Of savages and Stoics: Converging moral and political ideals in the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson

Rudmer Bijlsma
University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract
This article undertakes a comparative study of the conjectural histories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson, focusing on the convergences in the moral and political ideals expressed and grounded in these histories. In comparison with Scots like Adam Smith and John Millar, the conjectural histories of Ferguson and Rousseau follow a similar historical trajectory as regards the development and progress of commercial, political and cultural arts. However, their assessment of the moral progress of humanity does not, or in a much more limited way than in Smith and Millar, correlate with this trajectory. Rousseau and Ferguson see a candour and vigour in savage and barbarian societies that is much less easily supported by the complex socio-economic framework of modern, commercial societies. It is argued that the convergences in their conjectural histories arise from a similar fusion of these histories with Stoic and republican perspectives. While Rousseau and Ferguson do not see history as cyclical, they think that the forces that push towards moral decline are strong and can, on the political level, only be countered by firm republican policies. Furthermore, their shared Stoic ideal of the life lived according to nature informs their solutions for modern societies.

Keywords
Adam Ferguson, conjectural history, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, republicanism, Stoicism

Eighteenth-century conjectural histories offer remarkably hybrid kinds of philosophical investigation, combining scientific, moral and, perhaps less overtly, ideological aims. Much of their moral and ideological purport concerns an assessment of the gains and
losses of commercial society in comparison to earlier conjectural stages. With Adam Smith, the concept of commercial society became theorized in a way that articulated, developed and stretched a certain set of presumptions and ideas that could also be found, or hinted at, in several of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries. People in a commercial society trade, of course, but key – for Smith – was ‘that their social relations within their own society became market-like, governed by the utility that such market liaisons both demand and entail’ (Hont 2015, 3). The concept, then, describes ‘the constitutive moral quality of the membership of this society’ (Hont 2015, 3). Yet, not all prominent eighteenth-century thinkers – not even Smith himself – were completely at ease with this given moral quality and all of its moral and social implications. Indeed, several Scottish Enlightenment conjectural historians sympathized with, and sought their own, more toned-down solutions to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s claim that the focus of the members of commercial society on self-interested pursuits compromised the public interest and that their excessive concern with the opinion of others stood in the way of true virtue.

While Rousseau’s influence here has been duly recognized with respect to figures like Smith and Adam Ferguson, scholars tend to drive, at the same time, a rather sharp wedge between the conjectural histories of the ‘speculative’ Rousseau and those of the ‘empirical’ Scots. Although – in contrast with the Scots’ savage – Bernard Mandeville’s savage is just as lonesome a creature as Rousseau’s, Mandeville nonetheless tends to be seen as more congenial to the Scottish conjectural-historical approach. Notably because he prefigures Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ and similar approaches to the rise of uncoordinated, spontaneous order and progress in other Scots. From the Scottish viewpoint, Rousseau commits a double speculative sin. His starting point is not only individualistic, but he also goes on to show how society corrupts an originally good human nature. In order for society to function properly, Rousseau must then seek recourse to the ahistorical artifice of the social contract. In Mandeville and the Scottish conjectural historians, artifice plays a role, too, but it fuses quite harmoniously with already ongoing, beneficial sociopolitical developments. As such, artifice and nature are evidently no opposites, or artifice can even be seen as natural (because humans are naturally ‘artists’, ‘artificers’).

Despite important shared characteristics – such as a commitment to natural sociability and empiricism – the Scots were not all of a piece. While, in general, the distance between their conjectural-historical approach and that of Rousseau is very considerable indeed, the kinship between Rousseau and Ferguson is closer, and the distance of the latter to his Scottish fellows greater, than usually recognized, or so I shall propose. As such, the comparative study of Rousseau and Ferguson is essential for a proper understanding of the extent of the impact of the former on, and his kinship with Scottish Enlightenment thought. This article undertakes a comparative study of the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson, focusing on the convergences in the moral and (republican) political ideals expressed in, and grounded by their histories.

Reading the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson in conjunction also offers us insight in an atypical variant of this type of philosophical inquiry. Conjectural histories trace the history of the development of society through various stages, thus offering an explanation of the origins and nature of our present sociopolitical predicament and, to a lesser or greater degree, a normative assessment of it. Typically, the present-day
predicament tends to be vindicated. Although not uncritical about certain drawbacks, the Scots Hume, Smith and Millar – and in a more eccentric way the Anglo-Dutch Mandeville – embraced the commercial society and the British Constitution of their own time. For the ‘mainstream’ Scots, the progress of commerce and political institutions went hand in hand with moral progress in the sense of inner and outer refinement and humanity.

While – in comparison with the (other) Scots – the conjectural histories of Ferguson and Rousseau follow a similar historical trajectory as regards the development and progress of commercial, political and cultural arts, their assessment of the moral progress of human beings does not, or in a much more limited way, correlate with this trajectory. Rousseau and Ferguson see a candour and vigour in more primitive societies that is much less easily supported by the complex, inegalitarian socio-economic framework of modern, commercial societies. Due to the concomitant decrease in personal and public virtue, progress on a material, technical and institutional level remains a highly ambiguous thing.

As I shall argue, the convergences in the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson arise from a similar fusion of these histories with Stoic and republican (or civic humanist) perspectives. Contrary to traditional republican views of history, Rousseau and Ferguson do not think of history as cyclical. History is open-ended, but the forces that push towards moral decline are strong and can only be mitigated by firm republican policies, and a corresponding politics of moral regeneration, that take their cue from kindred Stoic accounts of human flourishing.

Thus, central to my analysis will be a scrutiny of the Stoic ideal of life according to nature as it informs the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson. This shared ideal makes them value different historical stages and societies according to the measure in which they bring about harmony, wholeness – both within the individual human psyche, and between humans and their surroundings. In both thinkers, I propose, there is a sensible ‘primitivism’, which accords to the savage a measure of proto-Stoic moral-psychological wholeness that diminishes over time, and must somehow – in a way suited to the new circumstances – be reconstituted in the stage of conjectural history where we are now. In Section I, I make some general observations regarding the relation between the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson. In Section II, I outline how both of them introduce the savage and Stoic as images, or benchmarks, of wholeness in their histories, while I also consider the ways in which both thinkers appropriate Stoic philosophy. In Section III, I then scrutinize the way in which Rousseau and Ferguson put their evaluative benchmark of savage and Stoic wholeness to use in their analyses of more advanced societies.

The Stoic dimension of their histories, we shall see, helps explain how Rousseau and Ferguson can simultaneously appreciate savage society yet also regard more advanced societies as – potentially – providing the better scene for human flourishing. According to the Stoics, the appropriation (oikeiosis) of the world and the concomitant development of one’s rationality is a delicate process. Having appropriated the world effectively, the mature human being’s life and analogously life within a mature society are both quantitatively and qualitatively richer than their immature points of origin. But given the complexity of mature human flourishing, there is a lot that can go awry in the process of appropriation – threatening the persistence of our moral-psychological wholeness.
While Rousseau and Ferguson do not explicitly present the unfolding of their histories in terms of *oikeiosis*, the Stoic standards of wholeness that I highlight as being crucial to their views allow us to think of the individual and collective development of humans in such terms. For Ferguson, a Stoically inspired true religion forms the ultimate moral framework within which the mature society’s citizens ought to live civic-mindedly and with which they should strive to reconnect in times of looming moral and sociopolitical disintegration. For Rousseau, as we shall see, republican citizenship under the general will offers the key to a Stoic type of flourishing. Rousseauian artifice makes possible, for us modern people, the life according to nature.

It remains the case, of course, that Ferguson emphatically distanced himself from the speculative dimension of Rousseau’s thought, and I shall not deny that there are crucial differences here. The argument of this article, however, implies that Ferguson’s kinship with Rousseau is in some ways greater than Ferguson himself may or could have been aware.11 If one accepts my reading of his account of progress, moreover, Ferguson may have felt himself in other respects also to be more of a Rousseauian than interpretations that place him closely to Hume and Smith suggest he would have done. This article is about this ‘Rousseauian spirit’ in Ferguson and the Stoic and civic humanist spirit he and Rousseau share.

I shall focus on Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men* (or ‘second Discourse’, 1755) and on Ferguson’s *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Rousseau’s influence on Ferguson’s Essay was by means of the second Discourse, and these are also the texts in which the benchmark of savage wholeness vis-à-vis commercial society is played out most fully. However, I shall take into account most of the other of their main philosophical writings at some point – this allows me to provide a more complete reading of their positions and the interrelations between them.12 For a full understanding of Ferguson’s position on Stoicism and true religion, his late *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792) are indispensable. In my view, what is added on these topics in this work is chiefly an elaboration of what was already discussed or touched upon in his earlier works. His account of progress, central in my argument, also remains essentially the same.13

Before turning to the article’s main argument, I should briefly elaborate further on a matter of scholarly relevance of the proposed reading of Rousseau and Ferguson: it corrects, or at least nuances and complements, recent readings of both thinkers as significantly closer to the typical proponents of commercial society – such as Hume, Smith and Montesquieu – than traditionally presumed. The dimensions in their conjectural histories that I shall highlight reinforce the more traditional scholarly focus on the ambivalence concerning (Ferguson), respectively fierce criticism of (Rousseau), commercial society.14 While Ferguson certainly accepts commercial society as a given, my innovative analysis of his complex notion of progress shows that there are real ways in which savage and – especially – early civilized societies provided superior backdrops for the flourishing of, what he calls, our progressive natures as individuals.15 As such, these earlier societies become a foil for criticizing and edifying present-day society. Moreover, Ferguson does not condone the idea of thin sociability,16 which is related to the primacy given to flourishing in the private sphere by typical commercial society theorists.
Naturally, we are truly sociable creatures. Such strong sociability tends to erode in commercial society, and this is only to be indulged at the risk of increasing corruption.

Hont argues that Rousseau’s view on sociability is kindred to the Epicurean, thin (or commercial) sociability theories of Mandeville and Smith. Indeed, while Rousseau – like Mandeville – begins with the lonely savage, the process of willy-nilly socialization and, eventually, political organization that he then conjecturally traces is triggered by a ‘great utilitarian need for cooperation’ (Hont 2015, 45). Further, Hont points out that they all see the integrative force of utility as, in varying degrees, being challenged by the moral-psychological need of recognition/amour-propre. What my analysis of Rousseau’s anthropology adds to this Epicurean picture is an emphasis on this anthropology’s Stoic dimension; on the Stoic ideal of wholeness and the analysis of its progressive loss that we also find in Rousseau. This dimension, I think, lessens the common ground with the ‘commercial anthropology’ of Smith and Mandeville.

This could simply mean that Rousseau, like Ferguson, infuses the theorization of commercial society with a critical Stoic perspective. Rousseau would then still stand on the firmly critical side of the large spectrum of ‘critics of the excesses of commercial society’ (Hont 2015, 91), within which, as Hont argues, Smith is also to be placed somewhere (on the brighter side, to be sure). However, the fact that Rousseau sees no hope for already completely corrupted commercial states like France suggests that he is, at least, not just an internal critic of eighteenth-century commercial society. In the case of these states, Rousseau simply steps out, unable to offer his Stoic cure (which, at any rate, would already have been a rigorous external intervention within the commercial dynamics). The question then becomes whether Rousseau’s solutions for uncorrupt or not-yet-too-corrupt states have a positively economic dimension to the extent that we could still qualify him as a kind of commercial society theorist. While Rousseau is indeed not opposed to private property or wage labour, Hont’s reading of him as a proponent of balanced economic growth has been challenged. Douglass points out that, when Rousseau explicitly addresses the question whether agriculture and commerce are compatible, he consistently denies that they are and favours the former as the right basis for a flourishing society. A proper consideration of this question, however, falls outside the present article’s scope. The argument that I shall develop suggests that, no matter the precise measure of the common ground with Smith and others, we have good reason to keep returning to Rousseau and Ferguson for sophisticated critical perspectives on early capitalist society.

I Conjectural history according to Rousseau and Ferguson

While most commonly associated with the Scots, the term ‘conjectural history’ is also – perhaps even more – conveniently suited to describe Rousseau’s approach of human history in the second Discourse. ‘Conjectural’ has the connotation, of course, of ‘speculative’, ‘hypothetical’ and Rousseau explicitly affirms that his reasoning will be such. His inquiries ‘ought not to be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin’ (DOI exordium, 132; OC III, 133). The pure state of nature as he analyses it is ‘a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will
exist and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately
to judge of our present state’ (DOI preface, 125; OC III, 123).

Hidden in a footnote, however, Rousseau keeps open the possibility – to be tested
scientifically – that the ‘Pongo’ or ‘Orang-Utang’ has ‘the faculty of perfecting itself
which is the specific characteristic of a human being’ (DOI note X, 208; OC III, 211). As
Duchet suggests, Rousseau’s speculative reconstruction of original human nature allows
one to think beyond superficial appearances and thus to reconsider traditional classifica-
tions of species.23 For Rousseau, then, innovative empirical science requires that the
ground be cleared by bold speculation.

It is against the ‘boldness of invention’ of Rousseau’s solitary, self-sufficient not-yet-
rational human being in the pure state of nature that Ferguson frames his own conjectural
history and empirical understanding of human nature:

With him (i.e. the human being, RB) the society appears to be as old as the individual (…)
If there was a time in which he had his acquaintance with his own species to make it is a time
of which we have no record, and in relation to which our opinions can serve no purpose, and
are supported by no evidence. (EHCS 1.1, 12)

In opposition to the ‘conjectures’ of Rousseau and Hobbes, Ferguson is determined to
ground his general principles in ‘just observation’ (EHCS 1.1, 8–9). With regard to this
thesis that man is sociable by nature, Ferguson and other Scots were much indebted to
Montesquieu and Buffon. Buffon argued that our human need for society strictly distin-
guishes us, as a species, from the animals, who merely live ‘en troupe’ (if they do live
together).24 Rousseau, while basically also accepting Buffon’s idea of a fully separate
human species, multiplied ‘the differences between men indefinitely’, thus creating, as
indicated, ‘the theoretical space for apes within the human species – and with this, that of
presocial man’ (Sebastiani 2013, 70).

Iain McDaniel suggests that Dugald Stewart’s ‘term “conjectural history” is a mis-
leading one for an intellectual programme25 that was so self-consciously grounded on an
appeal to fact, experience and observation’ (2013b, 551). Indeed, Stewart’s description
of what he sees as the typically Scottish conjectural approach insists on a degree of
speculation that is at odds with what we saw Ferguson state about his own method.
Stewart remarks:

In such inquiries, the detached facts which travels and voyages afford us, may frequently
serve as land-marks to our speculations; and sometimes our conclusions a priori, may tend
to confirm the credibility of facts, which, on a superficial view, appeared to be doubtful or
credible. (1980, 293)

However, we need not take Ferguson completely at his own word. His approach may
be more empirical and less a priori than Stewart’s description suggests it would be, but it
is not empirical to the extent that it (largely) excludes a priori conjecture.26 Crucially,
Ferguson’s insistence in his moral psychology on ‘the peculiar felicity to which his
(i.e. man’s, RB) active nature is destined’ strongly influences the way in which he inter-
prets the different stages of society. A key measure of societal progress and decline, in his
Essay, is the way in which man’s active nature is being served or inhibited in the various historical stages.\textsuperscript{27} With this moral-psychological yardstick, it comes as no surprise that we do not find in Ferguson a particular appreciation of the gradual way in which the position of women ameliorated in subsequent stages of society (as in John Millar\textsuperscript{28}). Ferguson’s greater moral concern is the increasing effeminacy among the men of polished, commercial societies. Likewise, Ferguson’s embrace of manly vigour influences his positive appreciation of savage life and its supposedly egalitarian nature, a stage of society that was deprecated for its cruelty and dishonesty by his fellow Scottish conjectural historians.\textsuperscript{29}

Also relevant in this regard is that Ferguson emphasizes the role of providence in human history, whereas Rousseau’s emphasis is more on contingency.\textsuperscript{30} As we shall still examine in more detail, Ferguson’s providential history is not about straightforward, ineluctable progress. But, as the closing lines of the Essay testify, he is confident that a well-exercised human freedom knows how to make most out of every scene or every conjectural stage in which it is at work. Rousseau sees nature as a providential order, too, but he does not think that the basically sound development of human societies is a providentially ordained certainty, or probability, at all.\textsuperscript{31} Rather, the exercise of human freedom has primarily led to increasing corruption in our history as Rousseau conjecturally traces it. While Newton was, at the time, widely seen as having experimentally vindicated the case for providence, these differences between Rousseau and Ferguson suggest that the precise way in which one interprets such providence as being (or not being) at work in human affairs still depends on considerable theological speculation.

Hence, we find in Ferguson’s theory (but also in those of the other Scots and, mutatis mutandis, Rousseau) an exchange between already tentatively held moral-psychological and metaphysical convictions on the one hand, and the analysis of historical source material on the other hand. If pursued with an open mind, such an inquiry can lead to a certain reflective equilibrium in which the ‘detached facts’ are put in a meaningful philosophical narrative, and in which previously held convictions are tested and refined by a confrontation with the (sometimes limitedly available) facts. The varying balances between observation and philosophical speculation that ensue in different thinkers are quite aptly termed, as Stewart proposed, ‘conjectural histories’. They enlighten us, or at least make us critically think about the typical forms of societies – something about which the descriptions of actual societies we encounter in historical sources only inform us in an incomplete, piecemeal way.\textsuperscript{32}

Like Ferguson, Rousseau takes his psychological principles as a guide in his conjectural account of the historical development of human societies in part II of the second Discourse. This account is said to be conjectural to a degree only, because ‘on the principles I have just established, no other system could be formed that would not give me the same results and from which I could not draw the same conclusions’ (DOI pt. I, 159; OC III, 162). While his psychological principles are more speculative, and connected to part I’s individualistic account of the pure state of nature that is anathema to Ferguson, Rousseau proceeds in a way that shows many parallels with Ferguson when he moves to part II: he tells the story of a gradually diversifying society, propelled by the dynamics of unleashed amour-propre, and with the first seizure of property and the division of labour as watershed moments.\textsuperscript{33} Both thinkers describe how increasing
specialization takes a toll on the human psyche, by alienating us, as it were, from our ‘better selves’. They both see Sparta and republican Rome as admirably civic-spirited and in crucial ways uncorrupted, and hence to be imitated types of political society. Finally, as McDaniel notes, the pursued historical conjectures lead both thinkers to a vision of complete despotism as an impending future scenario for Europe. In the substance of their analyses of conjectural-historical stages, then, there is a lot of overlap, and Rousseau’s influence on Ferguson is often considered to be evident here. But there are certainly features in the second Discourse’s second part as well that will have struck Ferguson as much too speculatively conjectural, such as Rousseau’s acceptance of the great role for Lawgivers in history.

For my purposes, an essential methodological point of overlap in their conjectural histories lies in their commitment to the diagnosis of, what one might call, social pathologies. Central to the second Discourse is Rousseau’s attempt to demonstrate how artificial life in society has led, step by step, to the complete, devastating alienation and oppressive inequality in modern commercial societies. Accordingly, the book’s foremost aim can be said to be diagnostic: how come we have lost our natural goodness in the course of civilization’s progress? The, as it were, scientific elements – such as the analysis of the influences of the division of labour and increasing material inequality on social life – stand directly in the service of this diagnostic aim. For Ferguson, the development towards civilized, commercial societies is fully natural and the inevitable result of the actions of a progressive human nature. His analysis of the various historical stages has a strong descriptive, scientific dimension that cannot be simply subsumed under his moralistic, diagnostic purposes. Accordingly, some aspects of commercial society that stern moralists wholeheartedly reject, such as luxury, receive nuanced treatment in Ferguson. Among the unwelcome side effects of commercial society are, nonetheless, social pathologies similar to those diagnosed by Rousseau, and Ferguson goes well beyond the terrain of the detached scientist in his concomitant verdict on, and solutions for these pathologies.

II Sensible ‘primitivism’: The savage as benchmark for the Stoic life according to nature

Both Ferguson and Rousseau have been faulted for offering impracticable primitivistic ideals; in both cases, most scholars have sensibly pointed out that they are not primitivistic, or at most only in a limited sense. Indeed, while they both positively and somewhat romantically portray savage life, there is no place for a return to earlier, more primitive stages of society in their conjectural histories. As I noted, however, the way in which Rousseau and Ferguson both put their savage to use as a moral-psychological benchmark for humans in subsequent stages of history binds their conjectural approaches. One could call this the sensible ‘primitivism’ of the Genevan and the Scot. We must not go back to savage life, but we can learn from, and to a degree even imitate, the savage’s uncomplicated, happy condition. In both thinkers, the appreciation of the savage’s existence is closely connected to the Stoic ideal of human flourishing that takes the life lived according to nature as standard.
This reading of an important convergence in the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson relies, for one thing, on a specific interpretation of the former’s understanding of the relation between nature and art. If one reads Rousseau as holding nature and art to be strictly demarcated, and both social slavery before the coming into existence of, and social freedom under the general will as complete, denaturing artifices, then the contrast with Ferguson’s approach, in which ‘art is natural to man’, is great. This is one of the chief ways in which Ferguson’s and Rousseau’s philosophical histories differ according to McDaniel. He contrasts Ferguson’s Stoic ideal of the virtuous and happy life according to nature with Rousseau’s ‘demarcation of nature and art’ (2013b, 558). But while Rousseau does demarcate art and nature, McDaniel does not consider the possibility of the two having a positive connection which allows for an interpretation of Rousseau’s conjectural history as putting forward for modern humans the ideal of the life according to nature in a similar way as Ferguson does.

Rousseau writes about the savage that

His modest needs are so ready to hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge necessary to desire to acquire greater knowledge, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity (…). His soul, which nothing stirs, yields itself to the sole sentiment of its present existence. (DOI pt. I, 143; OC III, 144)

This morally neutral condition of being at one with oneself constitutes Rousseauian natural goodness. While offering a very modest kind of unreflective happiness, savage happiness is complete because it is grounded on perfect moral-psychological wholeness—the savage’s desires fully match their needs. The savage can remain so happy precisely because he or she lives solitarily, only meeting briefly with the other sex to procreate and then immediately move on. Life in family and society implies a more fragile wholeness, because one’s peace of mind comes to partly depend on the desires and actions of other people. Eventually, we incur the risk of severe social alienation, by coming to live almost completely in the opinion of others. Nonetheless, the savage’s wholeness is not completely egotistic, due to the impulse of pity she feels upon confrontation with other savages or animals in need. In this way, the savage is open towards her surroundings and lives harmoniously within the natural order. She is embedded in a larger whole that grounds her solitary existence.

Rousseau explicitly links the wholeness and quiet contentment of the savage to the ‘ataraxia’ of the Stoic sage. But Rousseau’s savage has not yet started to perfect herself; Jean Starobinski calls it ‘une variante “animale” et “sensitive” de l’idéal stoïcien d’autarctie’ (1971, 40). More complete Stoic wisdom and freedom are attainable only later in the Rousseauian conjectural-historical trajectory—it if we manage to break the chains of corruption and inequality. It should be noted, however, that Rousseau continues to speak of ‘savage’ as long as the transition to political society has not been made. As we shall see in more detail in Section III, the moderately socialized savage of the Golden Age has a role complementary to that of the solitary savage to play as standard for human flourishing. In different places in his argument, Rousseau uses these different stages of savagery as a positive contrast with modern corruption.
In Ferguson, we find the savage always already living in families and primitive societies. Not unlike Rousseau’s, Ferguson’s (male) savage lives in idyllic harmony with his surroundings. He devotes himself, on terms of equality with his tribe members, to vigorous, social activities such as war and hunting. At moments when he is unoccupied by such activities, the savage man prefers sloth to household work (done by women) or other ‘sordid and mercenary’ activities. Fergusonian savage existence can be considered as a state of moral-psychological wholeness because of the simple satisfaction that is taken in day-to-day activities, and the concomitant absence of the desire for the accumulation of property, luxury and prestige that humans come to develop in later stages of society. The savage man’s wholeness is, furthermore, implied by Ferguson’s estimation of vigorous manly activity as the type of activity most suited to the active, progressive and social nature of humans in general. The savage man is, in one way, wise to leave the practice of the rudimentary ‘commercial’ pursuits to women, because the highest human moral-psychological potential is much less wholeheartedly furthered by such pursuits. Commercial pursuits are primarily aimed at individual interest; at the more effective satisfaction of our basic physical needs. Yet, Ferguson writes:

> That condition is surely favourable to the nature of any being, in which his force is increased; and if courage be the gift of society to man, we have reason to consider his union with his species as the noblest part of his fortune. From this source are derived, not only the force, but the very existence of his happiest emotions; not only the better part, but almost the whole of his rational character. (EHCS 1.3, 23)

In all its simplicity – because of its simplicity – the male savage’s life gives recourse to these happiest emotions in an extremely effective way. The Stoic overtones in the preceding quotation are evident: the development, or appropriation, of our rational nature is almost fully dependent on the effective union with our species. Furthermore, the simple life of the savage quite naturally (though unreflectively) leads to a life according to the Stoic injunction to act vigorously, rationally insofar as our limited power allows, and to submit to God’s will in things beyond our power. The savage acts eagerly in line with his active, rational nature and does simply not care for the prestige and pleasure potentially to be found in finite goods beyond one’s control.

Nonetheless, fully flourishing Fergusonian individuals do not exemplify, or even approximate, the Stoic sage’s *apatheia*. Ferguson rejects the fully negative Stoic view that all passions are misjudgements about the value of externals. A Stoic knows that things like prosperity, esteem and even friendship are preferred indifferents at most. Ferguson, by contrast, writes:

> even if a person, could, without any emotion, ward off the dangers of his country or his friend, we think it becoming, that the energy of his affection should be in due proportion with the occasion on which it is felt. It is no more than the force of a spring wound up to give an engine the movement required; and when the force keeps pace with the resistance to be overcome, its variations constitute a beauty, in the structure of which it is a part. (PMPS vol. I, 2.10, 128–9)
Hence, a certain passionate intensity in virtuous action is appropriate.\textsuperscript{58} It expresses our due valuation of the noble cause we are engaged in and helps give the virtuous action its proper force. Like the Stoics, nonetheless, Ferguson does analyse improper passions in terms of cognitive misjudgements. Emulation, for instance, arises from the false ‘opinion, that excellence consists in superiorit to other men’ (IMP 2.3.2, 73). Real happiness and real virtue constitute an inner condition that ‘cannot be affected by comparison’ (IMP 2.3.2, 72). Indeed, Ferguson goes along with the Stoics to a substantial degree in his depreciation of the external goods that most people regard as conducive to happiness: ‘The (…) virtues of wisdom, goodness, temperance, and fortitude, are equally a blessing in every situation, wherever they are found; whether on the throne of Aurelius, in the servitude of Epicetus, or any intermediate station’ (PMPS vol. II, 1.5, 53).\textsuperscript{59}

In Antiquity, Stoicism counted as the foremost philosophy for those participating in public life. Cicero objected, however, that the rigid nature of Stoic ethics made it de facto unfit to serve as such. For the Stoics, one is either completely virtuous and rational or one is not so at all – there are no degrees of virtue. According to Cicero, this made adequate moral exhortation possible only at the cost of hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{60} For example, to motivate a people to fight an enemy so as to prevent captivity, enslavement and death, leaders would need to represent these things as true evils instead of preferred indifferenters. Hence, an effective Stoic leader would not be able to always propagate Stoic virtue in unmitigated form – which, on Stoicism’s own terms, means keeping people completely vicious. In addition, Cicero deemed the Stoic (more particularly Chrysippus’) attempt to reconcile a complete providential determinism with human agency unconvincing.\textsuperscript{61}

While most commonly recognized as an Academic Sceptic in theoretical matters, Cicero has often been taken to be predominantly Stoic in his ethics.\textsuperscript{62} This is also how Ferguson reads him:

\begin{quote}
Cicero in his mere speculations was an Academic, and professed indiscriminate Scepticism: But, when he came to instruct his son in the duties of morality, he seized on the principles of the Stoic philosophy, as the most applicable to the conduct of human life. (PMPS vol. I, introduction, 8)
\end{quote}

However, as we have just seen, Cicero did have his reservations concerning Stoic ethics, too. In \textit{De Finibus}, he develops his own position through Piso after having had the Epicureans and Stoics introduce their principles by their spokesmen. In its public-spiritedness and high valuation of virtue, there is a clear Stoic dimension to Ciceronian ethics as expressed in this work. But Aristotelianism and Stoicism overlap to a substantial degree on these matters, while Piso’s refusal to fully dismiss the intrinsic value of external goods\textsuperscript{64} such as prosperity, together with his distinction between practical and intellectual virtue, also reveals a specific kinship with Aristotle. His further refusal to rank these different virtues and goods according to importance points, in turn, to the sceptical streak of his ethics.\textsuperscript{65} While in \textit{De Officiis} the Stoic dimension is more pronounced, here Aristotelianism and Scepticism are part of the mix, too.\textsuperscript{66}

Cicero is quite frequently referenced in Ferguson’s works, and there is an evident kinship in the way the two thinkers position themselves \textit{vis-à-vis} Stoicism. Both take a
relaxed attitude to Stoic doctrine, adopting what they see as useful, but departing from several core doctrines such as the idea that all passions involve misjudgements, that virtue is the sole good\textsuperscript{67} and the idea of an inexorable Fate. However, rather than explicitly rejecting some of the sternest features of Stoicism like Cicero did, Ferguson tends to defend its true, oft-misrepresented intentions against its critics. As regards ‘their famous paradox, that pain is no evil and the gifts of fortune indifferent’, for instance, Ferguson explains that this ‘meant no more, than that there was not any moral turpitude in pain; and that the gifts of fortune neither exclude, nor secure, the possession of virtue’ (PMPS vol. II, 1.7, 80). The apparently impracticable, superhuman ideal of Stoic sagehood can be affirmed if we take it ‘for which it was given, a noble idea, upon which the ingenuous mind cannot too nearly form itself’ (PMPS vol. II, 1.7, 82). Crucially, furthermore, Ferguson is no sceptic, and we can see the various dimensions of his ‘system’ of thought as fundamentally shaped by (or at least fundamentally kindred\textsuperscript{68} to) Stoicism: his conception of life as a game within a providential order,\textsuperscript{69} his moral psychology, his ethics, his conception of true religion.

If we consider the totality of Ferguson’s philosophy, therefore, it is more properly to be regarded as a neo-Stoicism\textsuperscript{70} in the mould of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus than in Cicero’s.\textsuperscript{71} This is also suggested by the way in which the three authors figure in Ferguson’s argumentation. His primary use of Cicero is as a source for his own catalogue of virtues and duties\textsuperscript{72} and as a transmitter of the views of other thinkers and schools.\textsuperscript{73} When it comes to concrete Stoic guidelines for the well-lived life according to nature, however, Ferguson extensively quotes Aurelius and Epictetus.\textsuperscript{74} He sees these men, along with Socrates, as most fully embodying the virtuous human life. Moreover, these two Stoics form the primary inspiration for his own account of true religion, as we shall see in Section III.

The typically Roman Stoicism of Aurelius and Epictetus – and also Seneca – was only developed in the centuries after Cicero in imperial Rome, and it would surely have been more congenial to Cicero than the Greek Stoicism he analysed and partly adopted (except for the less ‘rigid’ Stoicism of Panaetius\textsuperscript{75}). While remaining faithful to (almost) all of traditional Stoic doctrine, the Roman Stoics were less metaphysically inclined and more interested in the development of the human self and the problems confronting humans still on the path towards wisdom.\textsuperscript{76} This focus made Roman Stoicism more straightforwardly relevant for the active, public life (in which full sagehood may be hard to attain) than Greek Stoicism, and hence also particularly relevant for Ferguson.\textsuperscript{77} It also makes Roman Stoicism more compatible with ambition; a central affect for Ferguson but interpreted by Kettler as a radical departure from ‘his Stoic notions’ (2005, 165). In fact, Ferguson’s actual, unusually high-minded definition of ambition as the propensity in human nature ‘which tends to perfection, or the bettering ourselves’ (\textit{sic}, IMP 4.2.6, 117) – and manifests itself in benevolence, wisdom, temperance and fortitude – shows that this affect lies at the heart of his version of Stoic moral psychology and ethics.

One important element that separates Ferguson’s providential conception of nature and history from that of Stoicism in general is his affirmation of human freedom in a full metaphysical, not merely compatibilist sense.\textsuperscript{78} Hill characterizes this as the result of Ciceronian and Christian influence.\textsuperscript{79} Nonetheless, Ferguson’s understanding of moral freedom as our capacity to act well in the scene providentially allotted to us is taken from
Stoicism and has, as such, traditionally been embedded within a deterministic worldview. As we have seen, the metaphysical freedom of humans in nature and history is also essential for Rousseau. Hume and Smith, by contrast, were compatibilists. Hence, our Stoic conjectural historians rely on a metaphysical notion of liberty that is further from Stoicism than that of their (arguably) less Stoic, more Epicurean ‘opponents’. Ironically, Ferguson and Rousseau seem to think that moving towards true Stoic flourishing in our corrupted times requires a metaphysical freedom for which the Stoics themselves would not allow.

To be sure, Rousseau is not a neo-Stoic in the more complete sense in which Ferguson is. The second Discourse counts a number of ancient and modern influences among which it is difficult to pinpoint the most crucial. According to Brooke, the Epicurean dimension is more prominent than the Stoic in the second Discourse, while Stoicism becomes the more prominent ancient influence in Emile and The Social Contract. Indeed, Rousseau’s story in the former of the original solitary human condition and the way in which society subsequently develops closely resembles Lucretius’s. But I do think that my reading of the Stoic dimension in the second Discourse suggests that it is more central than Brooke proposes. Notwithstanding Lucretius’s influence, the moral-psychological development of humans in the course of the second Discourse’s conjectural-historical narrative cannot be fully understood without also taking into account Stoicism. The fact that Stoicism is central in the solution-centred later works also suggests that the Stoic dimension present in the second Discourse is of crucial importance in understanding its diagnosis. The epigraph to Emile, from Seneca’s De Ira, forms a properly Stoic bridge between Emile’s purposes and those of the second Discourse: ‘We are sick with evils that can be cured; and nature, having brought us forth sound, itself helps us if we wish to be improved’.

Now let us return to the savages of Rousseau and Ferguson. Different though these savages in some crucial ways be, their vigorous, contented, ‘proto-Stoic’ characters contrast markedly with the alienated citizen that the two thinkers see roaming the streets of the commercial societies of their own age. The simple, unreflective wholeness of Ferguson’s savage can even be said to offer a competing account of the natural goodness of human beings. It is fascinating to see how similar a rhetorical and argumentative tool to Rousseau’s savage Ferguson’s savage subsequently becomes as his history of civil society unfolds. Rousseau vividly describes the great advantages of the savage condition compared to that of modern man. Moderns tend to think of savage life as brutal and miserable, but, Rousseau asks, ‘what kind of misery’ can there be ‘for a free being, whose heart is at peace, and body in health’ (DOI pt. I, 150; OC III, 152). By contrast, ‘Almost all the people we see around us complain of their existence’ (DOI pt. I, 150).

Likewise, Ferguson implies that it is a failure of historical imagination and sensitivity to see earlier historical stages in a negative light when compared to one’s own: ‘Addicted to their own pursuits, and considering their own condition as the standard of human felicity, all nations pretend to the preference, and in their practice give sufficient proof of sincerity’ (EHCS 2.2, 94). It is the task of the conjectural historian to look beyond such prejudice, and in this sense, it is implied, the conjectural histories of Hume and Smith are compromised in their one-sided rejection of savage life.
There are two passages in the *Essay* where Ferguson – suggesting direct imitation of similar passages in Rousseau — paints the picture of the savage who, confronted with the temptations and drawbacks of commercial society, escapes into the woods ‘in amaze-ment, distaste, and aversion’ (EHCS 4.1, 173). These passages do not just illustrate the savage’s prejudiced attachment to his own ‘delicious freedom from care’ (EHCS 2.2, 94) but also serve to shape the historical imagination of the reader; to open their eyes to the fact that modern societies are not, by each reasonable measure, the great providers of human flourishing and liberty. The sloth that we have seen Ferguson point out as characteristic for the savage’s disposition when not engaged in social, active pursuits in fact mirrors the perfect tranquility (the Stoic ‘ataraxia’) of Rousseau’s savage – just as they both contrast this with the frenetic, self-centred activity of commercial man.

Rousseau’s explicit references to Stoicism suggest that he sees such tranquility of mind as most characteristic for Stoic wisdom. In *The Social Contract*, he points to the passive acceptance of providence that makes Christian citizens unsuitable defenders of their nations. He calls this their ‘stoicism’, as opposed to the ‘ardent love of glory and of fatherland’ of Sparta and Rome (SC 4.8, 149; OC III, 466–7). Like Ferguson, then, Rousseau does not see the Stoic injunction to be calm and dispassionate as something to be striven for under all circumstances. What is good for the savage is not by all means good for the citizen. Rousseau regards Stoicism as a multidimensional philosophy with varying, complementary uses in varying circumstances. Paradoxically, as we shall see in Section III, a patriotic citizenry living under the general will is also a key instance of reconfigured Stoic wholeness.

Let us, in concluding this section, look at some further instances of Ferguson’s Rousseauian invocation of the savage as benchmark of Stoic wholeness. In one of the *Essay*’s first sections, he asks us to consider ‘the obstinate attachment of a savage to his unsettled and defenceless tribe’ or the ‘devoted patriotism of an early Roman’ and then goes on:

> Let those examples be compared with the spirit which reigns in a commercial state, where men may be supposed to have experienced, in its full extent, the interest which individuals have in the preservation of their country. It is here indeed, if ever, that man is sometimes found a detached and a 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 (EHCS 1.3, 24).

Like Rousseau, furthermore, Ferguson sees savage equality as lastingly instructive: ‘he who has forgotten that men were originally equal, easily degenerates into a slave; or, in the capacity of a master, is not to be trusted with the rights of his fellow creatures’ (EHCS 2.2, 87). In another striking passage, Ferguson notes how wartime army service has made ‘the children of opulent families, bred in effeminacy, or nursed with tender care, ( . . . ) to contend with the savage’ (EHCS 5.4, 216).
III Retaining, regaining and reconfiguring the savage’s wholeness by Stoic and republican means

Rousseau and Ferguson do not completely idealize the savage. In Rousseau, the mix of praise and deprecation is remarkable (in particular when his remarks in *The Social Contract* are also taken into account): the savage is at peace with himself and morally ‘pure’, yet he is ‘heavy and stupid’ (DOI pt. I, 144; OC III, 145), and must completely do without the moral freedom that citizens acquire in the Rousseauian republic, and with the extended ideas and ennobled feelings they already show even in the midst of their degradation in corrupted societies.88

Ferguson’s savage, by contrast, is already a complete human being. He even is, in one way, the paradigm of moral-psychological wholeness. For, as Duncan Forbes observes,

looking back over the whole natural history of society one can make out something that looks like a denaturing of man. The barbarian is ‘corrupt’ when compared with the savage, for the latter’s place and function in society is determined only by his natural qualities and abilities; the only permanent divisions known to him are the natural divisions between communities, age-groups, the sexes; while the barbarian knows a subordination founded not only on personal qualities but also on inequalities of property. (1966: xl)

The barbarian has developed a rudimentary notion of property and corresponding distinction of ranks.89 But, as Forbes also notes, only in later stages of society will such inequalities as regards property and rank lead to true moral corruptions like envy and servility. Somewhat similar to Rousseau’s, the condition of Ferguson’s savage is, despite the almost complete lack of corruption, rather static and primitive. The extension of sentiment and outlook in the course of the progress of civil society bring about – on another, but not by all means superior level – a more complete, rounded human being.90

Crucially, furthermore, the savage lacks the refined morals that are only developed as we attain a more proper conception of the Deity.91

For both Rousseau and Ferguson, savage life offers, above all, a general image of harmony and wholeness, which is in its simple purity forever out of reach, but must be reappropriated – by different means, on a higher moral level – in the complex scene of advanced societies. A notable difference here is the strongly (though, as indicated, not exclusively) hypothetical character of Rousseau’s savage in the pure of state of nature. Ferguson’s analysis of the savage (though part of a conjectural history that is not as straightforwardly empirical as sometimes suggested) has substantial empirical roots in historians’ and travellers’ accounts of savage people. Moreover, his savage’s fundamental moral-psychological features are the same as that of modern humans. If we understand that this savage flourishes more than we do, therefore, the imaginative leap we must make to learn from his flourishing is not insurmountable. It is a flourishing of creatures just like us yet placed in more wholesome surroundings.

By contrast, Rousseau sees human nature as having altered in society. Due to the activation and development of *amour-propre* and *pitié*, the wholesome balance of needs and desires of modern humans will be fundamentally different from what that balance consists in for the savage. Considered in conjunction with its hypothetical nature, this
suggests that Rousseau’s savage stage can only have an exemplary function for modern humans in a qualified way. Nonetheless, the savage boasts the complete natural goodness of the human being as it has left the hands of its Maker, and Rousseau sees our awareness of this goodness as instructive for us, modern humans. The fact that Rousseau opposes the savage’s bliss to the modern city-dweller’s misery towards the end of the second Discourse underlines that, in addition to being a theoretical tool, the analysis of the savage in part I also serves a crucial rhetorical function – moral anatomy and painting converge. The precise normative function of the image of savage wholeness, however, remains limited to providing a general benchmark for human flourishing; we cannot (and from a moral point of view also should not want to) go back to the forests, so we must find our own balance of needs and desires. Yet, the liberated modern human being may find back something of the savage in herself. Emile, for one, ‘is a savage made to inhabit cities’ (E III, 205; OC IV, 484). Finally, to the extent that savage life is morally inferior, it also provides a negative benchmark by means of which we can assess the (potential) merits of our socialized existence.

III.i. Ferguson

In Ferguson, the continuity between the uncorrupted savage society and the ideal of the healthy modern republic or monarchy, in which corruption is firmly kept in check, is rather straightforward. As he writes, ‘There is a vigour, a reach of capacity, and a sensibility of mind, which may characterize as well the savage as the citizen, the slave as well as the master; and the same powers of the mind may be turned to a variety of purposes’ (EHCS 3.1, 107). As a result of ongoing societal progress, propelled by the incessant efforts of our individual progressive natures, economic and political sophistication characterize the civilized, polished societies we live in today (after having passed through the rude – i.e. savage and barbarian – and early civilized stages). This sophistication remains, as indicated, always natural for Ferguson.

Still, living according to nature in the full Stoic sense means, above all, realizing the noblest part of one’s nature and of one’s collective potential as a community of rational individuals. This is something within reach of both the savage and the citizen of highly advanced society. But it is more difficult for the latter, because the commercial nature of his society means that he is likely to spend a lot of time in ‘sordid, mercenary’ pursuits. In a busy commercial society, the highest potential reaches of our active nature may disappear ever more from sight, giving way to the mediocre commercial man who is ready to bow to political slavery as long as this leaves him his personal space to make financial gains. A fragmented society thus arises, no longer united by a vigorous communal political sphere. The psyche of individuals, too, becomes more fragmented and impoverished; its active nature finds only partial fulfilment, and the essential firm connection with fellow humans is lost.

To ward off truly perilous levels of corruption and the spectre of despotism, the moral-psychological and political balance which came easily in rude societies must be reconstituted by determined republican effort. Ferguson’s general description of the harmonious, public-spirited society is as follows:
The interests of society, (...) and of its members, are easily reconciled. If the individual owes every degree of consideration to the public, he receives, in paying that very consideration, the greatest happiness of which his nature is capable; and the greatest blessing that the public can bestow on its members, is to keep them attached to itself. That is the most happy state, which is most beloved by its subjects; and they are the most happy men, whose hearts are engaged to a community, in which they find every object of generosity and zeal, and a scope to the exercise of every talent, and of every virtuous disposition. (EHCS 1.9, 59)

Understanding the way in which Ferguson seeks to bring about this harmony in modern states demands, in turn, an understanding of his notion of progress that is more complex and ambivalent than it has been interpreted in some recent scholarly contributions.96 A life according to nature is a life in which our active, progressive nature is best satisfied. Ferguson distinguishes between the progress of individuals and that of society. The joint progressive actions of individuals lead to ever more complex societies in the course of generations, in which we find an ever-changing scene in which to be fruitfully active.

However, given the specific way in which our individual progressive natures flourish to the highest degree, the progressive sophistication of the commercial, political and scientific spheres can only be said to bring about progress in a complete way as long as it develops in conjunction with a humanity that remains vigorous, social and public-spirited in the way it acts under changing circumstances. As Ferguson states,

Wealth, commerce, extent of territory, and the knowledge of arts (...) maintain the wretched, as well as the happy. They answer one purpose, but are not therefore sufficient for all; and are of little significance, when only employed to maintain a timid, dejected, and servile people. (EHCS 1.9, 60)97

The essential expression of the active, progressive nature of individual humans and individual generations lies in their thriving here and now, in the midst of their pursuits: ‘The virtues of men have shone most during their struggles, not after the attainment of their ends. Those ends themselves, though attained by virtue, are frequently the causes of corruption and vice’ (EHCS 5.1, 196). And: ‘the proper state of his nature (...) is not a condition from which mankind are for ever removed, but one to which they may now attain; not prior to the exercise of their faculties, but procured by their just application’ (EHCS 1.1, 15). If ever we arrive at a point where we prefer to quietly enjoy the fruits of our material progress, we have started to corrupt.

As I read Ferguson, then, his view of continual societal/species progress through unintended consequences concerns an important, broad, yet only ‘basic’ level of progress. In times when this basic progress does not adequately support our progressive flourishing here and now, as (a collective of) individuals, we are on the whole not truly progressing, or even in moral decline. Ferguson’s warning for future despotism suggests that even the hard-won, thus far more or less linearly progressed liberty under the rule of law and commercial sophistication may ultimately collapse. Yet he is both optimistic that this Machiavellian moment can be warded off through his recovery plan for civic virtue98 and that, in the case of such a collapse, the ensuing chaos will soon activate the
best in humans and will thus be the beginning of restoration. In this sense, then, there is a good chance of continuous ‘lower-level’ progress – as long as we succeed in maintaining a sufficient connection with higher-level individual flourishing we are quite safe. Moreover, progress spreads from one society to the other and can thus continue in a neighbouring society when it has come to a standstill in the society which has stimulated this neighbouring society to progress.

While there is for advanced societies an important optimistic message in Ferguson’s history of civil society, then, we should be mindful of the serious reservations he also has. A crucial insight in this respect is his suggestion that the more vigorously humans thrive, the greater the true quality of their arts and products will be. As a consequence, some arts of savage origin have seldom been surpassed in more advanced ages: ‘The artless song of the savage, the heroic legend of the bard, have sometimes a magnificent beauty, which no change of language can improve, and no refinements of the critic reform’ (EHCS 3.8, 166). These songs and legends were conceived in the midst of human struggle, thus breathing life and spirit in a way that the full-time, technically brilliant writer in a specialized commercial society is often unable to bring about.

Oz-Salzberger concludes that in Ferguson’s ‘not necessarily progressive history of civil society (…) the underlying dichotomy was not between savage and civilized man, but between man employed in action (…) and man languishing in corruption or slavery’ (2008, 149). Indeed, Ferguson is above all concerned with the unimpeded exercise of the active nature of humans under changing circumstances. That the art of the savage can already reach such a level of simple perfection suggests that the active lifestyle combined with refined, technically brilliant art – which becomes possible only in the civilized stage – does not necessarily involve overall progress. More than once, in fact, Ferguson points to cases of technical progress that does not engage the human character as a whole and that is as such of little value. Even perfection in the political arts, like notably an advanced rule of law, does not necessarily amount to a condition that is in the most fundamental sense superior to that of rude stages: ‘Without police or compulsory laws, their (i.e. rude nations’, RB) domestic society is conducted with order, and the absence of vicious dispositions, is a better security than any public establishment for the suppression of crimes’ (EHCS 2.2, 85). Although offering the blessings of regular liberty, the rule of law is also simply necessary to keep the corruptions of civilized peoples in check.

What matters most is that the great sentiments of the active life animate both the simple and the complex work of art, the politically primitive and politically advanced society – the crucial dichotomy in this respect is as Oz-Salzberger proposes. This is not yet the full story, though. On the moral-religious level, a fundamental kind of progress is being made in the transition from rude to civilized societies. Let us consider this progress in some detail. Ferguson sees the rationality of human nature as reaching its highest peak when rational, social action is embedded in, and bolstered by, a moral-cum-metaphysical outlook called ‘true religion’ or ‘sublime religion’. Such an outlook strengthens benevolence towards our fellows and the wisdom to perceive what lies in our power and what not. As indicated in Section II, Ferguson’s true religion has a decidedly Stoic flavour. He characterizes it as follows:
the highest point to which moral science conducts the mind of man, is that eminence of thought, from which he can view himself as but a part in the community of living natures; by which he is in some measure let into the design of God, to combine all the parts together for the common benefit of all; and can state himself as a willing instrument for this purpose, in what depends on his own will; and as a conscious instrument, at the disposal of providence, in matters which are out of his power. (PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 313)\textsuperscript{106}

In line with this vision, the most perfect models for human life that Ferguson provides are those of Roman Stoics who combined proper, rational action with a pious submission to what Providence had placed beyond their power: Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. Socrates, who was a great exemplar for the Stoics themselves,\textsuperscript{107} has a similarly exalted status. Like the savage, or hardly surpass in a meaningful way – despite our much greater quantitative knowledge of Creation.\textsuperscript{108} It is a level of insight to be met with ‘in the concluding observations of Newton’s Principia, no less than in the remains of Socrates or Epictetus, of of (sic) Marcus Aurelius’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 312). This level is only attained at some happy point in the civilized stage. Rude nations are led by a Humean flux and reflux of superstition and enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{109} But just like works of sublime art are found in all ages, so expressions of sublime religion are found in all civilized ages. And, also like art, religion only truly flourishes when it is practiced in connection with an active, rational life. Hence, if anything, the attainment of true religion has become more difficult in our fragmented commercial societies. Someone who does not live a ‘full life’, so to say, in line with the true religion the principles of which he or she perhaps theoretically more or less grasps, cannot truly let these principles do their morally beneficent work – which, in turn, is necessary to wholeheartedly appropriate them. In the classical age, by contrast, there was ample opportunity for such a productive confrontation between theory and practice: a ‘fair trial was made’ of the force of the principles of Socrates and the stoics ‘as the nursery of heroes and the school of men’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 309). They were tested in the tumultuous public sphere and on the battlefield and, as a result, gained a particularly firm hold on the mind of great men of action.

Nonetheless, Ferguson is never merely nostalgic with regard to past achievements of our progressive nature. Human beings are free, and can, at any stage of civilization, wake from their hedonistic slumber in the private sphere and decide to contend anew with savages and Stoic sages. Such contending never involves a return; it is always a reappropriation of timeless ideals within the context of the latest stage of civilization. Over time, furthermore, the humanity, wisdom and distaste for despotism that come with the
true religion of elites must have contributed to several significant, lasting effects on the moral fabric of society as a whole.\textsuperscript{110} We now have regular freedom under the rule of law and do no longer enjoy our freedom at the cost of slaves. Such moral progress remains always relative, however. I already mentioned the rule of law in this regard, whereas the nominal freedom of the lower classes in modern commercial society comes with an utter lack of moral-psychological flourishing due to their repetitive labour and living in crowded cities.\textsuperscript{111} They are much worse off than the typical savage.\textsuperscript{112} In this sense, for Ferguson, every age has its mixture of consolations and sufferings, adding up to, \textit{grosso modo}, the same measure of felicity.\textsuperscript{113}

\textbf{III.ii. Rousseau}

Rousseau’s second \textit{Discourse} offers primarily a diagnosis of, not a solution for, the progressive loss of wholeness of human beings in society. Nevertheless, several indications of what a proper solution should look like are there. Rousseau argues that \textit{amour-propre} – the human concern for their standing in the eyes of others – has been incontrovertibly activated once humans left the original state of nature. Finding feasible moral-psychological wholeness for the moderns, then, involves dealing in the correct way with, looking for a proper outlet of, their self-love. A primitivistic solution may seem to be suggested by Rousseau’s ‘Golden Age’ (or ‘age of huts’), where savages live in primitive communities:

Thus, although men now had less endurance, and natural pity already had undergone some attenuation, this period in the development of the human faculties, occupying a just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour propre, must have been the happiest and the most lasting epoch. (DOI pt. II, 167; OC III, 171)

More specifically, the Golden Age is a stage of human development between two revolutions, and, in turn, the second of the two stages falling between these revolutions.\textsuperscript{114} The first revolution ‘brought about the establishment and the differentiation of families, and introduced a sort of property’ (DOI pt. II, 164; OC III, 167). These families start living a ‘softer’ life and to establish proper languages. The Golden Age dawns when these families, initially roaming the woods,

become more settled, gradually come together, unite in various troops, and finally in every region form a particular Nation united in morals and character, not by Rules or Laws, but by the same kind of life and of foods, and the influence of a shared Climate. (DOI pt. II, 165; OC III, 169)

This happy era comes to an end with the second revolution: the invention of metallurgy and agriculture. Soon thereafter, slavery and misery will sprout, growing ‘together with the harvests’ (DOI pt. II, 167; OC III, 171).

In \textit{Essay on the Origin of Languages}, Rousseau describes the gatherings of savages in the Golden Age in more detail, and in yet more idealizing tones. Depending on the climate they inhabited, they gathered around fire or water. On the southern regions, Rousseau
writes: ‘There, finally, was the true cradle of peoples, and from the pure crystal of the fountains came the first fires of love’ (EOL IX, 314; OC V, 406). Duchet emphasizes the significance of such passages for Rousseau’s conjectural-historical and moral outlook:

L’expérience capitale de l’*Essai*, c’est donc celle d’une socialité heureuse, d’une communication à la fois tendre et vive, d’un langage total, où le geste, la danse et les accents passionnés expriment le désir et le plaisir « confondus », sans distance ni absence, auprès du cristal des fontaines, ou du feu sacré, symboles de pureté et de transparence. (1995, 352–3)

Rousseau’s assessment of the Golden Age as ‘just mean’ in view of his philosophical anthropology and the concomitant symbolic meaning he attributes to fire and water in this stage suggest that it transcends other (more truly intermediate) stages in terms of significance. In painting it as a stage of near-perfect wholeness and transparence, Rousseau endows it with a rhetorical and moral significance similar to the pure state of nature’s. In Starobinski’s classic reading, the moral-psychological condition of the first savage, too, is characterized by a transparence which gives this brute creature ‘le privilège de la possession immédiate de la vérité’ (1971, 40).

Notwithstanding our first-hand experience in the modern world with peoples still in their own ‘Golden Age’, the stage is a milestone in Rousseau’s hypothetical account of man’s gradual passage from natural goodness to corruption. This passage can only be understood in the light of his speculative moral-psychological principles, leaving a proper assessment of the Golden Age’s ultimate anthropological significance beyond the reach of empirical science. This is precisely Rousseau’s point: human beings are free, spiritual creatures, and the too narrowly empirical, deterministic approach of human history of most of his fellow conjectural-historians robs humankind of its specific dignity.

Hill attributes primitivism to Rousseau by referring to the Golden Age as his ideal *rout court*, contrasting it with Ferguson’s ‘embrace’ of progress. Despite her acknowledgement that there are significant convergences in the two thinkers, Hill’s interpretation leaves, like McDaniel’s, an ultimately large gap between Rousseau and Ferguson in terms of method and moral outlook. While the second *Discourse* (or the *Essay on Languages*) may indeed give the reader the impression that Rousseau mourns this lost paradise for which the enslaved modern citizens only get ‘very few’ (though very noble) things in return, such a reading clearly does not withstand scrutiny when this text is read in conjunction with Rousseau’s ‘solution-centred’ writings.

What the Golden Age *does* offer is yet another, more advanced savage benchmark, or rough example, for what a solution for the corruption of modern day societies must look like. Just mean’ suggests that it is good that savages have started to progress beyond the stupid indolence of the pure (or ‘first’) state of nature, but that they are still close enough to their original state so as to be sufficiently free from the excesses of *amour-propre*’s promptings. This description offers a psychological standard for future societies that does not require a return to the same primitive situation in which the just mean was, perhaps, most effectively realized. We learn that moral-psychological wholeness can be a matter of degree, and that the original, complete wholeness of the savage in the solitary pure state of nature is not, ultimately, the best condition for a free, perfectible creature.
At the end of the second Discourse, Rousseau suggests that it is in an important respect also good that our amour-propre has brought us beyond the Golden Age: its incessant strivings have given us ‘what is best and what is worst among men’ (DOI pt. II, 184; OC III, 189). Now the value of this progress was doubtful if most of the worst things among men would have to persist to make possible the best, but The Social Contract and Emile tell us that this need not be the case. The ‘petulant activity’ of amour-propre can be calmed down and refocused on worthier objects in conditions other than that of the Golden Age, too.

Submitting to the Rousseauian social contract demands of citizens a transition to a robustly egalitarian disposition and way of life. The gap between rich and poor must be so limited that no one will feel compelled to sell themselves to another. Only thus is the establishment of a community of self-governing free equals feasible. As Cohen argues, this also helps to redirect our amour-propre from the all-consuming desire to be better than others to the sober satisfaction that we find in being recognized as equally worthy of respect as all other citizens because we are all freely partaking in a self-governing political order on the same terms. Neuhouser observes that, while such respect as moral equals under the law takes away some of our need to seek esteem for the particular ways in which we are better than others, it does not take away all of this need. This desire for distinction would remain compatible with the demands of the social contract, however, as long as we do not wish to be better than everyone else in a particular field of excellence.

In both Cohen’s and Neuhouser’s accounts, we arrive at a balance of needs and desires that allows us to live in harmony with our fellow human beings while nonetheless satisfying our amour-propre. By contrast, the desires we have in inegalitarian commercial societies derive from a misguided, distorted understanding of our true needs. The false idea that wealth and power help us effectively preserve ourselves makes both the successful and the not successful in the quest for these supposed goods enslaved, unfree. Hence, a life dedicated to these pursuits is fully artificial, being lived in discord with our nature and its true needs. The remedy for such an unnatural lifestyle lies in artifice, too.

In both Cohen’s and Neuhouser’s accounts, we arrive at a balance of needs and desires that allows us to live in harmony with our fellow human beings while nonetheless satisfying our amour-propre. By contrast, the desires we have in inegalitarian commercial societies derive from a misguided, distorted understanding of our true needs. The false idea that wealth and power help us effectively preserve ourselves makes both the successful and the not successful in the quest for these supposed goods enslaved, unfree. Hence, a life dedicated to these pursuits is fully artificial, being lived in discord with our nature and its true needs. The remedy for such an unnatural lifestyle lies in artifice, too.

The wholesome artifice of the just social contract allows us to live in accordance with the true needs of our human nature as it has become in the course of civilization. Moreover, while we have moved away from our original, savage moral psychology, our amour-propre and perfectibility were at that initial stage already present below the surface, as unused possibilities of our free human nature. Therefore, their subsequent activation when we leave the pure state of nature – due to a ‘fortuitous concatenation of foreign causes’ (DOI pt. II, 159; OC III, 162) – does not involve a move against nature. Rather, it is the beginning of the realization of the potential of our nature, for better and worse. This is also reflected in the development from natural to activated pity. Natural pity is a ‘pure movement of Nature, prior to all reflection’ from which eventually ‘flow all the social virtues’ (DOI pt. I, 152, 153; OC III, 155). It requires the imagination of a socializing human being for pity to become more than a ‘brute’, mechanical impulse: ‘Pity, although natural to the heart of man, would remain eternally inactive without the imagination that puts it into play’ (EOL IX, 306; OC V, 395).

Living in society, then, is not anti-natural, and the artifice of the social contract that is to realize stable freedom for the social creatures that we have become is not anti-natural, either. Here, I follow a point made by Neidleman against the interpretation of Melzer,
who characterizes the social contract as anti-natural. The general will is an indispensable artificial remedy that helps us regain the freedom and moral-psychological wholeness of the savage and the Stoic within the framework of the political order. Hence, in free societies, artifice and nature work in harmonious conjunction, as opposed to unfree societies, where artifice distorts nature and impedes realizing the highest potential of our nature. Under the general will, the original motive that impelled us to submit to a political order is finally effectively satisfied. Early savage and barbarian societies brimmed with the spirit of liberty. The only reason barbarians could have for organizing themselves in a rudimentary political order, therefore, was the more effective protection of ‘their goods, their freedoms and their lives’ (DOI pt. II, 176; OC III, 180). Modern politicians and philosophers who ‘attribute to men a natural inclination to servitude because of the patience with which the men they have before their eyes bear theirs’ are gravely mistaken (DOI pt. II, 176; OC III, 181). ‘[B]arbarous man will not bend his head to the yoke which civilized man bears without a murmur, and he prefers the most tempestuous freedom to a tranquil subjection’ (DOI pt. II, 177; OC III, 181).

Ferguson thinks along remarkably similar lines. For both thinkers, a significant deal of the spirit of our less civilized ancestors must be retained or regained in a truly free society. To be more secure in our liberty, we need a political order at some point, but this order’s mechanisms often come to undermine the very liberty for which they were established. While all art is natural for Ferguson, the art that does not undermine too much the natural pitches of human flourishing is always preferable to, and in a way more natural than, the servile spirit that so easily arises in advanced commercial civilizations.

The Stoicism present in Rousseau’s political vision in The Social Contract is more complete than the proto-Stoicism of his vision of savage wholeness. The moral freedom we attain under the general will is characterized by a kind of rational self-command – pursued together with one’s fellow-citizens – which replaces the reigns of appetite and opinion. Hence, where Rousseau’s savage wholeness is an, in Starobinski’s words, ‘variante “animale” et “sensitive”’ of the Stoic ideal, the reconfigured, reason-governed wholeness suggested in The Social Contract matches the Stoic vision of wholeness for the mature human being. The savage’s at-oneness with self rather corresponds to the Stoic view of the wholeness of the child. The unreflective harmony of needs and passions/desires is appropriate for the immature stage of our existence, but, for civilized grown-ups, this balance can only persist or be refound when rational self-command comes in play. According to the Stoics, a full life lived according to our specific human nature cannot be whole without reason. For Rousseau, a mature human being who is mostly guided by passion will inevitably join in with the unhealthy dynamic of inflamed amour-propre that enslaves most people in most nations of modern Europe.

In an abstract way, then, the ideals of Stoic liberty and republican liberty as self-government come together in Rousseau’s theory of the general will. The role which the particular historical exemplar of Rome plays in his argument gives it another typically republican dimension – the analysis of republican Rome’s history, its institutions and its ultimate demise are part and parcel of early modern republican theorizing since Machiavelli. As Neuhausser suggests, the fact that Rousseau’s account of moral freedom under the general will prefigures Kant’s categorical imperative should not
obscure the fact that Rousseau is, unlike Kant, willing to allow particularistic, imaginative and passionate elements to enhance the process of rational deliberation. For Rousseau, amour-propre and duty are not mutually exclusive motivations. Rational self-government ultimately transcends the laws of particular nations, but life in a particular republican community forms an almost inevitable prerequisite for the possibility of a more purely rational life in due course. A healthy republic such as the Roman in its heyday instills a strong affective identification in its members and allows amour-propre to be satisfied through the honour we are awarded when we make a significant contribution to the public good. Likewise, Rome’s particular institutions and civic spirit may keep inspiring other nations in their attempts at realizing republican freedom in their own ways. Purely rational moral ideals tend to have less power over imagination and affects and are as such less effective as a means to get as many citizens as possible to live according to the general will. Of course, Rousseau is not classically Stoic here – but most early modern thinkers of neo-Stoic inspiration engaged more positively with the realm of passion and imagination than their ancient forebears. What does make his view of moral freedom as rational self-government under the law distinctively Stoic, nonetheless, is the fact that – as I indicated above – it is closely connected to the moral-psychological ideal of wholeness.

IV Concluding observations

The visions of original wholeness, its (partial) loss and its possible recovery that guide the conjectural histories of Rousseau and Ferguson make them atypical conjectural histories. The crucial element of Stoic, republican idealism brings them to an ambiguous, critical verdict on the commercial stage – the stage that is embraced by many of their fellow conjectural historians. For both thinkers, the societal and moral-psychological processes that bring corruption also bring with it the possibility of a higher kind of human flourishing; of finally appropriating our rational nature (Rousseau), or doing so more fully (Ferguson).

This higher type of flourishing is largely disconnected from economic flourishing, however, and as such requires societies where the public interest is not, or at least not too much trumped by the private, economic interest of individuals and factions. This is why republican Rome holds such a pivotal sway over the political imagination of Rousseau and Ferguson. It was a civilized society where commerce had not begun to undermine the fruits of civilization. The spirit of liberty still reigned, and in this sense it was a more natural society than eighteenth-century commercial society – continuous with, though more sophisticated than (and in a way morally superior to), barbarian and savage societies and their spirit. For both thinkers, ancient Rome belongs to a bygone age, the salutary conditions of which can, like that of the savage stage, not be (fully) recuperated.

However, given the partial disconnection between societal and species progress on the one hand, and the flourishing of particular individuals within their particular communities on the other hand, these past conjectural stages remain more relevant than they are for thinkers who do not think in terms of such a disconnection. ‘We moderns’ have lost much of the wholeness that was there in these earlier stages, and as such they remain timeless exemplars that can guide and help reorient our moral and political course in the
present stage. The savage stage provides us with an evaluative benchmark of complete, unreflective wholeness that is not straightforwardly practicable but that informs us about the essential characteristics of human nature and the fundamental requirements of our flourishing. All subsequent conjectural progress is a move away from this original wholeness.

Such progress also involves an increasing maturity of the human species, however, and is as such a precondition for human flourishing at its highest pitch. But flourishing at one’s highest pitch can never involve a clean break with earlier, in a way inferior, pitches of flourishing. Only in corrupted societies do we become wholly estranged of such earlier flourishing. Whether our sociopolitical development will be *grosso modo* beneficial strongly depends on the extent to which we manage to keep living according to nature in changing circumstances. The human freedom to act within the constraints of the given circumstances is an essential aspect of this Stoic vision. Human beings are part of a sociopolitical dynamic that is to a large degree beyond their control, but the choices grounded in their remaining liberty determine whether this dynamic will be mostly for better or for worse.

In the political and moral Stoic ideal which I have analysed in Rousseau, there is not an account of true religion and its invigorating role with regard to civic virtue as we have found it in Ferguson. Religion is important for Rousseau as well – for his politics notably civil religion. But insofar as there is also a notion of philosophical religion in Rousseau’s system of thought, it does not have a role of similar importance in his account of progress as it has in Ferguson’s. More implicitly, nevertheless, Rousseau’s conception of providence does play a role in the recovery of wholeness, too. The savage’s balance between needs and inclinations is the state of the human being — her natural goodness — as she has left the hands of the Author of things. When we return to such a balance in a more sophisticated (i.e. reason-governed) way, we thus recover the providentially given wholeness from which our free, progressive actions had alienated us. Hence, we can assume, a pious way of regarding the world from the viewpoint of providence will help us better understand our place in it and our corresponding true interest.

In Ferguson, in turn, the role envisaged for the law is less elevated; living under the rule of law does not conduce to the moral transformation envisaged by Rousseau. But this is related to Ferguson’s overall more optimistic conception of human nature and society. Human values that evolved over long periods, even centuries, are expressed in Fergusonian law. Our civic-spirited ancestors had a strong zeal for liberty, which found its way into the laws they created. Analogously, the development of humanity and compassion that dates back to early Christian and some pagan societies (but not to the Greeks or Romans) influenced our warfare and was given expression in the modern law of nations. Our systems of law, insofar as they are expressions of such ideals, originate in human virtue rather than that they must, in Rousseauian fashion, bring about virtue. If the freedom-loving, communitarian, humane spirit that contributed to the creation of our rule of law is lost, so Ferguson thinks, the latter becomes a dead letter. The rule of law’s formal persistence may, perhaps, contribute to inspiring a return to virtue in due course but cannot guarantee the persistence of such virtue in its own right (also because virtue is much more than merely following legal prescriptions).
There is a point of concurrence with Rousseau here. Although the volonté générale works morally transformative, Rousseau does not think that it continues to do so as a matter-of-course once it has been established in a system of law. In a ‘well-constituted state’, the ‘prejudice in favor of antiquity renders them (i.e., the laws, RB) daily more venerable’ (SC 3.11, 109–10; OC III, 425). But laws that are, in principle, sound can grow weaker to the point of becoming obsolete when ‘the hustle and bustle of commerce and the arts, (...) the avid interest in gain’ and ‘the softness and love of comforts’ take precedence in the hearts of citizens over ‘the love of fatherland’ (SC 3.15, 113–4; OC III, 429). This point of concurrence between Rousseau and Ferguson underlines once more the fact that, for both thinkers, a vigorous, widespread public-spirited disposition among citizens is the key guarantor of law, liberty and human flourishing.142

ORCID iD
Rudmer Bijlsma https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4779-0946

Notes
1. Cf. with regard to Ferguson: Hill (2006, 194) and McDaniel (2013b).
2. Cf. Douglass (2017, 613, 619) and Sagar (2018, 101).
3. Cf. Hundert (1994, 62–86).
4. As I shall argue, art and nature are in a crucial way no opposites for Rousseau, either.
5. Ferguson, Essay, 1.1; Hume (2000, section 3.2.1) (‘mankind is an inventive species’).
6. Rousseau-Smith studies abound these days. In these studies, however, Rousseau’s critique of commercial society tends to be presented as, while taken up by Smith, also being overcome in Smith’s ultimately commerce-friendly perspective (cf. Hanley 2008; Rasmussen 2008).
7. Plassart refers to conjectural history as ‘un discours en plein essor’ (2011, 147).
8. Cf. Berry (2013, ch. 5).
9. Ferguson’s republicanism is combined with, and tempered by, a conservative, proto-liberal embrace of the rule of law as expressed in the British constitution (cf. Bijlsma 2019, 351).
10. Life according to nature and oikeiosis are closely related notions in Stoicism. For humans, growing up is above all about developing/appropriating our rational nature, and doing so in the company of our fellow rational creatures. Hence, when we live rationally we live according to (our human) nature. Cf. Inwood (2017, 77–8), Brooke (2012, 42–6) and Cicero (2001, III.16-25, III.62–71).
11. This need not puzzle us, as my reading of their kinship involves a complex, contested interpretation of Rousseau’s second Discourse and Social Contract (and to a lesser degree Emile) in conjunction, based on present-day scholarly debate.
12. I shall use the following abbreviations for the works of Rousseau and Ferguson: DOI refers to Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men; SC to The Social Contract; E to Emile; EOL to Essay on the Origin of Languages. EHCS refers to Ferguson’s Essay on the History of Civil Society (1996); IMP to his Institutes of Moral Philosophy (1800); PMPS to Principles of Moral and Political Science. OC refers to the Œuvres complètes of Rousseau, edited by Gagnébin and Raymond.
13. Kalyvas and Katzenelson contend that there is a shift towards a more liberal politics in PMPS, though they agree that republicanism continues to play a role (2008, 66). The republican and
Stoic dimensions of Ferguson’s assessment of progress certainly also remain, as my analysis demonstrates.

14. Cf. Pocock (1975, ch. 14).
15. I shall point out the contrast of my reading with Berry (2013) and Smith (2019).
16. Cf. Hont (2015, 17).
17. Hont (2015, 22).
18. SC 2.8. Cf. Hont (2015, 126).
19. Cf. Hont (2015, 102).
20. Douglass (2018, 507). Notably in the Constitutional Project for Corsica: ‘I look at every system of commerce as destructive of agriculture so much so that I make no exception even for commerce in commodities that are the product of agriculture’ (Rousseau 2005, 139; OC III, 920).

21. Cf. Palmeri (2008).
22. As distinct from later stages of the state of nature, in which savage societies have begun to develop – see Sections II and III below.
23. Duchet (1995, 338).
24. Cf. Sebastiani (2013, 66).
25. That is, that of Ferguson and other Scots.
26. Binoche suggests that Stewart’s use of ‘conjectural’ simply differs from Ferguson’s and that the contradiction between their takes on Scottish historical method is only apparent: Stewart applies the label to a history that reconstructs the typical stages of human social existence, whereas Ferguson uses it for what he sees as Rousseau’s speculative fictions (2014, 47). I am not sure, however, that no contradiction remains, and whether, accordingly, Ferguson would have been fully satisfied with the gist of Stewart’s analysis of Scottish method.

27. I explain this in more detail in the next sections.
28. Cf. Olson (1998). Sebastiani writes: ‘The prevalence of politics in Ferguson’s discourse pushed women to the margins’ (2013, 146).
29. Hume, Smith and Millar. For example, Smith (1982, 5.2.11, 208).
30. Cf. McDaniel (2013b, 553).
31. Cf. Gourevitch (2000, 586–7).
32. Cf. Binoche (2018, 76) and Höpfl (1978, 25).
33. Interpretations differ as to whether Rousseau’s history of society here is completely hypothetical (Goldschmidt 1974, 384–7) or whether it is rather conjectural in the mould of Dugald Stewart (Binoche 2018, 43). Rousseau’s appeals to actual history (the Ancients, present-day American savages, European civilization) suggests it is the latter. See also Section III.
34. McDaniel (2013a, 8, 2013b).
35. Cf. McDaniel (2013b) and Leigh (1986).
36. This paragraph is a modified version of a passage in Bijlsma 2019 (p. 353).
37. That Rousseau and Ferguson are both theorists of alienation also affirms my Stoic reading. The Stoic notion of allotriosis is commonly translated as ‘alienation’ and is the negative opposite of oikeiosis (cf. Brooke 2012, 43). The modern concept of social alienation was only established after Rousseau and Ferguson, by Hegel and Marx (Entfremdung) – but the former two were significant influences on the latter two in this regard (cf. Bijlsma 2019, 355). DOI is widely acknowledged as offering, de facto, the groundbreaking modern account of social alienation (cf. Honneth 2007, 4).
38. Cf. Neuhouser (2008, 3).
39. Cf. Hill (2006, 121).
40. Cf. EHCS 6.2.
41. Cf. Binoche (2014): ‘l’écart des méthodes n’exclut pas, in fine, la proximité des diagnostics’ (53).
42. Cf. Leigh (1986) and Hill (2006, 194). Note that ‘primitivism’ is an anachronistic, nineteenth-century term (first mention 1861, cf. Oxford English Dictionary). Since scholars often invoke it in relation to Rousseau and Ferguson, I shall use it, too – but in a critical manner. Considering the way in which they are ‘primitivistic’ and the way in which they are not also helps us determine the common ground in both thinkers and draw out the contrast with other interpretations.
43. Cf. Neuhouser (2008, 38).
44. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines ‘primitivism’ as follows: ‘an outlook on human affairs that sees history as a decline from an erstwhile condition of excellence (chronological primitivism) or holds that salvation lies in a return to the simple life (cultural primitivism). Linked with this is the notion that what is natural should be a standard of human values. The views of Rousseau and Ferguson do not match this definition but do – in a complex way – condone the related notion that what is natural should be a standard of human values.
45. McDaniel’s reading is supported by Melzer (1990, 94). Cf. infra, Section III.
46. Cf. Gourevitch (2000, 586) and Melzer (1990, ch. 2).
47. Scott (2006) points to the parallel between the embeddedness of savage life in nature and the embeddedness of the citizen’s life in the community shaped by the general will.
48. Cf. DOI pt. I, 187 (OC III, 192).
49. Cf. Melzer (1990, 21, 36–7) and Neuhouser (2008, 193).
50. For the socialized savage, see DOI pt. II, 177 (OC III, 181–2).
51. Ferguson sympathizes with the ‘subjection’ savage women suffer but also says that the ‘first suggestions of nature’ on which this subjection is grounded are to be preferred to the later ‘refinements’ by which slavery is established (EHCS 2.2, 83).
52. Among the ‘commercial arts’, Ferguson does not only count the trade of more advanced societies, but every activity related to ‘the exigencies of mere animal nature’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.2, 205). He points out that ‘It was not among the ancient Romans alone that commercial arts, or a sordid mind, were held in contempt. A like spirit prevails in every rude and independent society. “I am a warrior, and not a merchant,” said an American to the governor of Canada, who proposed to give him goods in exchange for some prisoners he had taken’ (EHCS 2.2, 92).
53. That is, considered apart from the position women are forced into.
54. Cf. EHCS 1.6, 38–9, fn. 9
55. Cf. note 52.
56. For a discussion of Stoic elements in Ferguson: Hill (2006, 34–9), Kettler (2005, ch. 6) and Skjönsberg (2017, 6–10). I briefly discuss Nicolai’s argument (2014a, 2014b) that Ferguson’s moral philosophy cannot properly be called Stoic in Bijlsma (2019, 358, fn. 46). Nicolai focuses on Ferguson’s moral philosophy in the strict sense (his account of the virtues). When read comprehensively, I shall argue below, Ferguson’s philosophy offers a distinctly neo-Stoic outlook.
57. Cf. Inwood (2017, 84–5).
58. Cf. also Kettler (2005, 148–9).
59. Cf. EHCS 1.8, 56–7; IMP 4.3.5, 131.
60. Cicero (2001, IV.22). Cf. Woolf (2015, 161).
61. Woolf (2015, 92).
62. Cf. Baltzly (2018, section 1).
63. Cf. Walzer (2003, 29, 39).
64. Cicero (2001, V.95); Woolf (2015, 170).
65. Cicero (2001, V.58); Woolf (2015, 168–9).
66. Woolf (2015, 171, 189).
67. Cf. PMPS vol. II, 1.4, 40; 1.6, 59.
68. Ferguson maintains that he discovered part of the overlap of his thought with the Stoics only after he had independently started to shape certain of his ideas (PMPS vol. I, introduction, 7).
69. Cf. EHCS 4.4, 184. Ferguson explicitly links this to Epictetus (PMPS vol. I, introduction, 7).
70. The label ‘neo-Stoicism’, of course, is not incompatible with a (partial) departure from, or thorough reworking of Stoic orthodoxy on a range of issues. For example, consider the case of Spinoza (cf. James 1993).
71. As opposed to Skjönsberg (2017, 8). Lisa Hill shares my view in this regard (2006, 35–8).
72. Cf. IMP 6.5.1. Cicero’s De Officiis, in turn, followed the method of the Greek Stoic Panae-tius, as Ferguson also points out (PMPS vol. II, 5.3, 344).
73. For example, Cato as mouthpiece for the Stoic position in De Finibus (PMPS vol. II, 5.2, 327).
74. For Marcus Aurelius, for example, see EHCS 1.8, 54; PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 312; PMPS vol. II, 1.6, 68. For Epictetus: EHCS 1.8, 56–7; IMP 4.3.5, 131; PMPS vol. II, 1.5, 49.
75. Cf. Woolf (2015, 165).
76. Scholars disagree as to whether the Romans came to draw a less strict distinction between the sage and everyone else along the way (cf. Baltzly 2018, 6.4).
77. Although Ferguson does talk about the Stoic school in a generalizing manner, and includes the school’s founder Zeno in his list of ‘great instructors of mankind’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 310).
78. Cf. EHCS 1.1, 13.
79. Hill (2006, 50).
80. Cf. Schliesser (2017, 114–5). Although, as Schliesser notes, some scholars deny that Smith is a compatibilist.
81. Cf. supra, introduction.
82. Brooke (2012, 188).
83. Brooke (2012, 185).
84. Cf. Hill (2006, 40).
85. DOI pt. II, 187 (OC III, 192–3).
86. Cf. EHCS 2.2, 94.
87. Cf. Sebastiani 2013: ‘The emphasis on the loss of liberty in civil society led Ferguson and Kames (…) to exalt the original state of independence, while the image of the asocial savage was superimposed over that of the dehumanized member of the stage of commerce’ (144).
88. Cf. SC 1.8; DOI pt. II, 184 (OC III, 189).
89. Cf. EHCS 2.2, 81.
90. Cf. EHCS 4.1, 175.

91. It seems that the active, social pursuits of the savage and barbarian are often hardly subdued by their superstitions. Yet, false religious beliefs form a potential future source of serious disturbance of their moral-psychological wholeness. In this sense, the public-spirited true believer has a more balanced character. True religion also helps cultivate a spirit of humanity (as we shall see below) that is a welcome development when compared to the often-cruel rude ages (‘In this wild and lawless state, where the effects of true religion would have been so desirable, and so salutary ( . . . )’, EHCS 2.3, 103).

92. Scott (Introduction to EOL: xxix) suggests that Rousseau’s focus on the savage’s natural pity also serves such a rhetorical role in DOI (in E and EOL the focus is on pity becoming truly active only in the course of our socialization).

93. Cf. Neuhouser (2014): ‘Since his prescription is not “Go back to living in forests with bears!” the original state of nature, though furnishing a general account of some of the goods we ought to seek in whatever social arrangements we live under, is powerless to recommend any specific civilized way of life as the one that true human nature requires’ (159).

94. What one could call Ferguson’s early civilized stage is one with property laws and a rather sophisticated system of government, but without an advanced separation of arts. For example, in the civilized Roman republic, wealth was acquired by conquest, not by commerce (EHCS 4.3, 181). Sparta is another example (PMPS vol. I, 3.9, 252).

95. Forbes points to Ferguson’s ‘almost Nietzschean’ critique of commercial man (1966, xxviii).

96. For example, Berry (2013) and Craig Smith (2019) offer accounts of progress in Ferguson that bring him rather close to Hume’s and Adam Smith’s optimistic accounts vis-à-vis the conjectural stage of commercial society. Cf. note 104.

97. Cf. EHCS 5.5, 220; 6.5, 247–8.

98. Cf. McDaniel (2013a, ch. 6).

99. EHCS 6.6.

100. As has been observed repeatedly, Ferguson thinks that conflict can serve a productive role in keeping both society and individual free, vigorous and – hence – in progress. For example, Kalyvas and Katznelson state that ‘Ferguson’s agonism mediates between Machiavelli’s republican appreciation of conflict as the underlying source of political freedom and a perfectionist and progressive understanding of the person that later achieved clear expression in John Stuart Mill’s liberal individualism’ (2008, 75). However, such a proto-liberal reading of Ferguson’s view on individual progress may obscure the more traditional, religious framework in which this view is ultimately embedded (cf. infra).

101. EHCS 3.7, 162.

102. Cf. IMP 1.1.12, 34: ‘Men have excelled in poetry, while they were yet rude in history or science’.

103. With regard to scholarly work, see EHCS 3.8, 171. With regard to war: EHCS 5.4, 219. With regard to moral science: PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 310. McDaniel points to the Rousseauian echo here (2013b, 563).

104. In his comprehensive Ferguson-study, Craig Smith gives a lot of weight to the development of the rule of law as a benchmark of unambiguous progress (cf. Smith 2019, 156). While the rule of law is certainly of momentous importance for Ferguson, Smith does, in my view, not sufficiently distinguish and point to the potential tension between what I call lower-level and
higher-level progress. Ferguson’s distinction between these types of progress gives him a measure of critical space vis-à-vis the merits of modern, law-governed commercial societies that is fundamentally different from what we find in Hume or Adam Smith. To be sure, Craig Smith does point to Ferguson’s peculiarly active conception of human nature, but in Smith’s interpretation there is not much tension between the progress towards an advanced commercial society and the demands of our active, progressive nature: ‘Action in pursuit of “business” is just as healthy for the human character as action in other fields’ (2019, 169). While commerce is indeed suited to our active nature, I think Ferguson maintains throughout his corpus that, as a basically self-interested activity, it is inferior to inherently social and public-spirited activities such as politics, the military or even risky sports. Ferguson does not hide his reservations as regards the merits of the self-serving, secondarily virtuous behaviour commonly found among merchants: ‘nor is that person altogether contemptible, who is fair in his dealings only, that he may be rich’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.9, 253).

105. Cf. EHCS 2.2, 89; PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 312. In IMP, Ferguson calls it the first tendency of religion ‘to make men love wisdom and beneficence, as being the characteristics of the supreme being, whom they adore; and to make them love their situations, and their duties, as being appointed by providence’ (6.2, 177).

106. Cf. Aurelius (2013): ‘The person living with the gods is the one who constantly shows them his mind content with what is assigned to it, and doing what the guardian spirit wants, which Zeus has given to each person, as a fragment of himself, as his overseer and guide’ (5.27).

107. Cf. Inwood (2017, 80).

108. My reading here opposes Hill’s, who sees Fergusonian religious progress – which she describes as increasing insight in the mind of God – as strongly correlated to what I call lower-level progress (cf. Hill 2006, 120). Her argument is complex; hence I must leave an explicit refutation for another occasion.

109. PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 305. Cf. EHCS 2.3, 103.

110. Craig Smith also points out that Fergusonian elites are expected to disseminate ‘improved’ moral beliefs through society (2019, 85). That Ferguson talks about true religion as the ‘highest point to which moral science conducts the mind of man’ (PMPS vol. I, 3.13, 313) suggests, in my view, that such religion is a crucial foundation of the elite’s educational task. Therefore, Smith’s suggestion that ‘Ferguson’s references to providence, like his references to nature, point to a general deistic outlook, but they rarely if ever, do any active work in explanation’ (2019, 132) does not do sufficient justice to the civilizing and morally-psychologically invigorating role that Ferguson attributes to true religion. It is a real force in history.

111. Cf. EHCS 4.2, 177.

112. EHCS 4.1, 174.

113. EHCS 2.3, 103–4.

114. Duchet analyses these different stages with great precision, using both DOI and the more detailed account of EOL. She also enumerates the gradual changes between the original state of nature and the first revolution, such as the first competition with animals and other humans, the invention of fire and the beginning of ‘une socialité réfléchie’ (1995, 376).

115. DOI pt. II, 166 (OC III, 170).

116. Cf. Duchet (1995, 333).

117. Hill (2006, 67).
118. ‘The recovery of this golden age in human history provided Rousseau with an evaluative benchmark against which subsequent developments could be viewed as corrupting the species, which is ultimately why he diverged so sharply from Mandeville and other defenders of commercial society at the time’ (Douglass 2017, 610).
119. Cf. Cohen (2010, 126–7).
120. Neuhouser (2008, 65–7).
121. Cf. Neuhouser (2014, 30).
122. Cf. note 92.
123. Neudleman (2017, 111); Melzer (1990, 94). Brooke (2012, 202) concurs with Neudleman.
124. The transition from natural society to political society marks our break with the state of nature; it turns savage into barbarian. Cf. DOI pt. II, 174 (OC III, 178–9).
125. For example, see the quotation of Forbes, supra.
126. Cf. Brooke (2012, 202).
127. Cf. Baltzly (2018, section 5).
128. Cf. Brooke (2012): ‘Rousseau’s vision of undominated republican citizens living together in freedom seems to me to be more than generically Roman in inspiration; it is specifically Stoic’ (202). The idea of life under the general will as free from bondage to the passions has Platonic origins as well (cf. Riley 1986).
129. Cf. SC 4.4.
130. Neuhouser sees Rousseau as being closer to Smith in this regard (2008, 230).
131. ‘No doubt there is a universal justice emanating from reason alone’ (SC 2.6, 66; OC III, 378).
132. Cf. Neuhouser (2008, 235). In Ferguson, there hardly is a cosmopolitan political dimension. In this regard, he is yet further removed from Stoic politics than Rousseau. Nonetheless, the Stoics were not fully averse to a degree of ‘political particularism’, either (cf. Skjønsberg 2017, 8).
133. One could think of Descartes and Spinoza.
134. Cf. Neudleman (2017): ‘If free institutions are treated as instrumental to the creation of a republic of virtue, then the Social Contract can sit alongside the Reveries, and, as we will see later, Claren and Emile, as examples of ancient wholeness reconstituted in a modern context’ (7).
135. For Ferguson, see also his History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic.
136. SC 4.8.
137. Cf. Gourevitch (2000, 586); E bk. I, 37 (OC IV, 245).
138. Duchet regards the religious, providential dimension as more pronounced in EOL: the image of purity and transparency in Rousseau’s description of the Golden Age there is wedded to the religious sentiment that God wanted us to be sociable (1995, 353).
139. Cf. EHCS 6.5, 249.
140. EHCS 4.4, 191–3.
141. ‘the influence of laws ( . . . ) is not any magic power descending from shelves that are loaded with books, but is, in reality, the influence of men resolved to be free’ (Cf. EHCS 6.5, 249).
142. I would like to thank Simone Zurbuchen for her insightful comments on earlier versions of this article, as well as for our fruitful and pleasant cooperation during the Marie Sklodowska-Curie fellowship which I held at the University of Lausanne. For his help and feedback, I would also like to thank Frederick Neuhouser. Finally, my thanks are due to an anonymous referee of Philosophy & Social Criticism. The project from which the present article derives
was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 707042.

References

Aurelius, Marcus. 2013. *Meditations: Books 1-6*, edited and translated by Christopher Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baltzly, Dirk. 2018. “Stoicism.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. Accessed August 1, 2018. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/stoicism/.

Bijlsma, Rudmer. 2019. “Alienation in Commercial Society: The Republican Critique of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson.” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 57, 3: 347–77.

Berry, Christopher J. 2013. *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Binoche, Bertrand. 2014. “Montesquieu, Rousseau dans l’*Essai sur l’histoire de la société civile*.” In *Autour de l’Essay on the History of Civil Society d’Adam Ferguson*, edited by Clotilde Prunier, 45–56. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest.

Binoche, Bertrand. 2018. *Nommer l’histoire: parcours philosophiques*. Paris: EHESS.

Brooke, Christopher 2012. *Philosophic Pride: Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Cicero. 2001. *On Moral Ends*, edited by Julia Annas and translated by Raphael Woolf. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Joshua. 2010. *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Douglass, Robin. 2017. “Morality and Sociability in Commercial Society: Smith, Rousseau – and Mandeville.” *The Review of Politics* 79: 597–620.

Douglass, Robin. 2018. “Theorising Commercial Society: Rousseau, Smith and Hont.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 17, no. 4: 501–11.

Duchet, Michèle. 1995. *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*. Paris: Albin Michel.

Ferguson, Adam 1792. *Principles of Moral and Political Science. Volumes I and II*. Edinburgh: Strahan, Caddel and Creech.

Ferguson, Adam. 1800. *Institutes of Moral Philosophy (A New Edition, Enlarged)*. Basil: James Decker.

Ferguson, Adam. 1996. *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, edited by Fania Oz-Salzberger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Forbes, Duncan. 1966. “Introduction.” In *Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, edited by Duncan Forbes, xiii–xli. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Goldschmidt, Victor M. 1974. *Anthropologie et politique: Les principes du système de Rousseau*. Paris: Vrin.

Gourevitch, Victor. 2000. “Rousseau on Providence.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 3: 565–611.

Hanley, Ryan P. 2008. “Commerce and Corruption: Rousseau’s Diagnosis and Adam Smith’s Cure.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 2: 137–58.

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

Honneth, Axel. 2007. *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Pocock, John G. A. 1975. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

“Primitivism.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed March 11, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/topic/primitivism-philosophy.

Rasmussen, Dennis C. 2008. *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith’s Response to Rousseau*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

Riley, Patrick. 1986. *The General Will before Rousseau*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1964. “Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes”; “Du contrat social”; “Projet de constitution pour la Corse.” In *Œuvres complètes. Tome III*, edited by Bernard Gagnebin, and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1969. “Emile, ou de l’éducation.” In *Œuvres complètes. Tome IV*, edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1979. *Emile, or on Education*, translated and edited by Allan Bloom. New York City, NY: Basic Books.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1995. “Éssai sur l’origine des langues.” In *Œuvres complètes. Tome V*, edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Paris: Gallimard.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997. “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men”. In “The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings”, translated and edited by Victor Gourevitch, 113–222. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1997. “The Social Contract.” In *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, translated and edited by Victor Gourevitch, 39–152. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1998. “Essay on the Origin of Languages.” In *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 7, translated and edited by John T. Scott, 289–332. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 2005. “Plan for a Constitution of Corsica.” In *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 11, translated and edited by Judith R. Bush, and Christopher Kelly, 121–65. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England.

Sagar, Paul. 2018. *The Opinion of Mankind: Sociability and the Theory of the State from Hobbes to Smith*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Schliesser, Eric. 2017. *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scott, John T. 2006. “The Theodicy of the Second Discourse: The ‘Pure State of Nature’ and Rousseau’s Political Thought.” In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers. Volume II*, edited by John. T. Scott, 225–56. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sebastiani, Silvia. 2013. *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, translated by Jeremy Carden. New York City, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Skjönsberg, Max. 2017. “Adam Ferguson on Partisanship, Party Conflict, and Popular Participation.” *Modern Intellectual History* 16, no. 1: 1–28.

Smith, Adam. 1982. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by Alec MacFie, and David Raphael. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press.

Smith, Craig 2019. *Adam Ferguson and the Idea of Civil Society: Moral Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Starobinski, Jean. 1971. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle, suivi de sept essais sur Rousseau*. Paris: Gallimard.

Stewart, Dugald. 1980. “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.” In Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects: with Dugald Stewart’s ‘Account of Adam Smith’,* edited by William Wightman, John Bryce, and Ian Ross, 263–351. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Walzer, Arthur E. 2003. “Quintilian’s ‘Vir Bonus’ and the Stoic Wise Man.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33, no. 4: 25–41.

Woolf, Raphael. 2015. *Cicero: The Philosophy of a Roman Sceptic*. Abingdon: Routledge.