

# Introduction

*They speak of human pursuits, as if the whole difficulty were to find something to do: they fix on some frivolous occupation, as if there was nothing that deserved to be done: they consider what tends to the good of their fellow-creatures as a disadvantage to themselves: they fly from every scene, in which any efforts of vigour are required, or in which they might be allured to perform any service to their country. We misapply our compassion in pitying the poor; it were much more justly applied to the rich, who become the first victims of that wretched insignificance, into which the members of every corrupted state, by the tendency of their weaknesses, and their vices, are in haste to plunge themselves.*

— Adam Ferguson on the “Corruption Incident to Polished Nations”<sup>1</sup>

“They,” “they,” “they,” “they.” Adam Ferguson’s ardent repetition raises the natural question of just *who* “they” might be. His conclusion to the passage offers a clue, of course, but the reader of Ferguson’s *Essay* would by this point already have known who the “they” are. His concerns have been made plain; the “rich” are identified explicitly as those citizens who actively forsake political (especially martial) participation in favor of opulent passivity. He has in mind, perhaps, the polished gentry who wish to flaunt publicly the true extent of their private leisure. Yet his criticism of the indolent and bored seems to apply even more broadly and appositely as it extends across the centuries between his time and ours. Presently, “they” could represent almost anyone, regardless of wealth. The rhetorical humor of Ferguson’s colorful pronouncement is a fruit of its prophetic poignancy. His frustration imparts wisdom late-moderns can readily identify, and thus we glimpse here a flicker of what is to come, both for our inquiry into Ferguson’s moral and political thought-world, as well as for his pronouncements upon modern commercial society. The “they” he chastises as pitiable may in many respects include late-modern societies within that broad third-person plural!

1. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. F. Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 246.

This narrow example captures the wider, more generic aim of the essays that follow: to work our way conceptually inside Ferguson's mind and allow his insights to illumine contemporary questions. For the purposes of this introduction it would be best to start on the wider view and taper incrementally, contextualizing each step along the way till we reach Ferguson himself. As a means of provisional orientation, the central question of this book takes the following line: What kinds of moral and political tension did the reorganization of economic goals introduce to early-capitalist societies? Each chapter will in turn take a different approach to this question by focusing on Ferguson's dominant theoretical interests—history, action, and political institutions. To understand why the period, place, and people in question merit our attention and to set the stage for the chapters to come, it would be useful to take preliminary account of *why* our inquiry has settled on this particular conceptual territory. Why is eighteenth-century Scotland an optimal context for this study? What makes Adam Ferguson most appealing? If moral and political implications of early-capitalist societies are of foremost interest to this inquiry, readers may ask, why focus on a comparatively neglected theorist of eighteenth-century Scotland?

First, why eighteenth-century Britain? This particular period of British history is unquestionably among its most distinguished. Intellectually and culturally the nation pulses with enthusiastic expectation. The popular feeling was that the country had made a political and social turn of sorts, entering a favored position historically and a new era of civil liberty; the Glorious Revolution, union of parliaments, and fiscally secure Hanover monarchy achieved over a twenty-year period also doubly reinforced this sense of stability and promise. On an economic plane, stability is the fertile soil in which commercial life is rooted and hope is the water that continually nourishes it. Stability and hope mutually foster one another in the garden of society. With this growth we find, unsurprisingly, sustained and notably widespread discussion of economic policy.

The self-fortifying nature of the stability-hope duality heralds a shift in the way politics is contemplated in the eighteenth century: from consideration of *governmental* modalities to consideration of *politico-economic* modalities. Political thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had been largely concerned with questions of authority, order, and functions of government; now the tide has shifted, and weighing most heavily on the mind of eighteenth-century Britons is the authority, order, and function of political economy. Yet it is still reflected upon as a subject of *philosophic* interest. Political economy had not yet been mathematized and would remain a subject of prudent deliberation,

not of quantification. By late century, however, especially after the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, the primacy of philosophy in commercial theory would begin to give way, but not until. That gradual transition was aided by increased acceptance of a Newtonian world-picture. "Natural" theories and designations enter their ascendancy and eventually subsume the discipline of philosophy itself to pure natural authority. By the mid-eighteenth century "natural" authority had also become the rubric of political economy, and political economy in turn had become the supreme demonstration of natural authority. This mutual self-justification would have its most significant impact on how the organic relation between private pursuit of wealth and public pursuit of justice was understood. Division between public and private collapses in the economic sphere and the two are consistently assumed to co-mingle; that is, private commercial pursuits are viewed as publicly advantageous, just as public pursuits would be viewed as privately advantageous. Thus, the reasons for Britain's importance during this period are threefold—a popular sense of entering a new political era of liberty, a shifting of attention from governmental to politico-economic modalities, and a breakdown of divisions between private pursuit of wealth and public pursuit of justice.

The interesting question was not *whether* God appointed political authority, but *how* that authority was to be lawfully wielded. A notion like "covenant," for example, lingers in theological debate for much of the eighteenth century, especially when those debates skirt political intrigue, but with the additional freight of Lockean contract, as though the two were synonymous. This contractarian formulation of political authority runs theoretically parallel to vehement advocacy for the divine right of kings as fundamentally providential. The issue of divine right and social covenant were, however, but two strands of a much broader eighteenth-century debate over the nature and function of providence itself. Newtonian world-pictures threw metaphysics into disfavor and initiated revisionist theories of natural law, virtue, and even redemption. With time it would become difficult even to distinguish a philosopher's appeal to "providence" from his appeal to "natural law." Natural law seemed to capture empirically the providential mode. The deist threat had not yet fully materialized and would not until the turn of the century. Questions of God's immanent activity in the world bore directly on the basic religious experience of every believer: if God's will is expressed most elegantly in the natural law, then how is one to grasp the experience of God? Terms like "superstition" and "enthusiasm" emerged as referential pillars of ecclesial debates surrounding this very question. For the "superstitious," experience of God is mediated through sacraments, icons, relics, or pilgrimages, or else anything

that might channel spiritual communiqués. Enthusiasm, on the other hand, referred to the direct and unmediated physical experience of God, recognizing sensual receptivity through (sometimes bizarre) bodily displays as the climactic validation of divine privilege, sometimes to the point of equivocating worship itself with corporeal enjoyment of God.

As a generic summary of these theological debates, we might say that the tendency was to reimagine the old in light of the new and to identify divine *telos* or commandments with the experience of natural law. Creation under human dominion gradually improves and progresses, and the original, all-sustaining power keeping civilization on its stadal course is the natural law. The tradition of faithful Christian obedience to divine commands artificially narrows to pure conformity with the physical demands of natural law achieved through moderation of passions. The binding authority of law and government likewise condenses into empirically verifiable patterns of how the world works and, in particular, how societies unite and prosper. The tendency in eighteenth-century theology is to clarify what God accomplished in his initial creative act by interpreting contemporary circumstances as decisive expressions of his potential intentions.

Theology thus becomes worldly in all the wrong ways. Providence is natural law established by the faculty of reason. The world appears to operate in such-and-such a way and to such-and-such an end, and by these appearances is duly judged as natural or unnatural, providential or artificial. What emerges from this view is a concept of providence *identical* to human judgments upon advantages or benefits arising from the intellect, civil society, or natural world. If something seems advantageous or beneficial to me, to civil society, or to the natural world, then that thing or event must be providential, seeing as *every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning* (James 1:17). And it is precisely in light of this understanding of providence that what had traditionally been considered wrongdoing within the Christian tradition could on this account become a Godsend. Envy and covetousness, for example, become viewed as essential to social cohesion and instrumental to the machine of industry. Righteousness, the other side of this polarity, becomes viewed as conformity to law, a masculine virtue approved and conferred by the public. Sin and righteousness are reinterpreted by many theorists of the period in a way categorically detached from their Christian origin or content. Sin is no longer a transgression against God, but an injury to the accepted norms of public happiness. Righteousness is no longer associated with salvific grace, or the heart of God, but with conformity to the erected standards of institutions and customs.

Maneuvering sin and righteousness into new positions meant that justice, too, would require realignment, which often took the form of conceptual subordination to the possession of property. By making property a condition of justice—indeed its very starting point—an instrument of commerce dislodged justice as a traditionally overarching political authority. Justice becomes defined in terms of distribution and a definite lack of temperate moderation. Ironically, this notion of justice was by no means all-inclusive. Some, like George Turnbull, viewed equality as idealistic and utopian, while others, including Hume, depicted equality as a viable political goal inspired by extensive commercial growth. By 1764, although ranks in society were seen as essential to its lasting cohesion, theorists could not at the same time resist the enchantments of equity and thus slipped into the unavoidable tension of advocating a necessarily stratified society and its endless pursuit of equality. Viewed *historically*, this was not a tension in the slightest. The progressive advancement of humankind through the ages is a story of superseding economic epochs. For Hume and Smith, concepts like justice and authority are themselves shaped by the overwhelming momentum of commercial improvement and thereby lead civil society to a state of affairs in which commerce *precedes* political authority as a commanding power. Divine providence is viewed within this conjectural model of history as a more or less redemptive and sanctifying power. Such a notion no doubt reflects certain commitments to Christian orthodoxy—to make right and to make holy, for example—but is not an adequately discriminating account of providence. *What*, exactly, is God redeeming? *What kind* of improvements can or should be rendered? Here the meaning of history becomes a story of an inevitable future, where refinements seek only further refinements, luxuries still greater luxuries, and innovations to still higher innovations. This progressive improvement, readers are told, is ultimately what makes one happy.

As a point of clarification, the ascendance of natural authority to theoretical supremacy did not at the same time subvert habits of framing political questions in broadly theological terms. In fact, doctrines of providence remained the centripetal force of eighteenth-century theology, as is evident in the innumerable attempts to reconcile the idea of God acting immanently within a closed Newtonian world. Natural theology now required natural foundations and natural legitimacy. One of the overarching tasks later in this book, however, will be to rebut the popular characterization of the eighteenth century, particularly of Britain, as an age of enlightened deism. Isolated figures, like Samuel Clarke, obviously entertain certain deistic commitments, but as will be seen later there is no reason to consider this the dominant or even popular theological point of view.<sup>2</sup> Details of that argument will be rehearsed

later. For now I wish only to note that philosophical inquiry of the period retained theological shape and did not altogether jettison its Christian heritage. Arguments were still required to show some degree of theological fidelity, even if the object and method of philosophy had become “natural” and less “revealed.”

Having offered a few qualifications for the question of “why eighteenth-century Britain?” it would be useful now to consider the narrower question of “why Scotland?” As a point of clarification, this question does not mean to include the whole of Scotland, but primarily southern Scotland and its vibrant port towns. The term “vibrant” is a particularly apt description in this regard, since Scotland had benefited richly from the constitutional changes inaugurated at the century’s turn by the union of parliaments.<sup>3</sup> The country had prospered politically and economically under these new constitutional arrangements and this would lead naturally to an enrichment of philosophical reflection. Of course, Scotland’s philosophical tradition was already of some repute; the new commercial confidence enjoyed at midcentury simply gave this tradition its needed relief and leisure. Naming a few members in this talent pool vividly illustrates the nation’s philosophic eminence: Gershom Carmichael, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, Henry Home (Lord Kames), Thomas Reid, George Turnbull, George Campbell, Hugh Blair, James Beattie, Alexander Gerard, Dugald Stewart, Adam Ferguson, and a host of politicians and armchair intellectuals trained in the humanist arts.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1760s and ’70s Scotland had become the epicenter of philosophical engagement and, significantly, almost all the names included in the list above dwelt in Edinburgh at one time or other, some permanently. Edinburgh was *the*

2. Characterization of this century as an age of enlightened deism has been repeated most forcefully by Charles Taylor in both *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) and *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). Karl Barth intimates similarly in the first chapter of *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: SCM, 1972). On a separate track, many intellectual historians have utilized this presumption of latent deism as a sign of democratic replacement of hierarchical structures, whether ecclesial or civil. See, for example, “Scepticism, Priestcraft, and Toleration,” in *Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Political Thought*, ed. M. Goldie and R. Wolker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). An alternative interpretation of the “long eighteenth century” that I follow closely throughout this book is J. C. D. Clark’s meticulous study in *English Society: 1660-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For an example of the deism mentioned above see Samuel Clarke, *The Works* (New York: Garland, 1978).

3. A brief retelling of the unification story is offered at the end of chapter 1.

4. Francis Hutcheson, of course, immigrated to Scotland from Ireland, which may also serve as testament to Scotland’s wider philosophical attraction.

place to be for intellectual stimulation.<sup>5</sup> As a city of much notoriety, achieved through the help of a new constitutional order and political consciousness, Edinburgh serves as an intense microcosm of the period's unique cultural fixtures. Given this cultural activity it is therefore unsurprising that improved economic conditions would prompt philosophers to contemplate the nature of political economy itself. How were circumstances once so dire—failed colonial charters, domestic famine, constant threats of rebellion—commercially transformed in less than three decades? Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular, promptly became the locus for working out how the nation and city became a commercial success story, and its philosophers would interrogate the material causes of commercial growth with matchless ability and breadth. We must not forget, moreover, that these are immensely practical theorists who wish to understand why life is lived as it is and how its conditions might be improved upon. Such commonsense practicality explains why it proves so difficult to find an essay of the period falling outside the disciplines of history, morals, or politics—the objects considered are socially constructive.

So, of all places, why is Scotland a site of such tremendous intellectual activity? Its unique commercial advantages stimulated a new political consciousness that would lead naturally to a concentration of philosophical reflection on political and economic questions of the day. The Scottish Enlightenment is, after all, an exceptional phenomenon indebted to political stability and organized around philosophical personalities, making it an ideal setting for examining the moral and political tensions of early capitalist societies. How capably the philosophies emerging from these circumstances were reinvested into Scottish life is touched upon indirectly in chapters 2 and 4.

Of those distinguished Scottish philosophers listed above, why select Adam Ferguson as a principal conversation partner for this study? The question, in fact, gives rise to another that is perhaps more important: Why, exactly, has he remained so inconspicuous? Why is he a *surprise* selection? This thesis offers a litany of reasons why he should not have been so marginalized by modern moral and political historiography and situates him, alternatively, among the earliest modernity critics. Perhaps he has been marginalized or overlooked because his criticisms did not, as it were, “win the day.” Either way, it is the cautious subtlety of his thought, the sheer radiance of argument resistant to the popular tactics of British moral and political theory, that makes him an extraordinary figure of the period. Where his peers are optimistic, he is often

5. Edinburgh's intellectual prominence was arguably preceded historically by Aberdeen and Glasgow; however, Edinburgh's establishment as the nation's capital and bastion of political intrigue ultimately sanctified it as a place of substantive intellectual activity.

pessimistic; where his peers see wealth, he sees slavery; where his peers see progress, he sees decay. Indeed he tended regularly to see things his own way.

To get a better sense of his general placement within the wider tapestry of eighteenth-century Scotland it would be useful here to offer a few brief biographical remarks.<sup>6</sup> Adam Ferguson was reared in a Kirk minister's family on the invisible Perthshire border between the Scottish highlands and lowlands. His position of birth, both familiarly and geographically, would prove crucial to his professional career, affording him a rigorous classical education and advantageous connections to the nobility. By the time of his matriculation to St. Andrews in the early 1740s he spoke both Gaelic and English fluently—an ability that would later secure his placement as chaplain to the Black Watch—and was steeped in Greek and Latin classics. Completing his St. Andrews degree at nineteen years of age he then relocated to Edinburgh to continue studies in Divinity. Here he would forge lifelong friendships with churchman peers and receive his first introductions to modern philosophic methods. His studies would be cut short, however, by a hastened appointment to the 43rd Highland Regiment (Black Watch) as deputy chaplain. A Gaelic-speaking ordinand of exceptional ability with Hanoverian sympathies proved the ideal candidate for such a strategic post. His *Sermon in Ersh* delivered to the Watch on the eve of the '45 Rebellion is a marvelous example of midcentury political theology.<sup>7</sup> He intended to accept ministry of a Kirk parish outside Edinburgh after decommission from the Watch, but a failed application and the death of his father in 1754 eventually forced him to accept an offer as tutor to a young Scottish lord on continental tour. Upon return to Scotland, Ferguson inadvertently entered a tumultuous shifting of social and ecclesial tides. He swiftly became engrossed in civil debates over militia policy and Kirk debates over the morality of stage plays—in particular, the public scandal surrounding the “*Douglas* affair.” Although he would eventually lose the debate over establishing militias, his support of stage plays on moral and biblical grounds held sway by making it clear that the arts both form and disclose the character of civil society simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> By positioning himself on the side of his friend and *Douglas* playwright, John Home, Ferguson joined the swelling ranks of what has been described as a group of Scottish moderates.<sup>9</sup> Their

6. All such remarks are derived from Jane Fagg's invaluable biography of Ferguson in *Correspondence of Adam Ferguson, Vol. I*, ed. V. Merolle (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), xix–cxvii.

7. For an introduction to and transcription of this *Sermon* see Matthew Arbo, “Adam Ferguson's Sermon in the Ersh Language: A Word from 2 Samuel on Martial Responsibility and Political Order,” *Political Theology* 12, no. 6 (2011).

8. Adam Ferguson, *The Morality of Stage Plays Seriously Considered* (Edinburgh: 1757).



victories here and on future issues would alter the course of many theo-political Kirk trajectories.

Ferguson's appointment as Advocates Librarian in early 1757 at David Hume's recommendation would be the first step in a long and distinguished academic career. Roughly two years later, and again at the recommendation of Hume, Ferguson was appointed to the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. This appointment brought to rest temporarily his many years of wandering and confirmed his academic, not ministerial, vocation. This appointment and confirmation did not halt his faithful service to the church, for he served continually as an elder and Assembly representative throughout the 1760s and '70s. In any event, it was not until his appointment to the more fitting Chair of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy that he published his more reputable treatises, which include *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* (1783), and *Principles of Moral and Political Science* (1792). Each of the texts was well received at the time of their publication, though it would be the *Essay* that ultimately secured his reputation in the history of political thought. Socially, Ferguson was very much the man about town, involving himself with various societies and supporting strategic political causes. He was a coveted conversation partner described amiably by all who knew him. Political involvement would eventually secure his invitation to join the Carlisle Commission as a negotiator to the recently victorious American colonies. But having failed even to make an appearance before the Continental Congress, the Commission returned to Britain just in time for Ferguson to fall terribly, almost fatally, ill. He resigned his chair shortly after recovery and retired to the countryside to try his hand (yet again) at farming the Scottish borders. Eight years later, at the age of seventy, he embarked on a long-awaited trip to the continent for his induction into the Berlin Academy of Sciences and subsequent leisure tour of Italian states. Returning to Britain he farmed his plot on the borders countryside another ten years before admitting, at age eighty-seven, that he had become too feeble to maintain his estate and would retire to St. Andrews for its convenient proximity to family. Adam Ferguson died there on February 22, 1816, aged ninety-three, and was buried in the old cathedral grounds along the northern wall. His unusually long, energetic, and eclectic life tells a great deal about the sort of person we are listening to—a practical man with practical concerns, whose ideas and sensibilities are derived from concrete

9. Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985). For the general purpose it serves, the term ("moderate") more or less works.

experiences of political life. At different junctures in life Adam Ferguson was a classicist, chaplain, tutor, traveler, librarian, elder, professor, diplomat, farmer, and socialite. The philosophic and contextual relevance of Ferguson for the central question is suitably assured, for he speaks to the question when and where it first arose.

Interrogating the moral and political tensions of early-modern commercial theory at the point where standard policy and procedure began to be called into question can isolate and illumine crucial ethical questions emerging from the present configurations of our economic order. In the course of this study it will become evident that some of these questions are perennial, while others remain unique to the eighteenth-century Scottish experience. Be that as it may, the broader contours of arguments considered here can directly inform moral deliberation over the theological origins, means, and ends of modern economies. Now, having said that, it is equally essential that some indication be given as to *how* this historiographic program will be conducted. To prevent entanglement in overly complex methodologies, Adam Ferguson has been enlisted as a conversation partner and guide. Every attempt has been made to grasp the questions and circumstances through his eyes, empathizing with them when possible, engaging the figures he engages, and familiarizing with his way of seeing. In other words, the goal has been to understand what Ferguson would speak to contemporary states of affairs were he given the chance.

Three additional qualifications of some recurrent tactical decisions would be helpful at this point. First, modern thinkers who do not necessarily “belong” to the eighteenth-century world are consulted periodically. Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Robert Spaemann, and Reinhart Koselleck, for example, make occasional appearances to demonstrate why Ferguson’s problems are not entirely unique and to help build an interpretive framework for understanding what is theoretically at stake. Connections between such thinkers and our eighteenth-century subjects will vary in strength; sometimes the connection will seem tacit or loose, while at others more direct. In every case, however, the aim is to widen momentarily the picture we are considering to include voices that may help us better understand it.

Second, there is the matter of eighteenth-century literary styles. In this age, concision and elegance are united to the enhancement of both. John Locke and David Hume are notable stylistic exemplars in this respect; their prose transmits lucidity in every turn of phrase. Well-placed irony is utilized with greater regularity and confidence, and very typically adorned in elaborate idioms. Aptitude for stretching sentences to their maximum potential also seems to have been especially prominent in the long eighteenth century. Often the

relief of arriving at a sentence period feels not unlike coming up for air at the end of an underwater swim! Such length, along with the necessary support of seemingly innumerable clauses, makes the task of quoting these figures with brevity inordinately arduous. I have therefore adopted the technique of breaking quotations into parts so as to convey the intended argument as clearly and succinctly as possible without losing the passage's fundamental spirit. Leaving these passages intact would require disruptive block quotes, robbing the essay of momentum.

Third, and lastly, allow me to qualify the use and non-use of certain economic terminology. Despite Adam Smith being heralded as the father of modern economics, and despite the Scottish Enlightenment's role as incubator of early capitalism, the word "capitalism" as an economic signifier does not appear in the literature treated by this thesis. Neither does the term "economy" for that matter. The transliterated *oconomy* makes rare appearances here and there, harkening to ancient notions of household management and agricultural trade, but its eighteenth-century application lacks the conceptual freight of contemporary references. "Commerce" is their word of choice and I have tried to follow them in using it, though, admittedly, the terms above are also occasionally employed when most fitting to the case. This care with economic terminology has been equally applied to other conceptual genres.

This book aims to contextualize Ferguson's philosophical contributions historically, bring his preoccupations to the foreground, and affirm his defense of Christian metaphysics. Chapter 1 is largely an exposition of Ferguson's philosophy of history. It begins with a brief rehearsal of his Scottish peers' understanding of historical progress and concludes with Ferguson's critique of conjectural models. Special attention is given in this chapter to the relevance these models have for growth variables in modern economics. Chapter 2 is also predominantly expositional, outlining in detail Ferguson's theory of action. As before, the aim is to distinguish him from his contemporaries and to demonstrate how his theory of action squares with certain Christian commitments. Particularly interesting on his account is the negative impact of much commercial practice upon human initiative and political exertion. In chapter 3 I focus almost exclusively on Ferguson's moral and political critique of popular economic policy advanced in his *Essay*. His preoccupation with establishing militias remains central to his wider political hermeneutic, for as the defining issue of his early political pamphlets it applies to the troublesome corroboration of commerce and militarism outlined in the *Essay* itself. Upon rehearsing these arguments I then apply Ferguson's pessimistic conclusion to contemporary economic realities. Lastly, in chapter 4, I identify three of

Ferguson's metaphysical opponents—determinacy, universality, and romanticism—and affirm his suspicion that when incorporated philosophically each distorts an authentically Christian vision of reality and the moral order upheld by it.

Each chapter of this book builds upon the next to support something like the following argument: The goals of modern commerce and the methods used to achieve them generate irresolvable moral and political antinomies—to the extent that modern economies remain inherently progressive—by inhibiting or altogether eliminating authentic human action and by undermining the very political institutions intended to sustain commercial life. The several premises supporting this conclusion are articulated in each chapter. If the poignancy of Ferguson's judgment occasionally takes the reader by surprise, you are not alone; it serves as testimony to how little has changed since the late eighteenth century and thus the moral contradictions of the modern marketplace speak as truthfully to our perils as they did three hundred years ago to the Scot. This poignancy will repeatedly validate the contention that study of a less prominent moral philosopher of the eighteenth century can furnish new insights into questions of immanent relevance for Christian political theology.

If Ferguson can help us ask better ethical questions about modern commercial exchange, then this book will have served part of its purpose. If it persuades the reader that Economy can itself become a tyrant, negating the freedom and abundance it promises always to supply, then it will also have served the other part. The self-defeating nature of modern economy is premised on the antithesis between means and ends—false ends inevitably undermine even the most precise means. And thus an increasing number of “theys” are swept up into the abstract confusion of economic misdirection and left scratching their heads over which exchanges are truly worth transacting and how they ultimately contribute to the common good. Such confusion is perhaps the final product of having misplaced treasure: *for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matt. 6:21).