-81).

highlight the work of two thinkers whose contributions are sometimes overlooked. I also make contrasts between the respective approaches of Smith and Ferguson. In treatments of the Scottish Enlightenment it is not uncommon to see the work of its various thinkers bundled together as though together they constituted a unified school of thought. In fact, there were many fault-lines.² This paper explores just one of them. But the same token, though each thinker made his own unique contribution to understandings of the effects of specialization, their relationship to Marx on the same topic serves to underline a number of key similarities.

A secondary aim of the paper is to draw attention to the fact that, although the Scottish Enlightenment has been characterized as an attempt 'to legitimise bourgeois civilization at an early stage of its growth'³ at least two of its members were far from oblivious to the negative aspects of commercialism's main engine--specialization. Nevertheless, it is argued that both remain committed to commercialism as the best possible regime for human happiness.

General Discussion. In John Rae's biography of Adam Smith it is reported that on the publication of Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) Smith accused him of 'having borrowed some of his ideas without owning

² John Robertson has urged a greater awareness of 'potential fault lines within Scottish moral Philosophy', drawing special attention to the eccentricity of Ferguson's work ('The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment', in *The Scottish Enlightenment, Essays in Reinterpretation*, Edited by Paul Wood, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000, pp. 47-8).

³ H. Mizuta, 'Towards a Definition of the Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies in Voltaire*, Vol. 154, pp. 1459-64, 1976 p. 1459

them'⁴ Ferguson apparently replied (via another source) that he had done nothing of the sort but that they shared in common an unnamed French source⁵ (probably either a Physiocrat-possibly Francois Quensay- or Montesquieu). The dates of the estrangement are unclear but it seems unlikely that the rupture in their longstanding friendship was healed before Smith's death in 1790.⁶

Adam Ferguson on the Division of Labour. Adam Ferguson's exposition of the nature, development and effects of specialization merits particular attention since it has afforded him, in hindsight, some minor claim to fame. It is sometimes suggested that his work represents the first sustained critique of capitalism and market society based on the detection of alienation effects and a theory of class exploitation. At the very least, it was arguably the most subtle exposition of the effects of specialization to date. Indeed, Peter Gay once wrote that 'Ferguson's pages on the division of labour are a minor triumph of eighteenth century sociology'.⁷

⁴Rae, John, *Life of Adam Smith* London: MacMillan. Reproduction, New York:: Augustus M.Kelley. 1895/1965.

⁵ *The Autobiography of Dr Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk*, London and Edinburgh, 1910, p. 299

⁶ Ronald Hamowy has suggested that Smith was not referring to any plagiarism regarding his analysis of the sociological effects of the division of labour but rather to Ferguson's use of the famous pin factory example.(Hamowy, R., 'Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and the Division of Labour, *Economica*, vol.35, no.139, August 1968, pp.244-259, p. 255-6).

⁷ Gay, P., *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols., London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1970, II, pp. 342-3. Brewer, J., 'Adam Ferguson and the Theme of Exploitation', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 37, 1986, pp.461-478 and

Ferguson was less interested than Smith in the economic effects⁸ of specialization, focusing instead on its social consequences. In this regard the *Essay* breaks new ground and probably constitutes the first fully developed sociological account of the effects of specialization.⁹ As William Lehmann notes, Ferguson's treatment of specialization 'makes a distinct advance...in a way that definitely anticipates, if it does not influence in order, St. Simon, Comte, Spencer and Durkheim'.¹⁰ Marx also quoted Ferguson approvingly and declared that he had been inspired by the latter's treatment of the dehumanising effects of the division of labour. According to Ronald Hamowy Ferguson...

...can claim priority over Smith in offering, not an economic analysis of the question which was original with neither writer, but rather, the first methodological and penetrating sociological analysis, an analysis which was to have far-reaching consequences in intellectual history by contributing substantially to the sociological groundwork of Marxism.¹¹

But it should also be borne in mind that Ferguson's interest in specialization is sparked by classical (ie civic humanist) themes. The sociological impression is brought about by his application of an antique

⁸ Ferguson was happy to cede the field of political economy to Smith and generously acknowledged the latter's superior expertise in the area. To this end he included the following note in the fourth edition of the *History of Civil Society* (1773, iii.4). 'But I willingly quit a subject in which I am not much conversant, and still less engaged by the object for which I write. Speculations on commerce and wealth have been delivered by the ablest writers, and the public will probably soon be furnished with a theory of national economy, equal to what has ever appeared on any subject of science whatever.'* The footnote referred to 'Mr Smith'. This note was retained until the seventh edition of 1814 which was the last in Ferguson's lifetime (Ross, Ian Simpson, *The Life of Adam Smith*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 230).

⁹ Swingewood, A., *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, London: Macmillan, 1984, p. 23.

¹⁰ Lehmann, W.C., *Adam Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Sociology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1930, p. 187.

¹¹ Hamowy, 'Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson', p. 259.

diagnostic tradition to the novel conundrums of market society. Thus, his concern with 'alienation' and 'anomie' is perhaps best thought of as an ingenious contemporary adaptation of the Stoic interest in community, social intimacy and the mechanisms of solidary association.

Ferguson begins by implicitly challenging Adam Smith's explanation of the source of specialization. Smith had located the origin of the division of labour in a peculiar human instinct to 'truck barter and exchange'.¹² Ferguson, by contrast, bases the tendency to specialize labour functions upon natural human diversity coupled with certain environmental factors, namely the enormous variety of situations and obstacles confronted in the range of human experience.¹³ Typically the process is one of gradual evolution, based on small, successive improvements over time rather than on any long-term planning on the part of actors.¹⁴

Ferguson was particularly struck by the fact that, paradoxically, the division of labour was both the cause and product of progress yet operated, at the same time, as a key source of retrogression, especially in its effect on statecraft, martial and political disposition and defence capability.¹⁵ Ferguson notes, not without enthusiasm, the tremendous advantages attributable to specialization: an increasing accumulation of wealth, a soaring population

¹² Smith, WN, I. p. 25.

¹³ *P.I.*, p. 246.

¹⁴ *Essay*, p. 174.

¹⁵ Ferguson, Adam, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, edited and with an introduction by Fania Oz-Salzberger, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 206-7.

and an infinitely expanding refinement in artistic skills. The division of labour is central to human progress, since it is productive of wealth and prosperity.¹⁶

But in general, he seems to hold to the less enchanted view that modern commercial society, while affording many advantages, is yet the scene of what more contemporary thinkers would now label 'alienation', particularly in its 'alienation from species-being' variation, the primary cause of which is the social and work-function division of labour.

Alienation? Exploitation? Ferguson's outline of the dehumanising consequences of specialization on workers seems to foreshadow Marx's discourse on the same subject to the extent that it hints at the effects of fragmentation and product alienation.¹⁷ At times the affinity with Marx is remarkable with the development of ideas, at times, almost as fully realised.¹⁸ In fact it was Ferguson's treatment which partly inspired Marx's ferocious polemic on the same subject.¹⁹ Partly because of his critique of specialization

¹⁶ *Essay*, p. 173-4; *Institutes*, pp. 31-2.

¹⁷ As noticed by David Kettler (The Social and Political Thought of Adam Ferguson, Indiana: Ohio State University Press, 1965, pp. 8-9).

¹⁸ See, for example, "Of the Separation of Departments", *Collection of Essays, passim.*; Hamowy, R., 'Progress and Commerce in Anglo-American Thought: The Social Philosophy of Adam Ferguson', *Interpretation*, vol.14, Jan. 1986, pp.61-87, p. 87.

¹⁹ Marx credits Ferguson with the idea of worker alienation in *Capital* Vol. I. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p. 334 and *The Poverty of Philosophy*, New York, International Publishers, 1971, 129). According to Marx, Smith took the idea from Ferguson but Marx seems to have been unaware that Smith discussed the topic in his Glasgow Lectures before the *Essay* was published. However it is possible 'that Ferguson suggested the theme in the first place' (Duncan Forbes, Introduction to Ferguson, Adam, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, edited and with an introduction by Duncan Forbes, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967.pp.xxxiii-ii). Hamowy has concluded that that there is no doubt 'that a charge of plagiarism against Ferguson was thoroughly unjustified' and that 'equally [there is] not one whit of evidence that Smith took his views on the division of labour from Ferguson's *Essay*, as per Marx's claim (Hamowy, 'Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson', pp.2256-7. See also: Mizuta, Hiroshi, 'Two Adams in the Scottish Enlightenment', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 191, 1981, pp.812-19; Kettler, *Adam Ferguson*, p.74; For further discussion on the

it has even been suggested that Ferguson 'prophesied an inevitable decline' after societies had reached the commercial stage²⁰ Ferguson's pessimism and any similarities with Marx should not, however, be over-emphasised for reasons that will be given presently.

Though Smith also outlined the pernicious consequences of advanced specialization in the *Wealth of Nations*.²¹ Ferguson supplies more detail about its social effects and is more qualified about its benefits. Ferguson agrees with Smith and Hume that in its unperverted form, the division of labour is a uniting principle; that it is capable of generating a kind of organic solidarity.²² Human beings are, he says, the only animals who 'unite their labours for some common purpose, and distribute the burdens of the community according to some rule of instinct or reason.'²³ But in the commercial age, the bonding capacity of specialization is reversed and its highly destructive potential revealed. Ferguson describes the emergence of a division of labour between 'manual and mental labour' whereby those employed in manual

Marx/Ferguson link see Lehmann, W.C., 'Review of P. Salvucci's' Adam Ferguson: Sociologica e Filosofia Politica', *History and Society*, vol.13, no.2, 1974, pp.163-181, p.168; R. Meek, 'The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology' in *Economics and Ideology and other Essays*, London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1967; Pascal, Roy, 'Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century' *Modern Quarterly*, 1938, pp. 167-179.

²⁰ Istvan Hont 'The 'Rich Country, Poor Country' Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy', in Hont, I. and Ignatieff, M., (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 296.

²¹ See Smith, A., *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, R.H. Campbell, and A.S. Skinner, eds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, ch. i. *passim*.

²² *Essay*, p. 179; Smith, A., *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, edited by R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael and L.G. Stein, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, (A) vi.46-49, pp.348-349; *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, R.H. Campbell, and A.S. Skinner, eds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, I.ii.1-3, pp.25-27.

²³ Ferguson, Adam, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1978, p. 22.

labour come to be debased by it. The specialized worker becomes oblivious to any concerns outside her/his own narrow work sphere as labour becomes more mechanical. Specialization 'contract[s] and limit[s] the views of the mind' making workers unfit for public duties.²⁴ Soon, those involved in factory labour become mindless automatons, mere cogs in a vast machine.

Many mechanical arts...require no capacity; they succeed best under a total suppression of sentiment and reason....manufactures prosper most where the mind is least consulted, and where the workshop may...be considered as an engine, the parts of which are men.²⁵

But Ferguson's remarks, though clearly anticipatory, should not be interpreted as proto-Marxist, as some scholars have suggested.²⁶ Ferguson registers the drawbacks of specialization but never recommends its reversal and unlike Marx (himself exaggerating his affinity with Ferguson)²⁷ he regards specialization as a perfectly natural development originating in our natural diversity and in our inventive, progressive faculties. Ferguson readily acknowledges that economic exploitation of workers leads to imbalances in wealth and he agrees with Smith that rank distinctions and class inequalities flow directly from specialization.²⁸ But far from launching

²⁴ *Essay*, pp. 174-5, pp. 206-7.

²⁵ *Essay*, p. 174.

²⁶ See, for example, Rosenberg, 'Two Views or One', p. 127; Pascal, Roy, 'Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century' *Modern Quarterly*, 1938, pp. 167-179; R. Meek, 'Smith, Turgot and the 'Four Stages' Theory', *History of Political Economy*, vol.1, 1971, pp.9-27; Swingewood, 'Origins of Sociology', *The British Journal of Sociology*, p.171.

²⁷ See Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, p.334.

²⁸ *Essay* pp. 178; 235.

an attack on class exploitation, Ferguson is quite supportive of the system of rank distinctions.

Yet Ferguson certainly shows sympathy for the labouring 'classes' and seems to accept that commercial relations are exploitative. For example: laws intended to protect them may actually serve to preserve property inequalities²⁹ and their conditions of work are less than ideal; the majority are forced to labour for the benefit of the few³⁰, their work is uninteresting and mind-numbing³¹ and 'the genius of the master...is cultivated, while that of the inferior workman lies waste.'³² He also acknowledges that, in, commercial states, 'the exaltation of the few' tends to 'depress the many'³³ and that some of its 'occupations' are even 'more debasing than slavery'.³⁴

Ultimately, though, Ferguson has a tendency to see the world from the perspective of elites, reserving his greatest sympathy for the leisure classes suffering from the apparently unbearable tortures of boredom and *ennui* brought on by modernity.³⁵ Ferguson regards economic exploitation as an inevitable feature of commercial states³⁶ and notes the unpleasant facts of

²⁹ *Essay*, p.151.

³⁰ *Essay*, pp. 229.

³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 173-5.

³² *Essay*, p. 175.

³³ *Essay*, p. 177. Thanks to John Brewer for drawing attention to these passages (Brewer, "The Scottish Enlightenment", pp. 15-23).

³⁴ 'Of the Separation of Departments', *Collection of Essays*, No. 15, p. 142.

³⁵ 'We misapply our compassion in pitying the poor; it were much more justly applied to the rich, who become the first victims of that wretched insignificance, into which the members of every state, by the tendency of their weaknesses, and their vices, are in haste to plunge themselves' (*Essay*, p. 246).

³⁶ *Essay*, p.177. Ferguson notes that: 'Property, in the common course of human affairs, is unequally divided: we are therefore obliged to suffer the wealthy to squander, that the poor may subsist; we are

commercial life with regret and occasional³⁷-- but not sustained--
condemnation. The division of labour has drawbacks but it also has many
benefits. As Ferguson muses philosophically: 'the lot of man is never free of
inconvenience, so the inconvenience he suffers is never deprived of all
compensation'.³⁸ Ferguson is thus far less worried than Marx about the effect
of specialization on the 'soul than about what it may do to society.'³⁹

It would be fair to say that Ferguson's account of rank distinctions embodies
no serious critique of class. Class distinctions are located in natural
inequalities which are unavoidable, therefore Ferguson rebukes that
'absurdity of pretension to equal influence and consideration after the
characters of men have ceased to be similar.'⁴⁰ Subordination is not only
necessary to society and the attainment of the 'ends of government' but is
immanent in the 'order established by nature.' People 'are fitted to different
stations' therefore 'they suffer no injustice on the side of their natural rights'
when 'classed' accordingly.⁴¹ Ferguson's critical exposition of specialization
contain no programmatic calls for change. Like Smith he thought that the

obliged to tolerate certain orders of men, who are above the necessity of labour, in order that, in their condition, there may be an object of ambition, and a rank to which the busy aspire' (*Essay*, p. 225). The only regime under which equality of wealth is appropriate is a democratic one: 'in such only it has been admitted with any degree of effect' (*Essay*, p. 151)

³⁷ For example, in one of his unpublished essays he expostulates that some occupations are so debasing that 'the less there is of this sort, the better...subordination however valuable is too dearly bought by the debasement of any order or class of the people' ('Of the Separation of Departments', *Collection of Essays*, No. 15, pp. 142-3)

³⁸ *P.I.* p. 251.

³⁹ Gellner, E. 'Adam Ferguson', in *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*, London: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 80.

⁴⁰ *Essay*, p. 179.

⁴¹ *Essay*, pp. 63-4.

problems of specialization could be solved within existing social conditions.⁴²

While his diagnosis of the pitfalls of industrialization has clear Marxian implications the normative implications, for Ferguson, at least, are quite different. In addition, Ferguson's chief concern lies, not with the economic exploitation of workers, which he readily acknowledges, but with the effects of specialization upon civic virtue in 'statesmen'.

Decline of Military. What proto-Marxist readings of Ferguson fail to appreciate is that Ferguson describes the division of labour as a total process permeating all strata of society. And, unlike Marx, Ferguson thought that it was the ruling classes, the statesmen and military leaders, who bore the full brunt of specialization effects:

In this regard he repeats the observation made earlier by Ibn Kaldhoun (of whose work Ferguson seems to have been unaware) that the delegation of security to specialists leads to a 'politically and militarily emasculated' state.⁴³ Rousseau's observations on the same topic are also closely re-iterated.⁴⁴

Specialization and professionalization in martial functions held great significance, not only for Ferguson, but for Scottish society in general.

⁴² To quote Norbert Waszek (Waszek, N., 'The Division of Labour from the Scottish Enlightenment to Hegel.' *The Owl of Minerva: Quarterly Journal of the Hegel Society of America*, vol.15, no.1, Fall, 1983, pp 51-75, p.56).

⁴³ Gellner, E., 'Adam Ferguson and the Surprising Robustness of Civil Society, in *Liberalism in Modern Times: Essays in Honour of Jose G. Merquior*, edited by Ernest Gellner and Cesar Cansino, London: CEU Press, 1996, p. 121.

⁴⁴ "As the convenience of life increases, as the arts are brought to perfection, and luxury spreads, true courage flags, military virtues disappear" ('Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences', in Rousseau, J. *The Social Contract and Discourses*, Translation and Introduction by G. DH. Cole, London: Everyman's Library, 1973, p. 20).

Historically Scottish identity and social structure had been closely bound up in its claims to military prowess. According to John Robertson, this identity was the product of a number of distinctive historical circumstances and events: The introduction in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of the traditional system of feudal 'knight service' overlaid the more longstanding system of military organization known as the 'Scottish service'. Under this system the earls raised armies from among the 'lower' ranks. But as feudalism declined, the Scots insured against a deterioration of martial vigour and social intimacy by adopting a system of 'voluntary bands of "'manrent"' between lords and their followers—bands which themselves were usually based on the still more enduring ties of kinship' Though martial social structure was common in Europe, Scotland was distinctive in combining this social structure with a strong martial ethnic and cultural identity.⁴⁵ This distinctiveness was dealt a blow in 1663 when the Scottish Estates voted a Militia Act 'in which they acknowledged his Majesty's royal prerogative and undoubted right of the sole power of the raising, arming and commanding of his subjects'.⁴⁶ The final and decisive blow came when Ferguson was serving with the Black Watch regiment in Flanders. At home, the Battle of Cullodan (1746) saw the highland clans decisively eliminated as a military force.^{47,48}

⁴⁵Robertson, J., *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁶ Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Smith, A.G., *The Political Philosophy of Adam Ferguson Considered as a Response to Rousseau: Political Development and Progressive Development*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Yale University, 1980, pp. 19, 11. As John Robertson notes, the effect on Scottish Highland society and therefore Scottish

For Ferguson, the most dangerous separation in functions is that which occurs between soldier and statesman; roles which are otherwise 'naturally' conjoined. Ferguson conceives this split as creating a kind of schism in the human psyche.⁴⁹ To separate 'the arts of policy and war, is an attempt to dismember the human character'.⁵⁰ Moreover, a statesman 'ignorant of war' is about as useful to the defence of a state as a 'mariner' who is 'unacquainted with variable winds and storms'.⁵¹

Ferguson adopts and expands upon the observation of Polybius that the union of Rome's military and civil orders was its chief strength.⁵² The militia issue had been a longstanding one in Scottish political discourse⁵³ (most notably in the figure of Andrew Fletcher) and because it was particularly controversial during the latter half of the eighteenth century Ferguson's two pro-militia pamphlets were published anonymously.⁵⁴ *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia* (1761) and *The History of the Proceedings in the Case*

national identity in general was disastrous: When confronted finally with English professional soldiers at Culloden in 1746, the Highland army disintegrated. Outright repression, disarming legislation and the abolition of hereditary jurisdictions then completed the destruction of their society and cause so efficiently that within eleven years the Highlanders too could safely be absorbed, complete with the newly invented kilt, into the British army (Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue*, p. 7).

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⁴⁹ Forbes D. *Edinburgh in the Age of Reason*, Edinburgh: The University Press, 1967, p.45.

⁵⁰ *Essay*, p.230.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.82.

⁵² Willke, J., *The Historical Thought of Adam Ferguson*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America, 1962, p.148. The theme of standing army as an instrument of corruption is also present in the writings of Shaftesbury, another of Ferguson's sources (F.J. McLynn, 'The Ideology of Jacobitism-Part II', *History of European Ideas*, vol.6, no.2, 1985, pp.173-188, p.179.

⁵³ Sher, Richard B., 'Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, and the Problem of National Defense' *Journal of Modern History*, 61, (2), 1989, pp.240-268, p.265.

⁵⁴ Sher, 'The Problem of National Defense', p.258

of Margaret, Commonly Called Peg, only Lawful Sister to John Bull, Esq. (Sister Peg)

(1761) argued for the right of Scotland to have its own citizen militia. They were written in response to the failure of the Scottish Militia Bill (1760) and against the background of two circumstances: 1) Scotland's pointed exclusion from the William Pitt sponsored militia bill of 1757 and 2) the threat of invasion by France.⁵⁵ Like the Scottish Militia Bill, the Pitt sponsored bill reflected British fears of a further Jacobite uprising.⁵⁶ Both of Ferguson's pamphlets excited considerable attention and in 1762 he was a founder member of 'The Poker Club' which led the campaign for the establishment of a Scots militia.⁵⁷

Security was not Ferguson's only concern. The unbridled self-interest market life allegedly spawned and gave vent to was perceived to have resulted in the neglect of the military skill of citizens, thereby threatening the virtue and moral character of British subjects. In his *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia*, Ferguson argued that Scotland had become 'a Nation of Manufacturers, [in] which each is confined to a particular branch and sunk into the Habits and Peculiarities of his Trade.' On the one hand, the positive effect of this development is that '[w]e furnish good Work' but on the other

⁵⁵Fagg, J. 'Biographical Introduction' in Ferguson, Adam, *The Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, Edited by V. Merolle with an Introduction by J.B. Fagg, in Three Volumes, London: William Pickering, 1995, p.xxxiv.

⁵⁶ Hamowy, R., *The Social and Political Philosophy of Adam Ferguson*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1969, p.198.

⁵⁷ Sher, 'The Problem of National Defense', p.259. See also: Adam Ferguson, *Biographical Sketch or Memoir of Lieutenant-Colonel Patrick Ferguson Originally Intended for the British Encyclopedia*, Edinburgh: Printed by John Moir, 1816, p.10.

there is the negative tendency to 'educate men, gross, sordid, void of sentiments and Manners, who may be pillaged, insulted, and trod upon by the enemies of their country'.⁵⁸ The spirit of nations is 'considerably impaired' where the civil and military character has become separated.⁵⁹ To Ferguson's mind the loyalties of professional standing armies would always be in question. 'The most celebrated warriors' he says 'were also citizens',⁶⁰ and Themistocles, Aristides and Pericles are identified as paragons of the synthesized civic personality about which Ferguson is so nostalgic.⁶¹ Ferguson lavishly idealised the warrior-statesman of classical reports and expressed his views on the subject with great vigour.⁶² His support for James Macpherson's *Ossian*⁶³ also reflects his admiration for the vital martial virtues which attached to pre-commercial subjects. At times this admiration borders on a primitivism which Ferguson would undoubtedly have wished to avoid given his other important commitments to modernity and material and moral progress.⁶⁴

Adam Smith also expressed regret at the dismemberment of human character brought about by specialization but was more concerned with the

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Ferguson, Adam, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, London: Jones and Company, [1783] 1834, pp. 183, p. 348, 399: *Essay F*, p. 145-6, p. 225, p. 181; *Reflections*, passim.

⁶⁰ *Essay*, p. 149 F

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 229. See also *Essay*, pp. 144-5.

⁶² See, for example, also *Essay*, p. 45, p. 101

⁶³ Luke Gibbons, 'Ossian, Celticism and Colonialism' in Terence Brown (ed) *Celticism*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996 p. 284. For a general discussion of the historicity of *Ossian* see K.L. Haugan, 'Ossian and the Invention of Textual History', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 58 (2) 1998, pp. 309-327.

⁶⁴ For a fuller discussion of this point see: L. Hill, 'Adam Ferguson and the Paradox of Progress and Decline', *History of Political Thought*, 18, (4), Winter, 1997, pp. 677-706.

division of labour's effect on intelligence than on martial or political virtues.

This, Nicholas Phillipson suggests, locates him outside the civic tradition in the sense that wisdom, rather than martial and political virtue, is conceived as the cardinal virtue of the commercial age.⁶⁵ Smith and Ferguson seem to have disagreed greatly on the question of militias;⁶⁶ indeed Richard Sher has argued that Ferguson's views developed in direct response to Smith's.⁶⁷

Though Ferguson may have exaggerated their differences⁶⁸ nevertheless

Hiroshi Mizuta notes that Smith's views on national defence differ from Ferguson's because the former 'has no dilemma of wealth and strength'.⁶⁹

According to Smith professional armies were more capable and efficient, and better protectors of liberty than militias.⁷⁰ After he outlined these views in the

⁶⁵ Phillipson, N. 'Adam Smith as Civic Moralist', in Hont, I. and Ignatieff, M., (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.181. The textual evidence certainly supports this view. See Smith WN., V.i.f-g., p.788.

⁶⁶ See Emerson ('Conjectural History and the Scottish Philosophers' 336, p.90) for further discussion of Smith's views on this item.

⁶⁷ Sher, 'The Problem of National Defense', p.267 and passim.

⁶⁸ For example, in his response to Alexander Carlyle's attack on his views Smith wrote to Andreas Holt: 'When he wrote this book, he had not read mine to the end. He fancies that because I insist that a Militia is in all cases inferior to a well-regulated and well-disciplined standing Army, I disapprove of Militias altogether. With regard to that subject, he and I happened to be precisely of the same opinion' (Adam Smith, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, Mossner, E.C., and Ross, I.S., eds, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, Letter 208, 26th October 1780). In later passages of the Book V of the *Wealth of Nations* Smith qualifies his position thus: '[T]he security of every society must always depend, more or less, on the martial spirit of the great body of people. In the present times, indeed, that martial spirit alone, and unsupported by a well-disciplined standing army, would not perhaps, be sufficient for the defence and security of any society. But where every citizen had the spirit of a soldier, a smaller standing army would surely be requisite. That spirit besides, would necessarily diminish very much the dangers to liberty, whether real or imaginary, which are commonly apprehended from a standing army. As it would very much facilitate the operations of that standing army against a foreign invader, so it would obstruct them as much if unfortunately they should ever be directed against the constitution of the state' (WN.V.i.f.59, pp. 786-787).

⁶⁹ Mizuta, 'Two Adams in the Scottish Enlightenment', p.815.

⁷⁰ Smith WN. V.i.a., p.23, p.28, p.39. Smith did, however concede with Ferguson that the standing armies of the Roman republic and Cromwell were pernicious but insisted that under ideal conditions, that is, where 'the sovereign is himself the general...a standing army can never be dangerous to liberty. On the contrary, in some cases it may be favourable to liberty' (WN.II., Vi.a.41, pp.706-7). For a more detailed

Wealth of Nations Ferguson wrote him a strong letter in which he pointed out that although he supported many of Smith's views, he drew the line at those relating to standing armies.⁷¹

Although a professional standing army was acceptable in times of peace in times of emergency, militias were not only preferable, but necessary.⁷²

Ferguson regarded the modern professional soldier as defective because morally, technically and mentally fragmented. It is all very well for the skills and manners of people to be improved in the course of specialization but when that same specialization leads to a corrupt state the price cannot be worth paying. The average trader may find that while 'his' manners are greatly enhanced by modernity 'he' suffers the loss of the all important martial virtues. The trade-off is a zero sum game because the merchant made rich by specialization 'has every virtue except the force to defend his acquisitions'. The 'wealth or virtue' trade-off is a complicated one for Ferguson because without true virtue, wealth cannot be sustained and yet virtue is generally the cost of material wealth. Note also that the newly acquired virtues Ferguson refers to are merely the cool, secondary, virtues of enterprise and commercial probity, whereas the virtues sacrificed in attaining

discussion on the relationships of the two Adams here see Sher, 'the Problem of National Defense', passim and Sher, *Church and University*, p.237, for Smith particularly.

⁷¹ Adam Ferguson in a letter to Adam Smith, 18th of April, 1776, *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, E.C Mossner and I. S. Ross, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, No. 154 pp.193-4.

⁷² Ferguson, Adam *Principles of Moral and Political Science: Being Chiefly a Retrospect of Lectures Delivered in the College of Edinburgh*, in Two Volumes, Edinburgh: Printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell. London; and W. Creech, Edinburgh, 1792, II. p. 492.

them are the cardinal civic virtues, hardly a profitable exchange from his point of view.⁷³

Though Ferguson's views on the subject of militias would have been informed by his years in the Black Watch regiment⁷⁴ the influence of classical and neo-classical sources like Machiavelli and Polybius is also detectable. Both endorsed citizen militias on the grounds that technical and tactical superiority could never compensate for lack of courage. Ferguson agreed with them that since citizen armies are always 'fighting for country and children, it is impossible for them to relax the fury of their struggle.'⁷⁵ Ferguson also disparaged mercenaries for their unreliability and lack of energy. Mercenaries are notoriously difficult to control, and it is impossible to maintain their goodwill. They are more prone to disloyalty, insubordination and mutiny and are hazardous to the civic spirit of the general population because their venality is contagious. Apart from providing poor security from invaders, professional armies are a potential source of internal instability because they are more likely than citizen soldiers to usurp power or to promote aspiring

⁷³ *Essay*, p.145.

⁷⁴ Willke, *The Historical Thought of Adam Ferguson*, p.2-3.

⁷⁵ Polybius, *The Histories of Polybius*, translated from the text of F. Hultsch by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh with a new introduction by F.W. Walbank, in Two Volumes, New Haven: Greenwood Press, 1975, 6.52., p.502. Identically, Machiavelli argued that 'the reason why mercenary troops are useless' is that 'they have no cause to stand firm when attacked, apart from the small pay which you give them' and that the only way to keep the state intact is 'to arm oneself with one's own subjects' (Machiavelli, Niccolo., *The Discourses*, edited and with an Introduction by Bernard Crick, Suffolk: Penguin, 1970, I.43., p.218). See also Machiavelli, N. *The Art of War, 'The Citizen Army'* in *The Chief Works and Others*; Vol.II, edited by Allan Gilbert, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1965, pp.579-587

tyrants.⁷⁶ (Machiavelli made an almost identical litany of charges against mercenaries in *The Prince*.)⁷⁷ Militias have three key advantages over standing armies: they have a personal stake in the territory they defend; they will always be more numerous than the enemy and they provide defence free of charge. Against the claim that militias enjoy greater levels of competence, Ferguson counters that in times of crisis, though 'inferior at first' militias are highly motivated to promptly meet professional standards.⁷⁸

Ferguson agreed with Frances Hutcheson that military service should be an avocation; a duty incumbent on all⁷⁹ in order to protect the state from both internal and external threat. The loyalty of soldiers to an employer as opposed to a homeland makes it easier for them to become enemies of the commonwealth should that employer (usually a general) decide to advance 'his' own cause. An armed populace, meanwhile, is always prepared and able to secure its rights from the encroachments of aspiring tyrants whereas a populace accustomed to reliance upon professionals for their defence is ineffectual, timid and 'effeminate'.⁸⁰ A people become 'disarmed in compliance' with the 'fatal refinement' of task specialization have

⁷⁶ *History*, pp.28-32, 104, 127, 288.and *Reflections*, *passim*.

⁷⁷ Machiavelli, Niccolo, *The Prince*, translated and with an introduction by George Bull, London: Penguin, 1981, Book XII, p.77.

⁷⁸ Adam Ferguson's unpublished moral philosophy lecture notes dated April 9, 1776, quoted in Sher, 'Problem of National Defense', p.256.

⁷⁹ Lawrence Delbert Cress, 'Radical Whiggery on the Role of the Military: Ideological Roots of the American Revolutionary Militia', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.40, 1979, pp.43-60, p.52.

⁸⁰ *Essay*, p.230

injudiciously 'rested their safety on the pleadings of reason and justice at the tribunal of ambition and force.'⁸¹

Ferguson's suggested reforms on this issue were his only significant departure from his otherwise firm commitment to the natural course of spontaneous order. In all other respects he was a conservative.⁸²

Social Effects. One highly original aspect of Ferguson's discussion of specialization was his observation that the separation of tasks leads to conditions sociologists once referred to as 'anomic' or, more recently, as undermined by low levels of social and moral capital. While it seems 'to promise' national wealth and 'improvement of skill', in reality, specialization erodes that most precious commodity: moral community.

The division of labour leads inevitably to centralization and bureaucratization both of which limit a person's inclination and capacity to be civically active.⁸³ 'The members of a community may...be made to lose the sense of every connection...and have no common affairs to transact but those of trade...in which the national spirit...cannot be exerted'.⁸⁴ The division of labour alienates individuals from public affairs as it effects a gradual dismemberment of the human personality.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.271

⁸² See Kettler, 'Adam Ferguson', pp.88-9.

⁸³ *Essay*; p.178.

⁸⁴ *Essay*, p. 208. Ferrarotti notes that Hegel's exposition of *bürgerlich Gesellschaft* was also significantly informed by Ferguson's analysis (Ferrarotti, F., 'Civil Society and State Structures in Creative Tension', *State, Culture and Society*, 1, Fall, 1984, pp.3-25).

'State Structures', p.16).

Specialization undermines social intimacy or 'loosen(s) the bands of political union'.⁸⁵ Whereas in pre-commercial societies shared defence responsibilities made 'the public' a cosy 'knot of friends'⁸⁶ specialized commercial agents are isolated and separated by their lack of martial valour, their individuated desires for 'riches' and their deep 'aversion to danger'.⁸⁷ Attention is gradually diverted from public concerns as people are drawn into the private, individuated realm of commerce and manufacturing. Pre-empting Marx, Ferguson notes that work specialization alienates people 'from the common scene of occupation, on which the sentiments of the heart, and the mind, are most happily employed' with the effect that eventually 'society is made to consist of parts, of which none is animated with the spirit of society itself.' Political demobilization lapses into a generalised political incompetence and when these circumstances combine with the *anomie*-inducing effects of over-extension and the enervation brought on by idleness and luxury, civic virtue and national strength are imperilled.

Adam Smith on the Division of Labour.

Adam Smith's approach to the division of labour is equally significant though for different reasons. According to Nathan Rosenberg his work 'provided a masterful analysis of the gains from specialization and exchange

⁸⁵ *Essay*, pp.206-9.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.208.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.231.

upon which, it is no exaggeration to say, the discipline of economics was nurtured'.⁸⁸

Smith's attitude to the division of labour, though also depreciative in parts, does not share Ferguson's deeper negativity. Smith did not agree that the division labour destroyed community insisting, rather, that it merely transformed the quality and means of *interdependence* while at the same time enhancing personal and private independence. The division of labour is positive *because* it is a key cause of the dissolution of charitable, philanthropic, paternalistic and dependent relationships. In order to obtain their wants and secure the co-operation of their fellows pre-commercial agents had 'no other means of persuasion' than to 'gain the favour of those whose service' was required. That meant having to resort to the demeaning, inefficient and unreliable method of 'servile and fawning attention to obtain [the] good will' of others. But in 'civilized society' agents are afforded greater levels of independence, paradoxically, because each 'stands at all times in need of the co-operation and assistance of great multitudes'. The ability of humans to specialize and exchange the products of this specialization makes them 'mutually beneficial to each other'.⁸⁹

Advanced commercial societies are too unwieldy to be held together by a drive so inconstant and random as spontaneous affection. Industrializing

⁸⁸ Rosenberg, 'Two Views or One', p. 127.

⁸⁹ Smith, *LJ* (A) vi.46-49, pp.348-349.

society is regulated and sustained by the bonds of contract (the primary mechanism of association); a regular system of justice, the self-government generated by internal psychological mechanisms like sympathy and the impartial spectator and the mutually-enabling effects of the division of labour. Rather than tearing communities asunder (as per Ferguson's account) specialization generates unprecedented levels of mutuality. Now associations are increasingly voluntaristic, egalitarian and mutually beneficial; a matter of purely instrumental mutual 'good offices'.⁹⁰

Exchange is now the primary form and *purpose* of association; the urge to 'truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another' is innate and therefore natural. By this means the equally natural institution of society is held together.⁹¹ Specialization, and the exchange culture to which it inevitably gives rise, leads to the development of commercial society whereby 'every man...lives by exchanging, or becomes in some measure a merchant'.⁹²

Exchange gradually comes to displace clan and familial displays of loyalty as the paradigmatic social interaction.⁹³

Specialization not only generates commercial society, it solves an erstwhile and troublesome obstruction to the development of commerce and

⁹⁰ WN I.ii.2, p.26

⁹¹ WN I.ii.1-3, pp.25-27

⁹² WN, VI.1.p. 37

⁹³ For a fuller discussion of the relationship of self-interest to the other-regarding virtues in Smith see: Lisa Hill, 'Ferguson and Smith on 'Human Nature', 'Interest' and the Role of Beneficence in Market Society', *Journal of the History of Economic Ideas*, Adam Smith Special Edition, IV, 1996, (1-2), pp. 353-399 and by the same author, 'Homo Economicus, Difference Voices and the Liberal Psyche', *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 13, (1), Spring, 1999, pp. 21-46.

civilization itself: the security problem. Security is both an internal and external matter. The internal security of states is solved by the establishment of a formal system of justice and the development of professional, 'well-regulated' standing armies to 'execute and maintai[n]' it. 'A standing army', Smith wrote, 'establishes, with an irresistible force, the law of the sovereign through the remotest provinces of the empire, and maintains some degree of regular government in countries which could not otherwise admit of any'.⁹⁴ An organized system of justice underpinned by regular armies affords 'to industry, the only encouragement which it requires, some tolerable security that it shall enjoy the fruits of its own labour'.⁹⁵ When '[t]he natural effort of every individual to better his own condition' is unleashed under conditions of 'freedom and security' the society will be prosperous and happy. Smith was pleased to note that 'In Great Britain', the most opulent, differentiated and commercially advanced nation in the world, 'industry is perfectly secure...[and, arguably] freer than in any other part of Europe'.⁹⁶

The security threat posed to commercial states by the potential 'violence and injustice of other independent societies' is also resolved by specialization.⁹⁷ Standing armies, which though more expensive to maintain than citizen militias, afford 'opulent and civilized' nations a considerable

⁹⁴ WN.V.i.a.40, p. 706.

⁹⁵ WN I.xi.i. p. 256; See also; WN.I.xi.g,pp. 213-14.

⁹⁶ WN, IV.v.b.43, p. 540

⁹⁷WN.V.i.a.39.p. 705 and WN.V.i.a.40, p. 706. In concert with the military advantage afforded by the 'invention of fire-arms' which though 'at first sight' might appear to be 'pernicious...is certainly favourable to the permanency and to the extension of civilization' (WN V.i.a-b.44, p.708).

military advantage over the 'poor and barbarous'.⁹⁸ Civilised countries, with their superior capacity to wage professional and technologically advanced war thus have greater control over sovereignty and therefore a greater capacity to protect the expansion of trade and commerce.

But Smith was quick to reassure his readers, and in particular pro-militia enthusiasts like Ferguson, that standing armies were no danger to liberty. On the contrary, the sovereign who enjoys the 'security' of an extensive, professional and well-armed military is unburdened of 'that troublesome jealousy' which causes less secure governors perpetually 'to watch over the minutest actions' and stand poised to 'disturb the peace of every citizen'. Paradoxically, the militarily insecure (that is, the avocationally defended) state is also the oppressive, stifling state:

Where the security of the magistrate, though supported by the principal people of the country, is endangered by every popular discontent; where a small tumult is capable of bringing about in a few hours a great revolution, the whole authority of government must be employed to suppress and punish every murmur and complaint against it. To the sovereign, on the contrary, who feels himself supported, not only by the natural aristocracy of the country, but by a well-regulated standing army, the rudest, the most groundless, and the most licentious remonstrances can give little disturbance. He can safely pardon or neglect them, and his consciousness of his own superiority naturally disposes him to do so. That degree of liberty which approaches to licentiousness can be tolerated only in countries where the sovereign is secured by a well-regulated standing army. It is in such countries only, that the public safety does not require, that the sovereign should be trusted with any discretionary power, for suppressing even the impertinent wantonness of this licentious liberty.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ WN. V. ia-b, 44, p. 708

⁹⁹ WN V.i.a. 41, pp. 706-707.

Perhaps predictably, Ferguson disagrees strongly; the militarily specialized state is, in reality, the insecure and potentially imperilled state.¹⁰⁰ As we have seen, he regarded the modern professional soldier as defective because morally, technically and mentally fragmented.

Further, while Ferguson certainly approved of formal systems of justice and police, he was not altogether convinced that this secured personal safety and property any better than the methods used by 'rude' subjects. As he wrote, somewhat naively:

In rude ages, the persons and properties of individuals are secure; because each has a friend, as well as an enemy; and if the one is disposed to molest, the other is ready to protect; and the very admiration of valour, which in some instances tends to sanctify violence, inspires likewise certain maxims of generosity and honour, that tend to prevent the commission of wrongs.¹⁰¹

Smith on Alienation? There is more to Smith's treatment of specialization than the Scots Militia debate and a steadfast refusal to call for a roll back in military specialization. His discussion on the division of labour is noteworthy not least because it is one of the few sources of corruption he identifies as peculiar to or induced by the commercial age. Smith appreciated the alienating effects of the division of labour and his comments here are genuinely prescient.

¹⁰⁰ *P.II.* 492.

¹⁰¹ *Essay*, p. 104.

The division of labour reduces the tasks of workers to one or two simple operations, and since work is central to intellectual development the labourer naturally loses the good part of her cognitive capacities, including natural inventiveness. Since her field of experience has become drastically reduced through specialization, occasions for inventiveness rarely arise. Workers' physical capacities are also impaired: task separation limits the labourer's scope of duties and renders 'him' 'incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment than that which [s/]he has been bred'. The individual thus acquires 'greater dexterity at his own particular trade' but only at the expense of 'his intellectual, social and martial virtues'.¹⁰²

The worker involved in detail labour is reduced to a kind of automaton, who is not only 'as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become' but is soon bereft of any capacity to exercise her moral sentiments or to judge of her own best interests; consequently her opinions do not count for much on matters of public interest.¹⁰³

Martial virtue is a further and significant cost of specialization. Smith was uncharacteristically animated on this point, noting that the monotony of wage labour corrupted the 'courage' of the labourer's mind rendering 'him' unfit

¹⁰² WN.V.i.f.50, p. 782.

¹⁰³ WN.V.i.f. 50, pp. 781-2.

for military service.¹⁰⁴ The coward is described as ‘mutilated and deformed in his mind’ and his condition likened to a ‘loathsome and offensive disease’ such as leprosy.¹⁰⁵

Significantly, such corruptions were unknown to pre-commercial societies of hunters, shepherds and rude ‘husbandmen’. The requirements of their ‘barbarous’ existence perpetually exercised their physical and more importantly their mental faculties. Every person in such societies was resourceful, alert and motivated by necessity to inventive and creative action; such persons were public-spirited, civically active and courageous warriors.¹⁰⁶

Cultural impoverishment also necessarily accompanies an advanced system of specialization. Smith regarded the pursuit of beauty as an essential ingredient in human flourishing. In his essay on ‘The History of Astronomy’ he submits that ‘custom deadens the vivacity of both pain and pleasure’.¹⁰⁷ But specialization narrows the scope of attention and deadens the moral sentiments to the point where ‘all the nobler parts of the human character may be...obliterated and extinguished’ altogether.¹⁰⁸ The age of specialization is also the age of declining literacy. The division of labour ‘affords an opportunity of employing children very young’ consequently their education is neglected. Whereas in Scotland, for example, ‘where the division of labour

¹⁰⁴ WN. V.i.f.50, p. 782.

¹⁰⁵ WN. V.i.f 60, pp. 787-8.

¹⁰⁶ WN.V.i.f.51, p. 783.

¹⁰⁷ Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, I.S. Ross, ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, ‘The History of Astronomy’, 10. p. 37.

¹⁰⁸ WN.V.i.f. 51, p. 783-4.

is not far advanced, even the meanest porter can read and write' in England's 'commercial parts' such is not the case. Smith posits the 'general' rule that 'in town they are not so intelligent as in the country, nor in a rich country as in a poor one'.¹⁰⁹ Smith's chief concern here seems to be the effects of low levels of education on public order: An uneducated populace is generally unruly, with no idea of 'amusement...but riot and debauchery'.¹¹⁰

Worker alienation is not a minor phenomenon restricted to a few workers. Smith indicates that this condition could cause 'the almost entire corruption and degeneracy of the great body of the people...in every improved and civilized society'; moreover, such a tendency seems to be inevitable.¹¹¹

Because of these extremely negative and apparently pessimistic observations it has been suggested that Smith's comments on the division of labour in Book V 'constitute a major source of inspiration for the socialist critique' of capitalism.¹¹² Along similar lines Robert Lamb has argued that Smith regarded industrial workers as alienated in the fullest sense as Marx applied it.¹¹³ According to Charles Griswold, Smith's critical remarks represent a civic humanist lament on the loss of 'indispensable' civic virtue.

¹⁰⁹ LJB, 329, pp. 539-40.

¹¹⁰ LJB, 329-30, pp. 539-40

¹¹¹ WN. V.i.f. 49-50, pp. 781-2. Smith does, note though, that people of rank were immune from the effects of the division of labour for unlike 'the common people' their 'employments' are not 'simple and uniform' (WN, I.iii.2.52, p. 784). Similarly 'the agricultural population is exempted from the worst ravages of division of labour by inherent limits upon the extent to which such division can be carried in agriculture' (Rosenberg, 'Two Views or One', p. 138).

¹¹² Rosenberg, N., 'Adam Smith on the Division of Labour: Two Views or One' *Economica*, Feb., 1965, pp.127-139, p. 127.

¹¹³ Robert Lamb, 'Adam Smith's Concept of Alienation', *Oxford Economic Papers* Vol 25 (2) 1973 pp. 275-85, p. 273

Griswold suggests that the matter is a serious one for Smith because 'the political implications of dehumanization are great, especially in free countries'.¹¹⁴ It has even been suggested that Smith's comments should be interpreted as a sign that he anticipates the decline and eventual annihilation of the commercial age. For example, Spencer Pack contends that Smith sees 'capitalism' as only one level or stage of human development that must eventually give way to something else because of its adverse effects on moral character.¹¹⁵ Robert Heilbroner takes a similar line, suggesting that, for Smith, laissez-faire capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction.¹¹⁶

Such claims are probably exaggerated. It is true that Smith's outline of the dehumanising consequences of specialization on workers does indeed foreshadow Marx's discourse on the same subject to the extent that it hints at the effects of fragmentation and product alienation.¹¹⁷ In fact, along with Ferguson's even more detailed account, Smith indirectly inspired Marx's ferocious polemic on the same subject.¹¹⁸ But the affinity between them should not be over-estimated. Like Ferguson, Smith registers the drawbacks of specialization but never recommended any revision of specialization functions believing that its attendant problems could be solved within

¹¹⁴ Griswold, C. *The Virtues of the Enlightenment*: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 293.

¹¹⁵ Pack, Spencer J. *Capitalism as a Moral System: Adam Smith's Critique of the Free Market Economy*, Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1991.

¹¹⁶ Heilbroner, R.L., 'The Paradox of Progress: Decline and Decay in the Wealth of Nations' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.34, 1973, pp.243-262.

¹¹⁷ Kettler, , *Adam Ferguson*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁸ Indirectly because Smith and Ferguson probably worked on the ideas together and informally. But, as we have seen, Marx gives of the credit to Ferguson (*Capital*, V. 1, p. 342).

existing social and political arrangements (see below). And contrary to Marx.

Smith regards specialization as a natural, inevitable and socially adaptive process.¹¹⁹

Another important point of divergence relates to their differing conceptions of labour. In Marx's formulation of human nature, humans are innately disposed to the enjoyment of work; it forms part of their basic makeup and under ideal conditions give their lives dignity and meaning. But Smith thought people had a natural 'hatred of labour' and a love of 'present ease and enjoyment'.¹²⁰ In the Smithian universe work rarely has intrinsic value; job satisfaction is rare and the majority of us find that our sole compensation is pecuniary.¹²¹ Strange as this may seem, given the seriousness of his account of its effects on individual workers, Smith sees the mind-numbing effects of the division of labour as of relatively low importance in the grand scheme of things. And unlike Marx, Smith did not perceive worker powerlessness as a necessary consequence of specialization. On the one hand, he notes that 'in disputes with their workmen, masters must generally have the advantage'¹²² and he even acknowledges that the division of labour entails a certain degree

¹¹⁹ Social order is seen to rest securely on a well structured system of rank distinctions. *TMS*. VI.ii.1.21. p. 226. Further, such distinction provide a vital spur to industry (*TMS*, I.iii.2.2, p. 50; IV.i.10, p. 183).

Ferguson agreed: 'We are...obliged to suffer the wealthy to squander that the poor may subsist; we are obliged to tolerate certain orders of men, who are above the necessity of labour, in order that, in their condition, there may be an object of ambition, and a rank to which the busy aspire' (*Essay*., p.237).

¹²⁰ *WN*.V.i.b. 2. p. 709.

¹²¹ *WN*, I. XI.p.9., p.266.

¹²² *WN*.I.viii. 14, p. 85.

of exploitation and exacerbates social inequality.¹²³ But on the other, Smith seems to have believed that workers were free to become their own 'masters'; to leave the factory system and set up on their own. Although such cases were rare (about one in twenty) they did exist.¹²⁴ Further, at a more general social level, the entire system of commercialism (of which the division of labour is an integral part) generates great levels of liberty and independence for all members of society, including the working poor. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the division of labour delivers security and is the source of almost all of the progress and prosperity of the commercial age.¹²⁵ This is significant because, for Smith, the happy society is the prosperous, materially abundant society.¹²⁶ Witness the 'serenity and happiness' of the rich compared to the 'misery and distress' of the poor.¹²⁷ In general he took the view that whatever makes a country rich (and the division of labour does this better than anything else) enriches the poor also and is therefore, in the long view, to

¹²³ 'The poor labourer who has the soil and the seasons to struggle with, and who, while he affords the materials for supplying the luxury of all the other members of the commonwealth, bears, as it were, upon his shoulders, the whole fabric of human society, sees himself to be buried out of sight in the lowest foundation of the building' (*Early Draft of Part of the Wealth of Nations*, 6. in *LJ*, p. 564. See also: *LJA*, 26, p. 340). Though Smith, for example, never uses the term 'he comes near to describing the processes which Marx thought of as constituting exploitation...Smith saw workers as having to share their produce with capitalists (and landlords) and presented profit (and rent) as deductions from the workers "natural recompense"'. At the same time, Smith also perceived 'this surplus extraction or deduction' as a 'necessity. Without the deduction of profit from "the value which the workers add to the materials [capitalists] could have no interest to employ them"...Continued employment prospects for workers were dependent on maintaining profit as an incentive. Nor was the deduction either undeserved or unusually large, merely a "modest compensation for the risk and trouble of employing the stock' (Brewer, John D. 'The Scottish Enlightenment' in *Modern Theories of Exploitation*, edited by Andrew Reeve: London: Sage, 1987, pp. 9-10).

¹²⁴ *WN*.I.viii. 9-10, p. 83.

¹²⁵ See, for example, *WN* I.i.10-111, pp.22-4.

¹²⁶ *TMS*, III.5.7. p. 166; *WN*, I. Viii.36.p. 96.

¹²⁷ *TMS*, I.iii.2.1, p. 51.

their benefit.¹²⁸ Thus, on balance, and despite its extensive ill effects, the division of labour, yields more, rather than less, human happiness.

Though it is doubtless hyperbole to claim that Smith perceives the whole process of detail factory work as a 'coherent, positive and constructive social process'¹²⁹ he *does* see it as having many deeply positive aspects. As Nathan Rosenberg has argued, even though the division of labour erodes individual intellectual capacity it enhances the general intelligence of the society.¹³⁰ And, rather than inducing the isolating and alienating society, Smith argued that specialization generated a new and more reliable form of interdependence. In an excursus comparing human and animal traits Smith explains why other species are destined to lead separate and independent lives. The reason is that they do not know how to divide their labour and consequently cannot form systems of mutual relations and needs. Humans, by contrast, *do* know how to

¹²⁸¹²⁸ *LJ.B.* 212-13, pp. 489-90. He noted that 'with regard to the produce of the labour of a great society there is never any such thing as a fair and equal division...The division of labour, by which each individual confines himself to a particular branch of business, can alone account for that superior opulence which takes place in civilized societies, and which, notwithstanding the inequality of property, extends itself to the lowest member of the community' (*Early Draft of Part of the Wealth of Nations*, 5-6. in *LJ*, pp. 563-4). Elsewhere he adds that the division of labour alone accounts 'for the superior affluence and abundance commonly possessed even by the lowest and most despised member of civilized society, compared with what the most respected and active savage can attain to in spite of so much oppressive inequality' (Appendix, *Early Draft of the Wealth of Nations, LJ*, p. 564). According to Joseph Schumpeter 'nobody either before or after A.Smith, ever thought of putting such a burden upon division of labour. With A.Smith it is practically the only factor in economic progress' (Schumpeter, J.A. *History of Economic Analysis*, New York, 1954, p. 187).

¹²⁹ E.G. West, 'The Political Economy of Alienation: Karl Marx and Adam Smith, *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 21 (1), March 1969, pp. 1-23.

¹³⁰ This is because the highly differentiated society 'is made up of an endlessly variegated number of ...activities, and although the worker's own personal assignment may be unchallenging and lacking in significant opportunities, the sum total of the occupations in society presents extraordinary opportunities for the detached and contemplative philosophers' (Rosenberg, 'Two Views or One', p. 136, 139). See also: Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 83.

specialize and then to trade the products of their specializations. This leads to increased interaction and impersonal inter-dependence creating 'mutual need and therefore social cohesion'.¹³¹

Further, even though specialization eroded martial virtue, Smith continued to advocate the use of standing armies.¹³² He approved specialization and professionalization in martial functions whereas Ferguson pushed for citizen militias in order to ameliorate the effects of the division of labour (and modernity in general) on civic virtue.¹³³ Richard Sher captures their differences well:

The contrast appears in their priorities and emphases; whereas Smith's thrust was on the positive aspects of the division of labour and economic growth generally, Ferguson's was on the dangers they posed. And whereas Smith is willing to treat nations and individuals from an economic point of view, Ferguson spurned the 'modern' approach and insisted on the priority of Stoic and civic humanist moral ideals.¹³⁴

In terms of the 'wealth/virtue' debate, then, Smith indicates, in a variety of ways, that he ultimately sides with the moderns in favour of wealth.

From Smith's point of view the main problem with the adverse effect of the division of labour is not the loss of civic virtue or the imminent collapse of commercialism itself but its entirely ameliorable consequences for public order and personal comportment. But Smith regarded this problem as soluble

¹³¹ Milton Myers, 'The Division of Labour as a Principle of Social Cohesion' *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 33, 1967, p. 435; LJ A. vi.46-49, pp.348-349.

¹³² WN. V. ia-b, 44, p. 708. At the same time Smith does seem to suggest that standing armies would be well supported by citizen militias, or at the very least, a citizenry imbued with 'the spirit of a soldier' (WN.v.i.f.59).

¹³³ See, for example, *Reflections Previous to the Establishment of a Militia passim*.

¹³⁴ Sher, 'the Problem of National Defense', p. 242.

within prevailing social conditions and relations. (Marx described his solution as merely 'homeopathic').¹³⁵ To this end he advocated the establishment of a compulsory and publicly funded school system to inculcate patterns of civility suitable for market society subjects.¹³⁶ The 'most essential circumstances in the public morals of a free people' is 'good temper and moderation of contending factions' which requires that the bulk of the people, in addition to training for a trade, have some supplementary education'.¹³⁷ Smith suggests that at a 'very small expense the public can facilitate...encourage, and...even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education' namely reading, writing and accounting.¹³⁸ This publicly funded education plan is mainly directed towards the working poor who, unlike the governing classes, do not have the time or resources to undertake it for themselves.¹³⁹ A basic education will make a people 'more capable of seeing through the interested complaints of faction and sedition'.¹⁴⁰ Further, educated people are

¹³⁵ *Capital*, I. p. 242.

¹³⁶ WN.V.i.i.5-6, p. 815. WN.V.i.f.57, p. 786.

¹³⁷ WN.V.i.f.40

¹³⁸ WN V.i.f.54. p. 785. For a fuller discussion of Smith's views here see: James E. Alvey, 'Moral Education as a Means to Human Perfection and Social Order: Adam Smith's View of Education in Commercial Society', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol 14 (2) 2001, pp. 1-18.

¹³⁹ WN. II. V.i.f.46-53, pp. 780-86.

¹⁴⁰ WN V.i.f.61, p. 788. According to Smith 'the frequent, and often wonderful, success of the most ignorant quacks and imposters, both civil and religious, sufficiently demonstrate how easily the multitude are imposed upon by the most extravagant and groundless pretensions' (Smith, A., *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D.D. Raphael and A.L. MacFie, eds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 249)

‘more respectable’ and orderly because more inclined to acknowledge the authority of their ‘lawful superiors’.¹⁴¹

Smith believed that the ‘state derives no inconsiderable advantage from the ‘instruction’ of the working poor due to its projected positive effect on political and social tranquillity. ‘An instructed and intelligent people’ is suspicious of ‘faction and sedition’ and is less likely to throw up ‘any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government.’¹⁴²

On balance, then, it is probably fair to say that Smith sees the adverse effects of specialization more as ‘inconveniences’¹⁴³ than anything else and they are far outweighed by the benefits. Contrary to claims that Smith regarded the effects of specialization as a threat to the entire future of commercial societies,¹⁴⁴ towards the end of his disquisition on the subject he seems to be suggesting that even though such effects are ‘loathsome’ and highly deserving of rectification, they are probably neither ‘mortal nor dangerous’.¹⁴⁵ Smith does not see either the stationary or retrogressive states as likely events.¹⁴⁶ Though some states would fail to progress due to environmental disadvantages and the effects of poor management, there is a ‘natural

¹⁴¹ WN.V.i.g.61, p. 788.

¹⁴² WN.V.i.f.61. p. 788

¹⁴³ LJ. Report Dated 1766, 328, p. 539.

¹⁴⁴ Eg. Heilbroner, ‘The Paradox of Progress’ and Alvey, J. ‘Adam Smith’s Three Strikes against Commercial Society’, *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 25 (9), 1998, pp. 1425-1441, p. 1426

¹⁴⁵ WN. V.i.f.60, p. 788.

¹⁴⁶ And neither does Ferguson for that matter. For a fuller discussion of this point see: Hill, L. ‘Adam Ferguson and The Paradox of Progress and Decline, *History of Political Thought*, 18, (4), Winter, 1997, pp. 677-706.

progress of improvement’;¹⁴⁷ indeed, the retrogressive state is the ‘unnatural’ state¹⁴⁸

Concluding Remarks.

Smith’s and Ferguson’s sociologies of specialization were equally rich and they shared a number of aspects in common. Nevertheless, a number of important contrasts are detectable: Smith’s optimism locates him in the ‘wealth’ camp of the eighteenth century ‘wealth-virtue’ debate and secured his position as a founding parent of modern economics. Because Ferguson’s account is far more pessimistic his work held greater significance for nineteenth century sociology. But it also links him to a classical (civic humanist) tradition that Smith is determined to leave behind.

An important similarity relates to the fact that, however adverse specialization might appear to be, both are ultimately committed to commercialism and the exponential progress of human society.¹⁴⁹ Progress is inevitable and the conveniences it affords are, ultimately, morally indifferent.¹⁵⁰ Claims that either expected the division of labour to destroy the commercial age are exaggerated. Similarly, suggestions that either influenced Marx, while in one sense historically accurate, are substantively inflated.

¹⁴⁷ WN V.i.a.43, p. 708.

¹⁴⁸ WN III. I. 9. p. 380. As John Brewer has noted ‘it is indisputable’ that Smith’s attitude to specialization is basically positive and that his ‘outlines of the deleterious effects of the division of labour are only isolated passages within a wider account of its economic benefits’ (‘The Scottish Enlightenment’, p. 14).

¹⁴⁹ ‘[T]he capacity of his progress is indefinite, the steps which we observe him make are but part of the scheme of a nature which is destined to endure for ever’. (‘Of Things that Are or May Be’ (Part 1), *Collection of Essays*, No. 27, p.229. *P.J.*, pp. 310-11.

¹⁵⁰ *Essay*, p. 245.

Neither regarded the basic structure or dynamics of market society as inherently objectionable; neither seems overly troubled by worker exploitation; nor do they propose any radical solutions such as a global revisionism in specialization functions. Ferguson's militia scheme is the notable exception and is just one aspect of his thought separating him from Smith. He is generally more negative about the social consequences of specialization than is Smith and this is probably what makes his analysis more sociologically rich. But, in terms of his ultimate commitments, he shares more with Smith than he does with Marx. The commercial state (and progress in general) are, for Ferguson, basically natural and positive.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ For a fuller defence of this claim see: L.Hill, 'Paradox of Progress and Decline'.