

Adam Ferguson

Liberalism, Republicanism, Marxism¹

Summary

In the first section, on Liberalism, the author compares Ferguson's texts from *An Essay* and from the *Principles*, with texts of authors of the European liberal tradition, like Constant, Tocqueville, Burke, Croce, von Hayek and others, observing that not only the same concepts, but often the same wording, occur both in Ferguson and in these authors.

Constant, in particular, spent a period of almost two years, in 1783-85, in Edinburgh, and certainly attended Ferguson's lectures, when the philosopher was about to retire from teaching. His own concepts and Ferguson's concepts appear strikingly similar.

In the second section, on Republicanism, the author confronts the recent literature on Republicanism or Civic Humanism, maintaining that its pretence of replacing Liberalism is illusory. Republicanism is in fact no more than an ideology -after all a quite recent 'discovery' of some historians- and, in the Hegelian sense, it represents just one of the moments of the contradiction, just one of the moments composing the whole, or *Gesamtheit*. And the history of mankind is a totality, or *Gesamtheit*.

Only Liberalism contains both moments of the contradiction, that of progress and that of conservation, at the same time. Therefore, it constitutes a superior synthesis, because it is the consciousness of history itself, and cannot be replaced by an inferior moment.

In the third section, the author observes that both Marx and Engels, not to mention subsequent authors, like Antonio Gramsci, distinguished philosophical materialism from the philosophy of praxis (i.e., Marxism). Therefore, Marxism must be considered as an ideology, as the ideology of particular social classes. And Ferguson's thought in no case can be set in the category of materialism, that is the philosophical category of Enlightenment, instead. Ferguson's philosophy, by contrast, is essentially Romantic, Historicist, Liberal, not to mention its substantial inspiration from Stoicism and Ciceronianism.

In conclusion, the inadequacy of both Civic Humanist or Republican, and of Marxist schemes, to understand and explain his philosophy, does not seem to need further demonstration.

1) Liberalism

This paper will consider Ferguson essentially from a European point of view, as a European figure, the point of its author being that eighteenth-century Europe was still a unified entity,² although in that century national languages assumed importance, producing the great writers, who wrote for the societies of their own countries: men like Hume, Gibbon, Burke, in Great Britain; Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire in France; Herder, Kant, Schiller, in Germany; Vico and Beccaria in Italy. Until then, the *lingua franca* in Europe had been Latin,³ and thanks to it, the world of learning could communicate, and understand each part with the others.

¹ This paper was delivered on 3 July 2009, for the ECSSS Conference, held at St Andrews, Scotland, on 2-5 July 2009.

² On this subject Jonathan Israel writes that "the Early Enlightenment was an impressively unified process across Europe, indeed a remarkable demonstration of the essential cohesion of European history. Nothing could be more mistaken than to suppose that national arenas evolved in relative isolation from each other or that national contexts were decisive in shaping the broad pattern of intellectual development", J. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the making of Modernity 1650-1750*, (Oxford UP, 2001), p. 137.

³ In Edinburgh, in professor Stevenson's class of Logic, in which prize essays were submitted from 1737 to 1751, about half were written in Latin, and the other half in English. Latin survived longest in the Faculty of Medicine, where theses were composed solely in that language until 1833: see D. B. Horn, *A Short History of the University of Edinburgh 1556-1889* (Edinburgh, 1967), 47. Similarly, in Germany, "in die Hörsäle der Universitäten drang das Deutsche erst seit 1687 durch Christian Thomasius in Leipzig. Noch bis in 19. Jh. mußten in einigen Fächern Doktordissertationen lateinisch verfaßt werden": see P. von Polenz, *Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache* (Berlin-New York, 1978), 93. Furthermore, in 1733 Johann Lorenz Mosheim translated into Latin Ralph Cudworth's the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678).

We define, and consider, this world as cosmopolitan, but, paradoxically, it emphasized the role of national languages, at the expense of Latin: in sum, the role of the *vulgar element*, as Machiavelli, and with him Antonio Gramsci, the father of Italian Marxism, would call it, at the expense of the *learned one*.

Ferguson was a man of this world, a man who was trained in the study of classical authors, Stoic philosophy and Ciceronianism in particular,⁴ but who had a quite innovative perception of the social phenomena of his own times. Therefore, if we can say that the eighteenth century is the century of Enlightenment and Materialism, no less, is it also the century of the incoming Romanticism, Historicism, Liberalism.

And Ferguson is more than a bridge between the two conceptions, more than a bridge between the century of the Enlightenment and that of Romanticism and Liberalism. In his work we find Romantic and Liberal ideas fully formulated and conceptualized. This will appear, in particular, with a comparison of concepts and passages from his works, and from these of Benjamin Constant, the French Romantic and Liberal writer, whose Liberalism, we believe, no one will call in question.

Ferguson, Constant, Kant, Montesquieu

Constant in his youth spent a period of two years, 8 July 1783-May 1785, in Edinburgh and, although in his *Cahier Rouge* he devotes just a few lines to this period, the similarities of his political thought with that of Ferguson are singularly striking.

The philosopher retired from teaching in 1785, and it is likely that the young Swiss attended his lectures, which were "the most celebrated in the University".⁵

He never mentions Ferguson in his writings. Nevertheless, according to Denis Wood, one must consider "Constant's attitude towards his researches and his anxiety that someone else may have appropriated his ideas".

M.me de Staël, in particular, remarked (*Rudler*, 506) "his extraordinary discretion, his ability to remain silent, when it suited him". Therefore, this might "in some measure explain why he did not formally acknowledge a debt to his Scottish education".⁶

The texts give, nevertheless, full, complete evidence of Constant's inspiration from Ferguson, from *An Essay*, in particular.

I will now compare some passages from Ferguson, and the corresponding passages from Constant's writings, in particular, and from Montesquieu and Kant.

In Glasgow Francis Hutcheson in 1742 published in Latin his *Philosophiae Moralis Institutio Compendiaria*. It was the opinion of a former student that, when lecturing at the university, "he wrote and spoke, at least we thought, better in Latin than English" (James Moore, *Dictionary of National Biography*, p. 999).

⁴ On Ferguson's 'partiality to Stoic philosophy' see *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, in two vols, 1792 (repr. Garland, New York and London, 1978), I, 'Introduction', pp. 7-8.

⁵ See Cecil P. Courtney, 'An Eighteenth-Century Education. Benjamin Constant at Erlangen and Edinburgh' (1782-5), in M. Hobson, J.T.A. Leigh, R. Wokler eds, *Rousseau and the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 295-324, *ibid.* p. 314.

⁶ Denis Wood, 'Constant in Edinburgh', *French Studies*, 40 (1986), 151-66, *ibid.*, p. 165, n. 34.

"The influence of laws, where they have any real effect in the preservation of liberty, 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" (*An Essay*, D. Forbes ed., (Edinburgh UP, 1966), VI, V, pp. 263-4);

"Une simple déclaration ne suffit pas ... il faut des corps assez puissants pour employer les moyens de défense que la loi consacre" (Constant, *Principes de Politique*, XVIII, *De la Liberté Individuelle*, in *Oeuvres*, Bibliothèque de La Pléiade, Gallimard (Paris, 1957), p. 1198);

"Liberty is a right which every individual must be ready to vindicate for himself, and which he who pretends to bestow as a favour, has by that very act in reality denied" (*An Essay*, VI, V, 266);

"Le danger de la liberté moderne, c'est que nous ne renoncions trop facilement à notre droit de partage dans le pouvoir politique.

Les dépositaires de l'autorité ne manquent pas de nous y exhorter. Ils sont si disposés à nous épargner toute espèce de peine, excepté celle d'obéir et de payer Non, messieurs, ne laissons pas faire. Quelque touchant que soit un intérêt si tendre, prions l'autorité de rester dans ses limites. Qu'elle se borne à être juste; nous nous chargerons d'être heureux" (Constant, *De la liberté des anciens comparée à celle des modernes*, Discours prononcé à l'Athénée Royal de Paris en 1819, now in *Cours de Politique Constitutionnelle*, ed. Laboulaye (Paris, 1861), tome II, p. 558).

"L'autorité fait du mal, même lorsqu'elle veut soumettre à sa juridiction les principes de la tolérance; car elle impose à la tolérance des formes positives et fixes, qui sont contraires à sa nature" (Constant, *Principes*, XVII, p. 1192);

Quite similar are the concepts, not to say the words, of Immanuel Kant, who wrote of Frederick the Great, that he was a prince who "does not believe unworthy of himself to say that he considers his own duty nothing to prescribe who therefore rejects from himself even the proud name of tolerance" (Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage; Was ist Aufklärung?', in *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Berlin, 1912), Band VIII, S. 41);

For its similarity, we enter here a passage from Tocqueville, on the "pouvoir immense et tutélaire, qui se charge seul de assurer leur jouissance et de veiller sur leur sort.... Il travaille volontiers à leur bonheur, mais il veut en être l'unique agent et le seul arbitre; il pourvoit à leur sécurité, prévoit et assure leur besoins, facilite leurs plaisirs, conduit leur principales affaires, dirige leur industrie, règle leur succession, divise leurs héritages; que ne peut il leur ôter entièrement le trouble de penser et la peine de vivre?" (Tocqueville, *Démocratie en Amérique*, Gallimard, II, quatrième partie, chap. IV, p. 324).

Again Ferguson: "Liberty seems to require that people of every separate order or rank should each have an active share in the legislature of their country" (Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, 1792, reprint Garland Publishing (New York and London, 1978), II, 67; ".the practice of representation enabled every order of the state to have a vigilant eye on the proceeding of the whole" (Ferguson, *ibid.* p. 468);

And Constant: "Les peuples qui recourent au système représentatif, doivent exercer une surveillance active et constante sur leur représentants" (Constant, *De la liberté*, tome II, pp. 537-60);

Montesquieu: "Le gouvernement d'Angleterre est plus sage, parce qu'il a un corps qui l'examine continuellement, et qui s'examine continuellement lui-même; et telles sont ses erreurs, qu'elles ne sont jamais longues, et que, par l'esprit d'attention qu'elles donnent à la nation, elles sont souvent utiles.....En un mot, un gouvernement libre, c'est-à-dire toujours agité, ne sauroit se maintenir, s'il n'est, par ses propres lois, capable

de corrections" (Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Décadence*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, La Pléiade, Gallimard, (Paris, 1951), II, VIII, p. 116);

"... the attainment of knowledge, ability, and public virtue, are proportion to the concern which numbers are permitted to take, in the affairs of their community" (Ferguson, *Principles*, I, 266);

"Le danger de la liberté moderne, c'est que nous ne renoncions trop facilement à notre droit de partage dans le pouvoir politique" (Constant, *De la liberté des anciens*, p. 558);

"To the ancient Greek, or the Roman, *the individual was nothing, and the public everything*. To the modern, in too many nations of Europe, *the individual is everything, and the public nothing*" (Ferguson, *An Essay*, p. 56; italics mine);

"Chez les modernes l'individu, indépendant dans la vie privée, n'est souverain qu'en apparence" (Constant, *De la liberté des anciens*, p. 542; "*les anciens*, comme le dit Condorcet (1743-94), *n'avaient aucune notion des droits individuels*", *ibid.*, p. 543; "nous ne pouvons plus jouir de la liberté des anciens, qui se composait de la participation active et constante au pouvoir collectif. Notre liberté, à nous, doit se composer de la *jouissance paisible de l'indépendance privée*", *ibid.*, p. 547; "le but des anciens était le partage du pouvoir social entre tous les citoyens d'une même patrie Le but des modernes est la sécurité dans les garanties accordées par les institutions à ces jouissances", p. 548; "*la liberté individuelle*, je le répète, *voilà la véritable liberté moderne*", p. 555.

As one can see, these passages are similar not only conceptually, but also as for the vocabulary that the two authors use. No doubt in Constant we find emphasized the individualistic and romantic element, but one must consider that his writings go back to half a century later, when the romantic movement was in its full maturity, while *An Essay* can be considered as an early, although mature, intimation of romantic, historicist, liberal ideas. Therefore, if it is true that *An Essay* "may be regarded to a certain extent as a commentary on Montesquieu",⁷ paradoxically one could maintain that *Constant's works can be regarded as a commentary on Ferguson*.

Ferguson, Tocqueville, Adam Smith, Turgot, Necker, Burke, *The Federalist*, Benedetto Croce, Fr. A. von Hayek
Tocqueville was a man of the nineteenth century, a post-romantic, and we cannot document a direct influence of Ferguson's thought on him, although, obviously, he may have read both *An Essay* and the *Principles* and, certainly, the works of Constant. Nevertheless, in his works we find concepts and passages strikingly similar to a number of passages occurring in Ferguson. This is clearly owing to the fact that both the writers take inspiration from liberal ideas⁸ and, therefore, these concepts were common to both.

In Tocqueville's analysis of the American society the concept of '*tyranny of the majority*' has particular relevance. Tocqueville writes: "si jamais la liberté se perd en Amérique, il faudra s'en prendre à l'omnipotence

⁷ See John Small, *Biographical Sketch of Adam Ferguson*, in 'Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh', 1864, pp. 599-665, *ibid.*, p. 609.

⁸ According to Gary L. McDowell, "Ferguson's theory of politics and society was the precursor of Tocqueville's more celebrated work, *Democracy in America*": see G. L. McDowell, 'Commerce, Virtue and Politics: Adam Ferguson's Constitutionalism', in *Review of Politics*, 45, Oct. 1983, pp. 536-552, *ibid.*, p. 537. For these problems see below, n.19.

de la majorité qui aura porté les minorités au désespoir" (*Démocratie en Amérique*, Gallimard, livre I, chap. VII, 'Tyrannie de la Majorité', pp. 261-64, but these words occur on p. 271).

And Ferguson: "... liberty is far from being safe in the exclusive prevalence of either there is indeed no species of tyranny under which individuals are less safe than under that of a majority or prevailing faction....." (*Principles*, II, 464); "Nations, however, have been fortunate in proportion as they have admitted every order of the people, by representation or otherwise, to an actual share of the legislature" (*An Essay*, p. 165); "... the attainment of knowledge, ability, and public virtue, are proportion to the concern which numbers are permitted to take, in the affairs of their community" (*Principles*, I, 266); "in a democratical assembly... the despotism of many;for this very reason, is the more oppressive and the less restrained" (*Principles*, II, 436);

And James Madison, in *The Federalist LI*, as cited by Tocqueville himself: "It is of great importance in a republic not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other part".

Again Ferguson: "the history of mankind has abundantly shewn that the attainments of knowledge, ability, and public virtue, are proportion to the concern which numbers are permitted to take, in the affairs of their community" (*Principles*, I, p. 266); "forms of government may be estimated by the numbers who are made to participate in the service or government of their country... and by the diffusion of political deliberation and function to the greatest extent that is consistent with the wisdom of its administration" (*Principles*, II, 509); "the error that results from the freedom of one person is best corrected by the wisdom that results from the concurring freedom of many" (*Principles*, II, p. 510)

Tocqueville: "Si la démocratie a plus de chances de se tromper qu'un roi ou un corps de nobles, elle a aussi plus de chances de revenir à la vérité, une fois que la lumière lui arrive, parce qu'il n'y a pas, en général, dans son sein, d'intérêts contraires à ceux du plus grand nombre" (*Démocratie*, deuxième partie, chap. V, p. 235); "Les lois de la démocratie tendent, en général, au bien du plus grand nombre, car elles émanent de la majorité de tous les citoyens, laquelle peut se tromper, mais ne saurait avoir un intérêt contraire à elle-même" (*ibid.*, chap. VI, p. 242); "Il y a plus de lumières et de sagesse dans beaucoup d'hommes réunis que dans un seul" (*ibid.*, VII, p. 258);

Ferguson: "The forms of legislature we have proposed implying numerous assemblies, whether collective or representative, may be censured as exposing men to all the inconveniences of faction or party division; but, if these inconveniences are to be dreaded, they nevertheless may be fairly hazarded, for the sake of the end to be obtained in free governments, the safety of the people" (*Principles*, II, p. 508);

Tocqueville: "La démocratie ne peut obtenir la vérité que de l'expérience Le grand privilège des Américains n'est donc pas seulement d'être plus éclairés que d'autres, mais d'avoir la faculté de faire des fautes réparables" (*Démocratie*, V, pp. 508-9).

Montesquieu: "Pour règle générale, toutes les fois qu'on verra tout le monde tranquille dans un État qui se donne le nom de République, on peut être assuré que la liberté n'y est pas..... Ce qu'on appelle union dans un corps politique, est une chose très équivoque..... Il peut y avoir de l'union dans un État où on ne croit voir que du trouble", (Montesquieu, *Considérations*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, II, chap II, p. 119);

Consider, furthermore, Immanuel Kant, in the passage in which he criticizes "the tutors who have undertaken the high task of supervision of their younger fellows, showing the danger which threatens them,

when they move off alone". But this danger is not so great, because they, "at the cost of falling, would learn how to walk" (*Beantwortung der Frage*, pp. 35-6).

As for the same concept, of opposition and conflict, which is a main feature of *An Essay*, (see, in particular, Part I, Sections I, II, III, IX, X), or the "inconveniences of faction or party division..... (that) may be fairly hazarded" (Ferguson, *Principles*, II, p. 508), I wish to cite, here, from Benedetto Croce, the <philosopher of liberty>, who, in his *Manifesto degli Intellettuali Antifascisti*, (*Il Mondo*, 1 May 1925), in opposition to the praise of 'unanimity' of Gentile's *Manifesto degli Intellettuali Fascisti*, (appearing in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, National Fascist Party, 21 April 1925), offering a specimen of his philosophy, which was essentially a development of Hegelianism, wrote that "the essence of liberalism lies in an historical concept of free competition, including alternating parties in power, one consequence of which is that progress is realized through opposition and change."⁹

And again Ferguson: "we mistake human nature, if we wish for a termination of labour, or a scene of repose" (*An Essay*, p. 7).¹⁰

And these are the corresponding passages from Croce: "Life is struggle and struggle is endless and the stasis of good is as absurd as the stasis of evil.... the ethics of liberty puts the end not in the incoherent concept of rest, of the end of sorrow, in happiness and beatitude, but in the concept coherent and clear and unambiguous of the work to be created..... the liberal conception is conscious that it brings not peace but war, not ease but suffering.... and prefers the achievements laborious and slow....", (B. Croce, 'Libertà e Giustizia', in *Discorsi di Varia Filosofia*, 2 vols (Bari, Laterza, 1959), vol. I, pp. 270-3 (translation by author);

"The true happiness, human happiness, yet virile, is not the beatitude unaware of pain, that beatitude to which only the fatuity and imbecility are similar. Of such a beatitude one cannot find the conditions in the history of the world; which -as Hegel says- where struggle is missing, <shows white its pages>" (B. Croce, *Saggio sullo Hegel*, 5th ed., Laterza (Bari, 1967), p. 39 (translation by author).

These words, no doubt, may serve to enlarge our understanding of the philosophy of Ferguson.

Friedrich A. von Hayek, the last of the great European historians who moved to America, with his deep knowledge of the European and, in particular, of the German, cultural tradition, in his essay 'The Result of Human Action, but not the Execution of any Human Design' (in *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*,

⁹ For quite similar concepts see B. Croce, 'La concezione liberale come concezione della vita', in *Etica e Politica*, Laterza (Bari, 1956), pp. 290-300.

¹⁰ The same concepts occur in Abbé du Bos: "That man by nature is designed an active being: that inaction, whether of body or mind, draws on languor and disgust: and that this is a cogent motive to fly to any sort of occupation for relief. Thus we fly by instinct to every object that can excite our passions, and keep us in agitation, notwithstanding the pain such objects often gives, which causes vexatious days and sleepless nights: but man suffers more by being without passions, than by the agitation they occasion", Abbé du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, (Paris, 1719), Intr., p. 1; pt. 1, sect. 1, pp. 5-7, as cited by Lord Kames in his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, edited by Mary C. Moran, Liberty Fund (Indianapolis, 2005), pp. 11-12.

Nevertheless in Du Bos these are no more than the reflections of a moralist, while in Ferguson they become a systematic concept, at the same time philosophical and political, which governs human actions.

In his writings Ferguson never refers to Abbé du Bos, but the *Réflexions* was a text largely known to British and Scottish writers. For the same concept, for example, see William Paley, who writes that happiness does not consist "in an exemption from pain, labour, care,such a state being usually attended, not with ease, but with depression of spirits.... and the whole train of hypochondriacal affections", W. Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, Liberty Fund (Indianapolis, 2002), Book I, chap. 6, p. 16.

Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 96-105),¹¹ epitomized the meaning of the social philosophy of Ferguson, drawing the title of his paper from a section of *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*.

"Every step and every movement of the multitude, even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future; and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed *the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design*" (*An Essay*, p. 122; italics mine).

The words of von Hayek are the more revealing, if we consider that *An Essay* can be considered as a sustained criticism of Rousseau,¹² of the projectors, of the great legislators, etc. In particular, Ferguson writes that "the forms of society are derived from an obscure and distant origin; they arise from the instincts, not from the speculations, of men", and criticises "the traditionary histories of ancient legislators" and "their supposed plans", while, he adds, "we ascribe to a previous design, what came to be known only by experience, what no human wisdom could foresee, and what no authority could enable an individual to execute" (*An Essay*, pp. 122-3). He explains, furthermore, that "free constitutions ...seldom or never take their rise from the scheme of any single projector (*An Essay*, p. 134), while "a people intent on freedom, find for themselves a condition in which they may follow the propensities of nature with a more signal effect, than any which the councils of state could devise", and insists on the criticism of the "projectors" and of their "visionary plans" (*An Essay*, pp. 140-1).

Everybody who is acquainted with the texts of Adam Smith, will recognise, in these words, Smithian concepts, especially in a text of 1755, and, later, in the sixth edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1790).

Smith wrote, in 1755, that "Man is generally considered by statesmen and projectors as the materials of a sort of political mechanics. Projectors disturb nature in the course of human affairs; and it requires no more than to let her alone, and give her fair play in the pursuits of her ends, that she may establish her own designs".¹³

These concepts in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* are theorized with the subject of the *man of system*, who "is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it..... (this) is to erect his own judgment into the supreme standard of right and wrong.... all political speculators are by far the most dangerous."¹⁴

And Jacques Turgot, in the 'Eloge de Vincent de Gournay',¹⁵ writes that the *esprit de système* is "l'arbitraire et la manie de plier les choses à ses idées, et non pas ses idées aux choses", while, according to Jacques Necker, the spirit of system "en ramenant tout à quelque idée générale, se dispense d'étudier, de comparer et de distinguer les nuances et les exceptions..... Le génie respecte les opinions communes & honore le bon sens, l'esprit de système, au contraire, aperçoit partout des erreurs."¹⁶

¹¹ On this subject see E. Heath, 'Ferguson on the Unintended Emergence of Social Order', in E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2009), pp. 155-168.

¹² See, for example, *An Essay*, p. 5, where Ferguson writes that Rousseau painted the progress of mankind "with a force of imagination ... with a boldness of invention, that would tempt us to admit, among the materials of history, the suggestions of fancy". On this subject see A. G. Smith, *The Political Philosophy of Adam Ferguson, considered as a response to Rousseau: political development and progressive development*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Yale UP.

¹³ For the text of 1755 see Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith*, IV, 25, now in Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, (Oxford UP, 1980), p. 322. Stewart compares the contents of this text with some passages, quite similar, from Necker's 'Eloge de l'Administration de M. de Colbert', which obtained the prize of the French Academy in 1763. For these problems see V. Merolle, *Adam Smith, Politica e Società*, Bizzarri (Roma, 1994), particularly pp. 109-118.

¹⁴ Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6th ed, 1790, (now Oxford UP, 1976), VI.ii.2.17-18, pp. 233-4.

¹⁵ See *Œuvres* de Turgot, ed. G. Schelle (Paris, 1913), I, pp. 618-20.

¹⁶ Necker, *De l'administration des finances de la France*, (1794), III, pp. 376-8.

Last, Edmund Burke, according to whom "the cannibal philosophers of France would sacrifice the whole of the human race to the slightest of their experiments",¹⁷ adding, in the 'Letter to Unknown', that he was "perfectly sensible of the Wisdom of Gentlemen, who are resolved not to be guided by the unhappy spirit of system in the plans which they propose for the reestablishment of their country".¹⁸

Needless to say, these concepts represent the fundamental principles of the political philosophy of liberalism, in opposition to Enlightenment, and no one, hopefully, will object to this point.

From the above discourse or, rather, from the above citations, a few conclusions can be drawn.

First, -the same concepts, and even quite similar wording, occurring in Montesquieu, Constant, Tocqueville, Kant, The Federalist, Turgot, Necker, Burke, Croce, von Hayek,- Ferguson's thought must be set in the context of the history of European liberalism, of which he is more than a precursor.¹⁹ His works philosophically and conceptually represent a bridge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but in the eighteenth century he stands not as a man of the Enlightenment,²⁰ but as a precursor, and even as a mature theorizer, of Romantic ideas.

Secondly Ferguson's thought cannot be understood adequately without considering the contemporary European philosophical and literary currents, of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. He obviously takes inspiration from Montesquieu, as did Constant and Tocqueville, and gave it to many authors, who expound similar concepts.

Thirdly, he gives a full theory of *historical change*, that Hume, a man of the Enlightenment, is unable to give, and for which Smith lacks adequate, in the sense of purely speculative, philosophical interests.

¹⁷ Burke, 'A Letter to a Noble Lord on the attacks made upon Mr. Burke and his pension', in *Works*, (1889), V, 212-3.

¹⁸ Burke, *Correspondence*, (Cambridge UP, 1967), VI, p. 479.

¹⁹ On this subject see A. Kalivas-I. Katznelson, 'Adam Ferguson returns. Liberalism through a glass, darkly', *Political Theory*, 26, no. 2 (1998), pp. 173-97, who nevertheless judge according to sociological categories, and lack an adequate historical and philosophical context. See furthermore R. Hamowy, *The political sociology of freedom: Adam Ferguson and F. A. von Hayek* (Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar, 2005), and V. Merolle, *Saggio su Ferguson. Con un Saggio su Millar*, Gangemi (Roma, 1994).

As for Ferguson's 'new approach to politics', Lisa Hill defines it 'liberal-Stoicism', in L. Hill, 'A Complicated Vision: the good polity in Adam Ferguson's Thought', in *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society*, pp. 107-123, *ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁰ See F. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (1936), erstes Kapitel, 'Die Vorbereiter', pp. 16-28.

As for the literature on Ferguson in German, see particularly Hermann Huth, *Soziale und individualistische Auffassung im 18. Jahrhundert, vornehmlich bei Adam Smith und Adam Ferguson*, Duncker & Humblot, (Leipzig, 1907). Huth insists on the "liberty of the individual" ('Freiheit des Individuums', p. 17), on the progress as "uninterrupted flowing stream" ('unterbrochen fortfließender Strom', p. 44-5), on the constitution as the result of a "long process" ('Verfassung als Prozesse langsam', p. 58), and on the "refusal of the rational-individualistic representations... the unconscious, the unintentional, the rule of the law of the heterogenesis of ends" ('Ablehnung der rational-individualistischen Vorstellungen.... Das Unbewußte, das Unbeabsichtigte, das Walten des Gesetzes der Heterogenie der Zwecke', p. 62). He reaches the conclusion that "Smith is not an individualist, but, like Ferguson, a liberal representative of the social principles" ('Smith ist nicht Individualist, sondern ist wie Ferguson ein liberalistischer Vertreter des Sozialprinzips', p. 157).

In this line of interpretation Huth can be considered as the precursor both of Meinecke and von Hayek.

But see also Karl Pribram, *Die Entstehung der Individualistischen Sozialphilosophie*, Hirschfeld (Leipzig, 1912), who insists on the principle of unintended consequences in Smith, citing (p. 96) from the well known passage of the *Wealth of Nations*, maintaining "the idea of a natural order, ... that idea from which the harmony of all interests works out in a condition of liberty" ('die Idee einer natürlichen Ordnung jene Idee, nach welcher die Harmonie aller Interessen sich von selbst im Zustande der Freiheit auswirkt', p. 102).

Last, Wilhelm Hasbach, in *Die allgemeinen philosophischen Grundlagen der von François Quesnay und Adam Smith begründeten politischen Ökonomie*, Duncker & Humblot (Leipzig, 1890), maintains that the character of political economy in the eighteenth century "could not be other than individualistic" ('konnte nicht anders als individualistisch sein'), *ibid.*, p. 170.

Enlightenment aims, in fact, at a *perfect society*, which, once constituted, will no more change. Historicism is its exact contrary: it believes in the uninterrupted efforts of men towards the constitution of a better society: therefore, in *historical change*.

Last, to understand his theorizing one must consider the Scottish history of his years, i.e. the contests of parties so well described by John Millar of Glasgow, for example.²¹ Without reading Millar, the present author believes, it is difficult to understand Ferguson adequately.

Understanding him is equally difficult if, apart from reading *An Essay*, one does not adequately consider the more mature theorizing of the *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, published in 1792, twenty-five years after *An Essay*, when the author had before his eyes the experience of the American Revolution and *The Federalist*.²²

2) Republicanism

Having *ad abundantiam* demonstrated the correspondence not only of the concepts, but also of the wording, in Ferguson's writings, and in the writings of the principal authors of the history of European liberalism, I could dispense with going on, in the refutation of those who interpret Ferguson as a kind of civic humanist or republican.

To those who could accuse me of having had recourse to the *argumentum ex auctoritate*, to the *ipse dixit* of the Aristotelians, I answer that I have expounded, and discussed, *the reasons of history*. And I could add, with the words of a distinguished American colleague, that "I have formulated a gentle reminder to historians not to trust what they read in the secondary sources",²³ but to read more of what the great authors have actually written.

²¹ See John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, first ed. 1771, and *An Historical View of the English Government*, first ed. 1787. Millar was defined by John Rae "the most effective and influential apostle of Liberalism in Scotland in that age", John Rae, *Life of Adam Smith* (London, 1895), pp. 53-4.

Typically Lord Bolingbroke, a man of Enlightenment, wrote, in 1738: "To espouse no party is so essential to the character of a Patriot King.... It is the peculiar privilege and glory of this character, that princes who maintain it... are not exposed to the temptation, of governing by a party; which must always end in the government of a faction For party is a political evil, and faction is the worst of all parties", 'The idea of a patriot King', in *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, in 4 vols, Carey and Hart (Philadelphia, 1941), II, 376-49, *ibid.*, p. 401.

²² As a curiosity an attempt at Americanizing Ferguson, on the part of the so called 'Adam Ferguson Institute' in Ohio, can be cited. In its home page (<http://www.logon.com/afi>), giving reasons for its commitment to 'study and discuss' the works of the Scottish philosopher and the concept of civil society, it emphasizes the concept of freedom, the necessity of taking action on the part of the individuals against the decline, etc. It says: "A Civil Societarian knows that, because of unintended consequences, a number of government programs cause more harm than good. The overall result is the creation of a permanent underclass, as the public sector reduces the private sector's ability to generate economic progress for all. A Civil Societarian knows that freedom is the road to both material and spiritual growth. Civil Societarians will not trade their freedom for security because this leads to the loss of both. Civil Societarians is not willing to stand by and watch as this land we call America declines, like past civilizations whose people lost track of their liberty and trusted their rulers more than they trusted themselves..... A Civil Societarian knows that evil prevails when good men take no action. He knows responsibility properly resides in the individual, whose action is necessary to preserve a civil society".

These are the reasons of a particular world of business and politics, which help understand a certain, in some measure hidden, meaning of *An Essay*, and its impact on society.

²³ See John Christian Laursen, 'Character Assassination in History: or, how we lost a liberal theory of Freedom of the Press', in *2.000. The European Journal*, IX, no. 2, Dec. 2008, p. 4.

Nevertheless, "civic humanism, (or classical republicanism)",²⁴ if you prefer, is like 'a ghost' that 'wanders in Europe', as in the words of Karl Marx,²⁵ and wakes up the sleep of those who write historical works. It has become as bold as to deny the reasons for Liberalism. According to its mentor, John Pocock, "there is a conventional wisdom, now taught to students, to the effect that political theory became 'liberal' about the time of Hobbes and Locke, and has in America remained so ever since. I find this *a serious distortion of history*".²⁶

Pocock's theses about the influence of Locke have been refuted by Isaac Kramnick, who demonstrated the lasting influence of Locke on the British and American authors of the second half of the eighteenth century, nor we do need to repeat here his points.²⁷

As for his interpretation of Machiavelli and Machiavellianism, the distinguished Florentine historian Cesare Vasoli, an expert in the history of Renaissance, reviewed *The Machiavellian Moment* with arguments that do not admit of any contradictions, nor have they been refuted.²⁸

Aim of the present essay is that of refuting Republicanism from a more general, conceptual, philosophical point of view, giving it the role that, in history, is proper to it: i.e., that of an inferior moment in historical knowledge.

The principal, so to say, follower of Pocock, Quentin Skinner, in a booklet entitled *Liberty before Liberalism*, explained that he tried "to sketch the rise and fall within Anglophone political theory of what I have labelled a neo-Roman understanding of civil liberty. The neo-Roman theory rose to prominence in the course of the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. Later it was used to attack the ruling oligarchy of eighteenth-century Britain..... During the nineteenth century, however, the neo-Roman theory increasingly slipped from

²⁴ As in the words of J. G. A. Pocock, 'Cambridge Paradigms and Scotch Philosophers', in Hont-Ignatieff, *Wealth & Virtue. The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge UP, 1983), pp. 235-252, *ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁵ "Ein Genspenst geht um in Europa- das Genspenst des Kommunismus", so Marx and Engels, in the opening sentence of the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, in Marx-Engels *Werke*, Band 4, (Berlin, 1959), pp. 459-93, *ibid.*, p. 461. The *Manifest* ends with the words: "Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!", p. 493.

²⁶ See J. G. A. Pocock, 'The Myth of John Locke and the Obsession with Liberalism', in J.G.A. Pocock and Richard Ashcraft, *John Locke* (Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, 1980). In *Virtue, Commerce and History*, (CUP, 1985), p. 47, he proposes "to offer what I consider a better historical interpretation, which will permit me to deal with the third term of the triad composing my title: the concept of 'manners'".

²⁷ See Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in late Eighteenth Century England and America*, Cornell UP (Ithaca and London, 1990).

²⁸ See Cesare Vasoli, 'The Machiavellian Moment. A Grand Ideological Synthesis', in *Journal of Modern History* (49), Dec. 1977, pp. 661-70.

Vasoli observes that the book "is based on a wide reading of 'literary' sources rather than works of original historical research" (p. 661), and accuses the author of "artificially constructing an abstract prospective, one that dissolves all sense of time and reduces a long historical development of ideas to a closed succession of formulas and analogies without any consideration of the effective novelty of each succeeding historical situation" (p. 663). Pocock pulls out certain *topoi* and 'models', placing them "in an artificial context based solely upon linguistic similarities" (p. 663). Last, *it would be difficult to find much that is truly original in this work, at least in the domain of research on the history of humanist thought and political reflection in the age of Machiavelli* (italics mine), because its author "sacrifices concrete historical knowledge to the abstract verification of ideological hypotheses" (p. 670)

Pocock answered Vasoli with the following words: "Those European historians whose deepest wish is that America should never have existed -since it compromises the uniqueness they claim for their own history -are driven to the unconvincing strategy of condemning the paradigm as ideology precisely because it works as historiography", J. G. A. Pocock, 'Cambridge Paradigms', *op. cit.*, p. 239 and p. 247.

As for the present author, he reached the same conclusions as Vasoli's, although, when reading *The Machiavellian Moment*, he was unaware of Vasoli's review: see *Scottish Studies Newsletter*, no. 27, Summer 1997, pp. 10-18, in particular n. 11.

sight Meanwhile the rival view of liberty embedded in classical liberalism went on to attain a predominance in Anglophone political philosophy which it has never subsequently relinquished. *The ambition of the following essay is to question this liberal hegemony by attempting to re-enter the intellectual world we have lost*.²⁹

The aim of Skinner's essay is ambitious. Reviewing his book, Sir Bernard Crick wrote sympathetic words and gave further reasons for his theses:

"Why has he (Q.S.) spent so much time reviving memory of the neo-Roman theory of free citizens and free states in early modern Britain of his obviously beloved old commonwealth men, Nedham, Harrington, Milton..... and *contrasting their republicanism to modern liberalism?* (italics mine). Presumably because he finds something of perennial value in the belief that the state should not simply be the provider and guarantor of each individual's liberties under the law.... but should be a perpetual public arena of active citizenship. His seventeenth-century republicans believed that political activity by citizens was a school of moral virtue and a guarantee against the abuse of liberty by even the most well-meaning regimes. Liberty granted too easily either creates apathy, so that future abuses are harder to resist, or leads to a purely utilitarian frame of mind..... Quentin Skinner, indeed, leaps into modern times to attack Isaiah Berlin for believing that liberty can be no more than not being interfered with, rather than also the positive opportunities of citizens to achieve the safety and welfare of the state and a free society."³⁰

The present author, as is clear from the above pages, sides with Sir Isaiah Berlin, and is suspicious of concepts like 'perpetual public arena of active citizenship', or 'abuse of liberty', although, in Sir Bernard Crick's words, they have an ennobling meaning. He is sorry to have to deny, with the words of the Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio, the reasons themselves for Republicanism.

In the opening page of his book entitled *Dialogo intorno alla Repubblica*,³¹ Bobbio was questioned by his former student Maurizio Viroli, a talented Italian scholar who teaches at Princeton, and is one of the most ardent supporters of the new faith, with the following words:

"Some political theorists argue that there is a republican tradition of political thought as distinct from both the liberal and the democratic ones. In the opinion of such scholars, of whom I am one, republican political theory is primarily characterized by the principle of political freedom. Whereas liberalism perceives freedom as an absence of interference and democracy identifies freedom 'in the power to impose rules upon oneself and not to obey rules other than those imposed on oneself' (these are your words), republicanism considers true freedom to be the absence of any dependency on the arbitrary will of a single man or a group of men".

And this was Bobbio's answer: "I have never encountered republicanism or the republic in my experience as a scholar of political thought. I know little or nothing about the theoreticians of republicanism who have inspired you."³²

²⁹ Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, (CUP, 1998), Preface, pp. IX-X.; italics mine. Meaningfully Skinner writes that "with the rise of the liberal theory to a position of hegemony in contemporary political philosophy, the neo-roman theory has been so much lost to sight that the liberal analysis has come to be widely regarded as the only coherent way of thinking about the concept involved", *ibid.*, p. 113.

Skinner can be right if referring to the period of the English civil wars, when there occurred the predominance of republican ideas of liberty, certainly not for the subsequent centuries, when more mature historical and philosophical concepts helped understand history as a totality, and distinguish it from ideology and politics.

³⁰ In *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 3, 1998, p. 326.

³¹ Laterza, (Bari, 2001); see English translation as *The Idea of the Republic. Norberto Bobbio & Maurizio Viroli*, trans. by Allan Cameron, Polity Publishers (Cambridge, 2003).

The words of Viroli, as those of many others, are tautological, and miss, we believe, the essential point: i.e., that we must decide whether to be party historians, as too many, indeed, are, or, simply, historians. We certainly can write the history of a political party, or even of a faction, but, if we miss the superior concept of history as a *totality*, as a *unity*, we will even miss the concept of history as a *science*. In sum, we will prevent ourselves from understanding society and its development, because we will be the historians of a part, not of the *whole*, or *totality* (the category of *Gesamtheit*) in the Hegelian sense.

In the history of political thought the philosophical concept of a *superior synthesis*, as the consciousness of the *moments of the contradiction*, is the fundamental premise for historical and philosophical writing. Without this concept one can be a historian of social classes, or ranks, if you prefer, not a historian *tout court*, i.e., a historian who is moved by *superior, purely scientific concepts*. Therefore, the point is that one must decide between politics and science, and, no doubt, the so called 'republicans', or 'civic humanists', of the two horns of the dilemma, have chosen politics. In this way, having in view a too clear political aim, or ideal, they make history subservient to the interests of a political party.

Republicanism, therefore, is different from, cannot coincide with, and cannot replace, liberalism. It cannot replace it, in particular, because *a part cannot replace the whole*. Liberalism is in fact the *consciousness* of history, and cannot be confounded with a political party, because it *comprehends* all the political parties, in its *superior consciousness*. And history is "the peculiar laws of continuous growth, whether by 'dialectical' conflict or otherwise, that govern individuals and groups, in their interplay with each other", as in the words of Sir Isaiah Berlin.³³

I cannot certainly now discuss a full theory of liberalism, with its several branches, and I willingly admit that I am biased in favour of the Italian tradition, represented by Benedetto Croce, the <philosopher of liberty>.³⁴ Croce's theories, as the philosopher himself admitted, were mainly "inspired and took shape from resistance against the oppression of fascism",³⁵ but its philosophical origins were in Hegel's dialectic method.

Its principal concepts can be summarized with the following words:

Liberalism "*coincides with a complete idea of the world and reality.... it belongs to a different and higher sphere..... in it is reflected all the philosophy and religion of modern times, centred in the idea of dialectics, that is, of development which, by means of the variety and conflict of the spiritual forces, continuously enriches and ennobles life.....*" This is the theoretical basis for the attitude and trust and favour which the liberal doctrine

³² See English translation, p. 8. In *Dizionario di Politica*, UTET (Torino, 1976), eds. N. Bobbio and N. Matteucci, there is no entry for <civic humanism> or <republicanism>. Nor occurs such an entry in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Thomson-Gale (Detroit, 2001), in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Scribner (New York, 1973), and, last, in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, eds. O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Kosellek, E. Klett (Stuttgart, 1997), as observed by M. Geuna in 'La tradizione repubblicana e i suoi interpreti: famiglie teoriche e discontinuità concettuali', in *Filosofia Politica*, XII, no. 1, April 1998, pp. 101-32, *ibid.*, p. 131.

³³ Sir Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, (Oxford UP, 1969), p. 143.

³⁴ See, particularly, B. Croce, 'La concezione liberale come concezione della vita', in *Etica e Politica*, Laterza (Bari, 1956), pp. 291-30, and 'Liberismo e Liberalismo', *ibid.*, pp. 323-7; 'Libertà e giustizia', in *Discorsi di Varia Filosofia*, 2 vol., Laterza, (Bari, 1959), I, pp. 261-276, and 'Per la Storia del Comunismo in quanto realtà politica', *ibid.* pp. 277-290. See furthermore *Scritti e Discorsi Politici (1943-47)*, 2 vols, Laterza, (Bari, 1963), 'Manifesto degli Intellettuali Antifascisti', *op. cit.*, and B. Croce-L. Einaudi, *Liberismo e liberalismo*, Ricciardi (Milano, 1957).

³⁵ Croce, 'Di un libro sulla libertà in Italia', in *Scritti e Discorsi Politici*, II, pp. 311-5, *ibid.*, p. 312.

shows in practice toward *all manner of tendencies*. Rather than set limits and checks on these tendencies and rather than subject them to restrictions and repression, the liberal doctrine offers an *open field* so that they may compete among themselves and co-operate in harmonious discord".³⁶

Modern philosophy, furthermore, "has given up the claim of ever being 'definitive' and has therefore given up all dogmatism, being satisfied, on the other hand, with remaining perpetually alive and able to state and solve all the problems that arise *ad infinitum* in life.... the liberal conception is not meant for the timid, the indolent and the pacifist, but wishes to interpret the aspirations and the works of courageous and patient, of *belligerent and generous spirits*, anxious for the advancement of mankind and aware of its toils and of its history".³⁷

For historical reasons, in the English-speaking world the traditions of liberalism are in part different from the ones current in continental Europe. Nevertheless, in historical writing, a concept must be common to everybody, i.e., that *politics cannot be confounded with science*. Politics is the field of ideology, of the *particular*, of the *individual* volition, while philosophy, or science, is the dominion of what is general, or *universal*: in sum, only philosophy is science, while ideology is an inferior kind of knowledge. Ideology is in fact a one-sided, or unilateral, knowledge, that cannot grasp, or *conceive*, both the terms of the contradiction.³⁸

And Republicanism, therefore, is no more than an ideology, one of the many, in the history of human societies, while *only Liberalism contains*, at the same time, *both the elements of the contradiction, that of progress and that of conservation*. Consequently, it is the only *exhaustive* theory of society, and cannot coincide with a political party.

Not holding these concepts, implies the risk that, in historical writing, we cause, in reality, 'a serious distortion of history', to use, but in a quite opposite sense, the words of John Pocock, cited above.³⁹

+++++

As for Ferguson, in particular, in order to make of him a 'republican', it would be pointless to maintain that he wrote the *Roman Republic*, and that he praised the ideals of republican liberty. He did actually praise republican liberty, but only when examining the history of the Roman Republic, and in opposition to the decadence of the Empire.

In the nineteenth century the writers, all, no one excepted, saw the history of Rome in the same way, i.e., in the way in which it had been passed down over the centuries by historical literature. And yet they cannot be considered as republicans, just for this reason.

In reality Stoicism and Ciceronianism were then flourishing, at the dismay of Hume.⁴⁰ And Stoicism, with its sense of commitment to political life, in opposition to Materialism and Epicureanism, can be considered as a

³⁶ See B. Croce, 'Liberalism as a Concept of Life', in Croce, *Politics and Morals*, trans by S. J. Castiglione, G. Allen & Unwin, (London, 1946), pp. 79-80. Italics mine.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 87. Italics mine.

³⁸ I am here borrowing Gramscian concepts and vocabulary which, along with Croce's works, were fundamental in the formation of my Italian prose writing, and of my political ideas.

The works of Antonio Gramsci, the *Prison Notebooks*, Einaudi (Torino, 1975), are here cited from the single volumes of the Einaudi edition, which preceded the critical edition.

³⁹ See above, text corresponding with n. 26.

⁴⁰ Hume complained that "the most durable, as well as justest fame, has been acquired by the *easy philosophy*, and that abstract reasoners seem hitherto to have enjoyed only a momentary reputation, from the caprice or ignorance of their own age.... The fame of

philosophical ally to liberalism. So in Ferguson, in particular, who declares his own inspiration from Stoicism.⁴¹ And no one can believe that, in the expectations of these writers, it would have been possible to give life, in modern Europe, to regimes that were purely theoretical, the product of imagination, and which contrasted with the reality of the present. The opposition to modern regimes could take the form of nostalgia, sometimes of advocacy, of the virtues of republican times, but no more than this. And the biography of Ferguson, with his commitment to the Hanoverians, with his Scottishness,⁴² certainly does not help, from this point of view.

Therefore, republicanism in the eighteenth century was no more than an ideology, which helped modify the current social relations, and strongly contributed to historical change. And the consciousness of it, of its theoretical reasons, did not appear, simply because it was, and was perceived, just as one of the chapters, - one of the many-, in the history of political ideas.

The consciousness of what Enlightenment was, appeared only late in the eighteenth century, when Immanuel Kant wrote his 'Beantwort der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?', dated from 'Königsberg in Preußen, den 30. Septemb. 1784'.

Similarly, the consciousness of what liberalism is, as a synthesis of eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries philosophical and political ideas, appeared only with Constant, Hegel, later with Tocqueville and other authors, when reflection about past history became mature, and the concept of a synthesis was reached: when human mind could command, and theorize, centuries of history. Once more was right Hegel, when saying that philosophy is like the owl of Minerva, that sets flying only at the sunset, i.e., that it is a reflection about past history, while, as for the present, we are just actors, not spectators, on the stage of history, in the sense that we do not command, or master, the whole, but only a part, of it.

Not so republicanism, which never became, and never did aim to become, the 'consciousness' of a whole historical period, because it represented just one of the moments, just one of the ideas, although a relevant one, in history. It was an ideal, more than a philosophical concept. And as an ideal, for political reasons, some historians, Pocock and Skinner first of all, are trying to revive it.⁴³

Cicero flourishes at present, but that of Aristotle is utterly decayed", Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in *Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, third edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975), Section I, p. 7.

In a letter to Lord Kames, he drew up an unsympathetic portrait of Cicero, whose first *Philippic* 'is not much admired by the ancients', while in the second 'he gives a full loose to his scurrility', Hume to Lord Kames, 13 June 1742, in *The Letters of David Hume*, I, pp. 41-2.

⁴¹ See above, n. 4, and below, text corresponding with n. 100.

On Ferguson's Stoicism see V. Merolle, 'Ferguson's Political Philosophy', in *The Manuscripts*, pp. XII-XIX.

Furthermore Stoic philosophy and 'civic moralism' cannot be confounded with 'civic humanism', a concept proper to the early Renaissance and marginal to Machiavelli's thought.

The reference to Machiavelli first occurs in Meinecke, who, in his *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, (1936), fully analysed Ferguson's pre-romanticism, noting how his notion of spiritual vigour bears comparison both to Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, and Leopold von Ranke's understanding of the '*moral energies* of a nation', Meinecke, *Die Entstehung*, p. 217.

⁴² On this subject see particularly D. Allan, 'Ferguson and Scottish History: Past and Present in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*', in E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2008), pp. 23-38, and M. Fry, 'Ferguson the Highlander', in E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Pickering & Chatto, (London, 2009), pp. 9-24.

⁴³ Typically Skinner writes that Sir Isaiah Berlin "takes himself to be pursuing the *purely neutral task* (italics mine) of showing what a philosophical analysis of our concepts requires us to say about the essence of liberty", *Liberty before Liberalism*, op. cit, p. 116. He believes that Berlin's 'neutral task' must be replaced by 'positive opportunities of the citizens', etc., as in the words of Sir Bernard Crick, cited above, in text corresponding with note 30. See nevertheless, here, above, text corresponding with notes 37 and 38.

But there is a fundamental question, a fundamental objection, as for the so-called Machiavellianism of Ferguson.

One could safely say that Ferguson never read Machiavelli, and that, of the Florentine historian, he had just a second-hand knowledge.⁴⁴

Of the Italian writers of the Renaissance, just on one occasion he mentions Francesco Guicciardini, and for a particular reason, concerning a Scottish person, in a letter to Andrew Stuart, of 28 June 1798.⁴⁵

If this is of relevant importance from a purely historical point of view, from a philosophical point of view the objection is non tenable. Machiavelli represents, in fact, modern philosophical materialism. He overturns the traditional way of thinking, which, at the origin of the system of the world, saw the God Creator of the traditional religion, and, from God, the history of man.

Machiavelli moves, as for the starting point of his meditation, from an anthropology, a materialistic one, from the human being as *actually living and operating*. He sees men as a bundle of sensations, as a prey of ambitions and desires, that can never be placated, and as continuously looking for new modes of satisfying his wishes. Hence his evil nature.⁴⁶ This is the opposite of what was preached by the Church, of man as made after the image of God, therefore good, and capable of redemption.

Therefore, the question is: can Ferguson be considered as a materialistic philosopher? His idea of the world and of man, can be set in one of the several schools of materialism?

The answer is, obviously, no, because it has nothing to deal with Machiavelli, Lamettrie, d'Holbach, Condorcet: nothing, or very little to deal, in sum, with Enlightenment. It is, in fact, Romantic and Idealistic, and, as for concepts like the Universe, the Providence, the Immortality of the Soul, substantially Ciceronian.

And Cicero's philosophy, in the words of Conyers Middleton (1683-1750), can be summarized this way:

"He maintained, that there was one God or supreme Being; incorporeal, eternal, self-existent; who created the world by his power, and sustained it by his providence. This he inferred from the order and beauty of the heavenly bodies..... wisdom, and a fitness to certain ends, observable in the whole and in every part of the visible world.... He believed also a divine Providence constantly presiding over the whole system..... He held likewise the immortality of the soul, and its separate existence after death in a state of happiness or misery".⁴⁷

These are the fundamental philosophical concepts inspiring Ferguson, although, in *An Essay*, he deals with human societies, rather than with general, philosophical ideas. But his inspiration from Romanticism and Idealism is clear from the earliest works, and never shaken.⁴⁸ And so his inspiration from Ciceronianism and Stoicism.

⁴⁴ Machiavelli is never mentioned in *An Essay*, in the *Principles*, in *The Institutes*, in the *Manuscripts*, in the *Correspondence*, nor, last, in the Ms Lectures of the EUL. Furthermore, Ferguson never appears having borrowed Machiavelli's books from the EUL: see Jane B. Fagg, 'Ferguson's use of the Edinburgh University Library: 1764-1806', in E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2008), pp. 39-64.

⁴⁵ See *The Correspondence of A. F.*, edited by V. Merolle, Pickering (London, 1995), II, p. 437.

⁴⁶ On this see Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958, who makes of Machiavelli 'a teacher of evil', Introd., p. 9.

⁴⁷ See Conyers Middleton, *Cicero's Life and Letters*, (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 306. Middleton's *Cicero* was first published in 1741.

On the same problems see V. Merolle, introduction to Ferguson, *The Manuscripts*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2006), pp. XVI-XVII.

⁴⁸ Duncan Forbes mentions Ferguson's 'soldier and statesman', and 'soldier and citizen' (see, in particular, 'A. F. and the idea of community', in *Edinburgh in the Age of Reason*, ed. D. Young, (EUP, 1967). This is too little indeed, to make of Ferguson a republican,

And, as Conyers Middleton wrote, "several of the fundamental principles of the modern philosophy which pass for the original discoveries of these later times, are the revival rather of ancient notions maintained by some of the first philosophers of whom we have any notions in history".⁴⁹

+++++

This quite recent ideology of republicanism has produced a number of books, and a quantity of research, that can be variously judged, but among whom there are original contributions.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, this literature is mostly ideologically biased.

For example, when reading Maurizio Viroli's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Well Ordered Society*,⁵¹ I cannot help thinking that Rousseau is the prophet of the Jacobins, of the terror, of totalitarianism, and it is not just a case that all the writers of liberalism, no one excepted, who came after him, from Constant and M.me de Stael onwards, levelled their own criticism against his theories. So, for example, also Ferguson, whose theories are, in reality, a reply to Rousseau, from the very beginning of *An Essay*.⁵²

In the case of Rousseau, as with all the authors of the Enlightenment, one cannot really understand his political philosophy if one does not consider not only the category of Enlightenment, but also that of Romanticism, which opposed and 'criticized' Enlightenment, in this way making a <progress> beyond it, and improving on it.⁵³

The alternative is that of considering an author in an 'abstract and philosophical light',⁵⁴ of theorizing abstract categories as eternal and immutable, not only with the risk, but with the certainty, of meeting the 'hard replies of history', as expressed by Norberto Bobbio, Viroli's mentor.⁵⁵

The *perpetual public arena of active citizenship*, in the words of Sir Bernard Crick cited above,⁵⁶ risks the 'bruciamento delle vanità', or 'burning of the vanities', which took place in Savonarola's Florence, at the time of Machiavelli, and similar events, which have repeatedly taken place, in history. And, after all, in society, there must be a role for the individual, for '*il particolare*', as Francesco Guicciardini, Machiavelli's contemporary, used to call it: or for <color che sanno>, <those who know>, as in Machiavelli, as translated -conceptually- by Antonio

although Forbes certainly does not emphasize these ideas. For a comprehensive criticism of his point see V. Merolle, in *The Manuscripts of A. F.*, pp. 317-19.

⁴⁹ See C. Middleton, op. cit., p. 305, and above, n. 47.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, in two vols., (Cambridge UP, 1978).

On the book see my review in *Il Pensiero Politico*, XV, 3 (Firenze, 1982), pp. 543-51.

But the author admits that he has become "more interested of late in the contrasts between our past and present system of thought", Q. Skinner, 'Surveying the *Foundations*: a retrospect and reassessment', in *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, edited by A. Brett and J. Tully, with H. Hamilton-Bleakley (Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 236-261, *ibid.* p. 237.

On *The Foundations* see nevertheless the review by Carlo Pincin, in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, XCVII, fasc. I, gennaio 1984, pp. 225-28.

⁵¹ Cambridge UP, 1988. Of the same author see also *Repubblicanesimo*, Laterza (Bari, 1999).

⁵² On this subject see A. G. Smith, *The political philosophy of Adam Ferguson*, op. cit.

⁵³ I am echoing Gramscian concepts, as repeatedly, in the pages of this essay.

⁵⁴ See A. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford UP, 1979), VII, III, chap. 1, p. 316.

⁵⁵ The same concept in Lord Kames who, criticizing the philosophers who "build castles in the air" -he had in mind Hume, in particular- says that "every writer takes the liberty of framing systems according to his own taste and fancy". But, it is far from his thoughts to try whether it will stand *the test of stubborn facts*" (italics mine), (Lord Kames, *Essays*, op. cit, Essay II, chap. VII, pp. 55-6.

This concept is recurring in almost all the authors of political literature, who can be defined 'liberals', as opposing the Enlightenment, including, in this definition, the Marxist writers of the last two centuries.

⁵⁶ See text corresponding with n. 30.

Gramsci, in opposition to the *vulgus*, or to <color che non sanno>, <those who don't know>.⁵⁷ And, hopefully, no one will be obliged to take part in *active citizenship*, or to have *virtue*, in the sense of the neo-Republicans, or in any other sense.

The alternative is Rousseau's "profession de foi purement civile, dont il appartient au Souverain de fixer les articles". If somebody does not believe, he can be banned from the state. "Que si quelqu'un, après avoir reconnu publiquement ces mêmes dogmes, se conduit comme ne les croyant pas, qu'il soit puni de mort", is the conclusion of Rousseau.⁵⁸

And, obviously, with these words, not only the Jacobins, but also those who gave the hemlock to Socrates, accusing him of impiety, are justified.

The point is that the *truth*, in a philosophical sense, and particularly in politics, is *problematic*,⁵⁹ and *cannot be achieved once forever*. And so it is in historical literature, for it to be actually science, and not ideology: i.e., if it wants to serve as knowledge, and not simply to the point of view of a particular social class, or rank.

The alternative is that of coercing historical knowledge, of superimposing abstract categories on history, leading to a new kind of 'Enlightenment', which would be a meta-historical category, therefore, absolute, and not admitting of contradictions, or of the principle that a society can change *naturaliter*, for the worse, but even for the better.

Modern civilization found its origin in the disintegration of the feudal society, when the serfs abandoned the fiefs, giving life to 'free burghs', such as Freiburg im Breisgau, Villefranche sur Mer, Castelfranco Veneto, etc. In this way manorial economy gave room to communal civilization, such as that of Florence at the times of Dante, with the several *arts*, or *arts and crafts*. Hence the merchants of the Italian Renaissance, and the maritime Republic of Venice, while in Northern Europe commerce progressively grew in importance, particularly at the time of the Reformation. With the discovery of America, a new impulse was given to mercantile traffic and commerce, while, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, the merchants and manufacturers changed the face not only of society, but of the whole globe.

The question, therefore, is: can the ideology of republicanism <comprehend>, and <explain>, these historical phenomena, which are no more and no less than history itself?

The answer is obviously no, because republicans, or civic humanists, as said above, in modern history are no more than *one of the moments*, and not a major one, composing society and concurring to its development, along with socialists, revolutionaries, religious movements, liberals of all the tendencies, etc.

⁵⁷ This is a paraphrase of the words with which A. Gramsci, in his *Note sul Machiavelli, sulla Politica e sullo Stato Moderno*, Einaudi, 6th ed., (Torino, 1966), pp. 9-10, renders Machiavellian concepts.

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social*, Livre IV, chap. VIII, 'De la Religion Civile', in Rousseau, *Œuvres Complètes*, Gallimard, (Paris, 1964), III, p. 468.

⁵⁹ Paraphrasing words and concepts from Benedetto Croce, Antonio Gramsci, the theorist of Italian Marxism, wrote that "in the scientific debate, since we suppose that the interest is the pursuit of the verity and the progress of science, shows himself more <advanced> he who puts himself from the point of view that the adversary can express an exigency that must be incorporated, although as a subordinate moment, in his own construction.

Understanding and valuing realistically the positions and the reasons of the adversary.....means emancipating oneself from the prison of ideologies (in the worst sense, of blind ideological fanaticism), i.e. to put oneself from a point of view <critical>, the only one fecund in scientific research", A. Gramsci, *Il Materialismo Storico e la Filosofia di Benedetto Croce*, Einaudi (Torino, 1966), p. 21. Translation by author.

And the general, philosophical idea, the concept of *totality*, of the *whole*, or *Gesamtheit*, should have brought this conclusion, avoiding any absurd pretence of replacing what cannot be replaced, as the whole cannot be replaced by a part.⁶⁰

The secondary literature, needless to say, at least concerning the Scottish Enlightenment, and Adam Ferguson in particular, and although mostly on the part of *minor dramatis personae*, offers a colourful spectacle.

Fania Oz-Salzberger's *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany*⁶¹ evolved from a doctoral thesis written at Oxford between 1987 and 1991. It inevitably retains the structure and characteristics of a dissertation, but is original research, although with many, too many limitations.

A more mature scholar would obviously have considered first of all the categories of Enlightenment and Romanticism, i.e., the philosophical concept of the history of two centuries, "l'un contro l'altro armati",⁶² to borrow the words of the Italian Romantic poet Alessandro Manzoni, of two centuries as succeeding to each other, with distinct, and even opposite features, but also as the last, Romanticism, reacting to Enlightenment, and incorporating, in part, its *truth* in a more advanced synthesis.

No doubt, Ferguson must be set in the philosophical category of Romanticism,⁶³ although there is, in his reasoning, some rationalism: for example, in his ignoring religion altogether, although this is fundamental in most the Romantic writers of the subsequent generation, and gives a distinct feature to Romanticism.

Nevertheless Dr Oz moves from the erroneous axiom according to which Ferguson was 'a civic humanist', and is forced to admit that "German readers did not confront the civic humanist contents of the texts made available to them."⁶⁴

The demonstration of her thesis is quite contradictory.

As for the philosophical ideas of Christian Garve, the translator of Ferguson's *Institutes*, she speaks of 'benevolent despotism', adding that he "did not conceal his distaste for political parties", and that there is, in him, "a strict rejection of conflict, coupled with a hostility towards popular political involvement."⁶⁵

Certainly, Garve was a *Popularphilosoph*, and his ideas were no more than the ideas then current in German Enlightenment, their aim being educational, not yet liberal. Why should he have emphasized the role of conflict, of the ranks, or the context of political parties, in Ferguson?

Again, as the author observes, concerning the Göttingen professors, "theirs was a strongly legalistic language, rooted both in natural law and in the traditions of positive law. Whenever Ferguson's civic language clashed with it, it was ignored or rejected".⁶⁶

There would be a reason, for this conclusion, had Dr Oz considered that Ferguson was a subject of the Hanoverian establishment, an heir of the 'Glorious', *liberal* Revolution of 1689, while the Germans were the subjects of the Enlightened King Frederick the Great, whose maxim was "reason as long as you want and on any subject you want, but obey".⁶⁷ To the end of the century, even Immanuel Kant, after publishing *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, in Königsberg, in 1793, met the 'royal' prohibition, on the part of Frederick's successor, to write any more about religion, while, in Great Britain, David Hume, -the *infidel*, as Samuel Johnson called him-, a man of the generation preceding Kant, could well doubt the authenticity of miracles, meeting the hostility of the clergy, but certainly not any prohibition on the part of the constitutional establishment.

As for Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who was "a lifelong admirer of Ferguson" (he died in 1819), the author correctly states that "his idea of freedom in the political context is distinctly liberal".

Jacobi was the author of *Woldemar*, "a Sturm und Drang novel with a Werther-like hero, a man of strong feelings and dangerous emotions." In *Etwas das Lessing gesagt hat* he praised Johannes von Müller, "a defender of papacy", attacking "absolutist or unlimited political power". He considers the state as 'a machine of coercion', and is for 'governmental minimalism'. Last, in his *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), that is "a critique of Enlightenment concept of reason argued that rational thinking leads to atheism and fatalism accused Lessing of Spinozism".⁶⁸

⁶⁰ For these concepts see below, the last section, and the concluding pages, of the present essay.

⁶¹ Clarendon Press (Oxford, 1995). See V. Merolle, review to the book in *Scottish Studies Newsletter*, no. 27, Summer 1997, pp. 10-18.

⁶² "two centuries/ armed against each other", see Manzoni's ode *Il Cinque Maggio*, for the death of Napoleon, strophe 8, lines 1-2.

⁶³ See Fr. Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, op. cit.

⁶⁴ *Translating the Enlightenment*, p. 3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁶⁷ "Räsonniert, soviel ihr wollt und worüber ihr wollt, aber gehorcht!", I. Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage "Was ist Aufklärung?"', op. cit., p. 37.

⁶⁸ *Translating*, pp. 257, 260, 265, 274.

As the reader can see, Dr Oz renders Jacobi as a perfectly Romantic and Liberal writer, as he was, indeed. Nevertheless she reaches the conclusion, unexpected and contradictory, that "it would not be wrong to see him as a disciple of the civic tradition", and that he is "a disciple of the civic tradition", because "he had read Machiavelli better than Ferguson had".⁶⁹ And, obviously, she criticizes Sir Isaiah Berlin, for giving the image of Jacobi as of "a 'mystical metaphysician', a 'fervent anti-rationalist theist', and a leader of a German Counter-Enlightenment movement whose 'arch-enemy is Voltaire'".⁷⁰

The point is that the author of this book contrasts two worlds, which are quite different from each other: on one side, the world of eighteenth-century Britain and Scotland, with the merchant and manufacturer as the main figure of the society of their own time, and the contests of parties on the political arena; and, on the other side, the world of the German Enlightenment, where the *initiatives* do not move from the *civil society*, or *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, as Hegel and Marx called it, or 'from the bottom upwards', but 'from above',⁷¹ from the so-called 'enlightened paternalism', or 'benevolent despotism', of a great king, Frederick the Great in Prussia, of the Empress Maria Theresia in Austria, but with scant liberty granted to the people.⁷²

Therefore, how could two worlds so different understand each other? And why should the world of German Enlightenment implement the ideas, or *science*, of the British pre-Romanticism, or Romanticism?

In reality the German *Aufklärer* translated and read Ferguson with educational purposes, but only the Romantics, Jacobi above all, recognised in him ideas similar to their own, i.e., pre-Romantic, or Romantic, ideas. After all, a man of the Enlightenment, and of the German Enlightenment in particular, with its emphasis on education, could not actually understand the contests of parties, which were identified with the factions. And it is not a coincidence that even David Hume, a man, no doubt, of the Enlightenment, identified the parties with sects and factions, and interest groups. This is one of the reasons why he did not actually understand the reasoning of Ferguson's *Essay*.⁷³

Dr Oz's book is somehow problematic, in the sense that, although in part misleading, because she uncritically executes a pre-conceived plan, helps nonetheless understand Ferguson, and opens a window on the German world of Enlightenment and of Romanticism.

By contrast Marco Geuna,⁷⁴ a recent convert, seems intent on 'sanctifying unctuously'⁷⁵ his deities, Pocock and Skinner, rather than on ascertaining historical truth.

In his 'Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment', he sententiously assures that Ferguson's *Essay* "is characterized by a systematic employment of categories belonging to the republican tradition of thought"; that

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 257, 265, 272.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 257. The citations are from I. Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, (Oxford, 1981), 17, 182, 9.

⁷¹ I am here having recourse to Gramscian vocabulary. For these concepts, see my *Gramsci e la filosofia della prassi*, Bulzoni (Roma, 1974), particularly chap. III, 'La concezione della società civile', pp. 147-69.

⁷² "Zu dieser Aufklärung aber wird nichts erfordert als Freiheit; und zwar die unschädlichste unter allem, was nur Freiheit heißen mag, nämlich die: von Seiner Vernunft in allen Stücken öffentlichen Gebrauch zu machen. Nun höre ich aber von allen Seiten rufen: Räsioniert nicht! Der Offizier sagt: Räsioniert nicht, sondern exerziert! Der Finanzrat: Räsioniert nicht, sondern bezahlt! Der Geistliche: Räsioniert nicht, sondern glaubt!.....Hier ist überall Einschränkung der Freiheit. Welche Einschränkung aber ist der Aufklärung hinderlich? welche nicht, sondern ihr woll gar beförderlich? Ich antworte: Der öffentliche Gebrauch seiner Vernunft muß jederzeit frei sein, und der allein kann Aufklärung unter Menschen zu Stande bringen; der Privatgebrauch derselben aber darf öfters sehr enge eingeschränkt sein, ohne doch darum den Fortschritt der Aufklärung sonderlich zu hindern", Kant, 'Beantwortung der Frage', op. cit., pp. 36-7.

⁷³ On this subject see V. Merolle, 'Hume as critic of Ferguson's *Essay*', in E. Heath and V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2009), pp.73-87, and D. Raynor, 'Why did David Hume dislike Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society?*', ibid., pp. 45-72.

⁷⁴ See M. Geuna, 'La tradizione repubblicana e i suoi interpreti', op. cit.; Geuna, a cura di, the Italian edition of Skinner's *Liberty before Liberalism*, as *La Libertà prima del Liberalismo*, Einaudi, (Torino, 2001); 'Skinner, pre-humanist rhetorical culture and Machiavelli', in Brett A., Tully J., eds, with H. Hamilton-Bleakley, *Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, (CUP, 2006), pp. 50-73; idem, 'Republicanism and Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Case of Adam Ferguson', in M. van Gelderen-Q. Skinner, eds, *Republicanism. A shared European Heritage*, in two vols (Cambridge University Press, 2002), II, pp. 177-195; 'La tradizione repubblicana e l'Illuminismo Scozzese', in L. Turco, ed., *Filosofia, Scienza e Politica nel Settecento Britannico*, Il Poligrafo (Padova, 2003), pp. 49-86.

⁷⁵ With these words Antonio Gramsci defined the attitude of Benedetto Croce towards the Italian 'Risorgimento': see Gramsci, // *Risorgimento*, Einaudi (Torino, 1966), p. 63.

"Ferguson is indeed a republican thinker", and that his "criticisms are motivated by the values of the republican tradition".⁷⁶

Unfortunately he falls short of demonstrating his assertion. He could develop a discourse along the lines of Ferguson's *Roman Republic*, but he cites that work cursorily, and it doesn't appear that he has ever read, or understood, it.⁷⁷

He cites Machiavelli, Algernon Sidney, Walter Moyle, Thomas Gordon, and even Montesquieu, on the tumults, or divisions in society, to conclude that Ferguson himself, since he explained the role of parties on the political arena, was a 'republican'.

Had he considered the contemporary Scottish history, and the contests of parties, so well described by John Millar of Glasgow,⁷⁸ for example, prof. Geuna would have certainly reached a quite different conclusion.

But, more than a man of the eighteenth century, Ferguson is a bridge between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and one cannot adequately understand his political thought, unless one knows the categories of Enlightenment and Romanticism, i.e., the philosophical and historical, not to say narrative literature and poetry, of two centuries of European history. By only using abstract categories one will never grasp the real contents of his political thought, or of any political thought. And the ideological premises from which he moves, prevent the author from understanding Ferguson's political thought.⁷⁹

As for the militia for Scotland, for example, a subject which he is unable to develop, simply because he has never read the *Correspondence*, and knows Ferguson only superficially, it was no more than the consequence of the attempt at introducing a militia for England. The problem can be summarized with the following words of David Raynor:

"In the spring of 1756 there was a great alarm over the possibility of a French invasion of England. Since there were only 35,000 regular soldiers stationed in Great Britain, and there was no militia, the government took the unusual measure of bringing over 8,600 Hanoverian and 6,500 Hessian soldiers at a cost of over £300,000 if they were sent home by Christmas, but much more if they stayed longer".⁸⁰

Hence Charles Townshend, MP for Norfolk, introduced in Parliament 'A Bill for the better ordering of the Militia Forces... in England', and the Bill was readily approved by the Commons.

Why, therefore, seeing Republicanism, Civic Humanism, etc, in the Militia issue for Scotland, but do not seeing Republicanism, or Civic Humanism, in the Militia Bill for England? And, as for the Scottish Nationalism, which did exist, indeed, as it does exist, why should it be identified with Republicanism and Civic Humanism?

This essay raises serious questions about the editing of the whole book.

Even worse, if possible, is Geuna's 'La tradizione repubblicana e l'Illuminismo Scozzese',⁸¹ where the author declares himself fully convinced that, in Ferguson, "the categories of the republican tradition constitute the conceptual basis, the architecture of his whole meditation",⁸² and that, in *An Essay*, its author "largely builds his reflections moving from a conceptual basis of republican matrix".⁸³

Prof. Geuna must have confounded Ferguson with Harrington.

The point is that he knows very little about Enlightenment, and nothing about Romanticism. How, then, can he understand Ferguson?

He stuffs his notes with all the possible secondary literature, especially Anglo-American, which he seems to know well (excepting the one which does not fit with his reasoning: for example, Meinecke, von Hayek, etc: but these were outstanding scholars, were Germans, and were from a different parish).

⁷⁶ In van Gelderen-Skinner, op. cit., pp. 181-3. But David Allan, in *Adam Ferguson*, Edinburgh University Press, (Edinburgh, 2006), defines Ferguson "an instinctive conservative", and insists on his "naturally conservative political disposition" (p. 16 and p. 71).

⁷⁷ On the *Roman Republic* see the exemplary study by Iain McDaniel, 'Ferguson, Roman History and the Threat of Military Government in Modern Europe', in E. Heath-V. Merolle, eds, *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2008), pp. 115-130. See furthermore P. E. Gabba, 'Adam Ferguson e la storia di Roma', in *Cultura Classica e Storiografia Moderna*, Il Mulino (Bologna, 1995), pp. 73-97.

⁷⁸ On John Millar see above, text corresponding with n. 21. See furthermore my *Saggio su Ferguson. Con un Saggio su Millar*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ These points I demonstrated in my *Saggio su Ferguson*, a book well known to prof. Geuna, who prefers to ignore it, because it would not fit with his reasoning. I am sorry here to have to cite myself, because, echoing Hume, one should avoid speaking of himself, or doing it too long; and, in the words of Benedetto Croce: "don't speak about yourself; let other people do it". Nevertheless prof. Geuna should know my edition of the *Correspondence of A. F.*, op. cit. He does not mention it at all, as he does not mention at all Ferguson's *Principles of Moral and Political Science*.

His fretus, i.e., relying upon bases so sound, -as everybody can see-, he builds his own construction.

⁸⁰ D. Raynor, 'Ferguson's *Reflections previous to the Establishment of a Militia*', in E. Heath-V. Merolle eds, *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, op. cit., pp. 65-72, *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁸¹ in L. Turco, ed., *Filosofia, Scienza e Politica nel Settecento Britannico*, Il Poligrafo (Padova, 2003), pp. 49-86.

⁸² "le categorie della tradizione repubblicana costituiscono l'impianto concettuale stesso, l'architettura di tutta la riflessione", *ibid.*, p. 58.

⁸³ "costruisce in larga parte le sue riflessioni muovendo da un impianto di concettualizzazione di matrice repubblicana", *ibid.*, p. 73.

Unfortunately, he doesn't know equally well the great authors of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, French, -for example, Chateaubriand, Constant, Tocqueville,- Germans, -like Kant, Herder, Hegel, etc.-, possibly some Italians, whose works are essential to understand modern history and, in our case, the thought of Adam Ferguson.

He gives a one-sided interpretation of the thought of the Scottish philosopher, and his ideas are no more than "a blotting paper"⁸⁴ of some current topics.

In the words of Samuel Johnson, "these infidels milk the bull".

3) Marxism

I could start this section of my paper with the words of Samuel Johnson, who once said that "there is no need to criticise what nobody reads",⁸⁵ and, I add, what no one believes in, or no more believes in.

Nevertheless, one cannot understand Ferguson adequately without examining the Marxist interpretation of his work.

And, to understand Marxism, one must understand, first of all, the category of philosophical Materialism.

This is defined, by Friedrich Engels, with the following words:

"The great, fundamental question of the whole, and especially of recent philosophy, is that of the relation of the Thought with the Being.... of the Spirit with Nature, the highest question of the whole philosophy... that, after all, played a great role also in the Scholastics of the Middle Ages, the question: what was there, in the beginning, the Spirit or the Nature? This question presented itself, concerning the Church, this way: has God created the World, or did the World exist from Eternity? According to the way in which this question was answered, the philosophers divided themselves in two great camps. Those who believed that at the origin there was the Spirit against Nature, and also, in the last resort, somehow believed in the Creation of the World.... built the camp of Idealism. The others, who at the origin saw Nature, belong to the different Schools of Materialism"....⁸⁶

If adequately considering Engels's words, the question is, again, whether the general philosophical ideas of Ferguson can be comprised under the category of Materialism, or not. The answer is, obviously, no. No, because Romanticism, Historicism, Liberalism, cannot be comprised under the philosophical category of Materialism, which is the category of Enlightenment, by contrast. And, hopefully, no one will say that Ferguson is a writer of Enlightenment, although, as is obvious for a real philosopher, there is some rationalism in his thinking: not to forget that he was accused of being 'an avowed deist', and, as somebody said, that he had conceived "too great an aversion to the Church".⁸⁷

⁸⁴ "una cartasciugante di alcuni elementi culturali francesi", as Antonio Gramsci defined Mario Missiroli, a famous journalist, who was, nevertheless, a powerful promulgator of culture, in *Gli Intellettuali e l'Organizzazione della Cultura*, Einaudi (Torino, 1966), p. 44.

⁸⁵ Cited in Henry Gray Graham, *Scottish Men of Letters in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1908, repr. by Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1983), p. 118.

⁸⁶ Translation by author. The German text reads as follows: "Die große Grundfrage aller, speziell neueren Philosophie, ist die nach dem Verhältnis des Denkens zum Sein des Geistes zur Natur, die höchste Frage der gesamten Philosophie... die übrigens auch in der Scholastik des Mittelalters ihre große Rolle gespielte, die Frage: was ist das Ursprüngliche, der Geist oder die Natur? Diese Frage spitzte sich, der Kirche gegenüber, dahin zu: hat Gott die Welt erschaffen, oder ist die Welt von Ewigkeit da? Je nachdem diese Frage so oder so beantwortet wurde, spalteten sich die Philosophen in zwei große Lager. Diejenigen, die die Ursprünglichkeit des Geistes gegenüber der Natur behaupteten, also in letzter Instanz einer Welterschöpfung irgendeiner Art annahmen.... bildeten das Lager des Idealismus. Die andern, die die Natur als das Ursprüngliche ansahen, gehören zu den verschiedenen Schulen des Materialismus...". Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, in *Marx-Engels Werke*, Dietz Verlag (Berlin, 1962), Band 21, pp. 274-5.

⁸⁷ See Ferguson, *Correspondence*, op. cit., II, p. 544.

To avoid any confusion, one must preliminarily observe that his aversion was to established church, not to the philosophical reasons concerning the origin of the universe. Again, the distinction must be made between politics, i.e. the history of events, and the philosophical reasons. And Marx's making of Ferguson a *Marxist ante litteram*, must be ascribed to the world of politics, certainly not to philosophy, or science.

Marx, in *Das Kapital*, defined Ferguson "der Lehrer Adam Smiths",⁸⁸ transcribing his proposition, according to which "wir machen eine Nation von Heloten, und es gibt keine Freien unter uns".⁸⁹

The citation from Ferguson reads in reality as follows: "If the pretensions to equal justice and freedom should terminate in rendering every class equally servile and mercenary, we make a nation of helots, and have no free citizens".⁹⁰

The problem is not that of emphasizing Marx's contradictions, or his misreading of Ferguson's texts. These must be considered in the context of a general reasoning, in which, for example, if compared with Adam Smith's similar texts, they acquire force and clarity. If considering a level of pure politics, one can observe that statements like the one propounded by Marx were current in the economic and social literature of the XVIII century.⁹¹ Therefore, no surprise if they occur also in Ferguson.⁹²

But, as for politics, what really does matter is the general reasoning of Ferguson, a reasoning that, as I have demonstrated in section 1 of this paper, certainly makes of him a Romantic, Historicist, Liberal thinker.

And Liberalism cannot be set in the category of philosophical Materialism, although it can contain, and certainly contains, elements of Materialism, at least as for the problem of the origin of the universe. Nevertheless, the political philosophy of Romanticism-Historicism-Liberalism is essentially *problematic*, in the sense that it does not accept a truth forever, although it mostly inclines towards Idealism.⁹³

⁸⁸ Marx, *Das Kapital. Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie, Werke*, Band 23, Dietz Verlag (Berlin, 1961), Erstes Buch, zwölftes Kapitel, Vierter Abschnitt, 'Teilung der Arbeit innerhalb der Manufaktur und Teilung der Arbeit innerhalb der Gesellschaft', p. 375. On p. 383, n. 70, Marx calls Adam Smith "Schüler Adam Fergusons" (zwölftes Kapitel, & 5, 'Der kapitalistische Charakter der Manufaktur'), and cites at length, from *An Essay*, a passage on the division of labour: see *An Essay*, Part IV, Section I, 'Of the Separation of Arts and Professions' (pp. 180-3, in the edition D. Forbes). In *Das Elend der Philosophie. Antwort auf Proudhons <Philosophie des Elends>*, in *Werke*, Band 4, pp. 62-182, *ibid.*, p. 146, again calls Smith "Schüler Adam Fergusons", and transcribes from Ferguson the same passage on the division of labour. As for the priority between Ferguson and Smith, see the text of Adam Smith of 1755, cited above, in note 13.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁹⁰ Ferguson, *An Essay*, p. 186.

⁹¹ See, for example, John Millar: "Mechanical arts admit of such minute divisions of labour, that the workmen.... are apt to acquire an habitual vacancy of thought.... They become, like machines, actuated by a regular weight.... Their continual attention to the objects of their profession, has a powerful tendency to render them ignorant and stupid", Millar, *Historical View*, (London, 1812), IV, 145-6.

And Diderot: "Lorsque une manufacture est nombreuse, chaque opération occupe un homme différent. Tel ouvrier ne fait et ne fera de sa vie qu'une seule et unique chose; tel autre, une autre chose; d'où il arrive que chacune s'exécute bien et promptement", Diderot, *Œuvres Complètes*, Garnier (Paris, 1876), XIII, p. 372.

See furthermore Marx, 'Teilung der Arbeit & Manufaktur', in *Das Kapital*, zwölftes Kapitel, in *Werke*, op. cit., Band 23, pp. 356-90.

⁹² For these problems see V. Merolle, *Saggio su Ferguson*, op. cit., particularly pp. 114-115.

⁹³ For example, of the three great Italian Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, only Manzoni was catholic and, philosophically, idealistic. By contrast, Giacomo Leopardi and Ugo Foscolo were both atheists and philosophically materialistic, although they did not plead the case for materialism, which is nevertheless clear from their poetry.

As for the principal French Romantic authors: Constant, M.me de Stael, Chateaubriand, de Maistre-; German: Hamann, Herder, Jacobi, Humboldt, Schiller, Goethe, Hegel-; British: -Wm Blake, Wm Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Shelley, Sir W. Scott-; in their writings one can find just occasional elements of philosophical materialism.

As for the more recent historical literature, the Marxist, or Materialistic, interpretation of the analyses of the Scottish historians found its precursor, as is known, in Roy Pascal's essay 'Property and Society: the Scottish contribution of the Eighteenth Century'.⁹⁴

Pascal insisted on the importance of property relations, saying that Smith saw the development of civil society as "a completely secular, material process"; that in him "the process of social development is not governed by a supernatural (religious) or moral principle",⁹⁵ while he was the founder of a "new interpretation of society which is undoubtedly materialistic".⁹⁶

Ronald Meek, on his part, reached the conclusion that "even if we cannot ascribe *the* materialistic conception of history to Smith, we may certainly ascribe to him *a* materialistic conception of history".⁹⁷

As a consequence of these premises, he made also of Ferguson a materialistic philosopher, whose leading idea was that "if we want to know what our fathers were like, we should try to ascertain what mode of subsistence they followed and what kind of environment they inhabited".⁹⁸

The conclusion was that "the two main engines of improvement, private property and the division of labour, inevitably usher in certain evils of their own".⁹⁹

One could observe, that there are evils in economy, as in the progress, but that they are *inevitable*, because in social physics, as, in general, in the physics of the bodies, the fundamental principle is that to each action corresponds a reaction, equal and contrary. The task of the social scientist, as that of the legislator, is that of obviating the ills, at the same time considering that, in the whole, the process leads to progress, to the advancement of civilization.

As for Ferguson, as said above, the problem is whether his reasoning moves from self-conscious materialistic, hence deterministic, premises, or not. The answer, again, is a clear no.

Ferguson himself, in the 'Introduction' to the *Principles*, declares his "partial(ity) to the Stoic philosophy" and, after praising Cicero, adds that "even in modern times... this sect has been revered by those who were acquainted with its real spirit, Lord Shaftesbury, Montesquieu, Mr. Harris, Mr. Hutchison, and many others".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ *Modern Quarterly*, vol. I, 1938, pp. 167-79.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 173. Pascal adds that "Marx's first thorough exposition of historical materialism, the *German Ideology* builds on the groundwork laid by Smith and his contemporaries" (p. 178).

⁹⁷ Ronald L. Meek, 'The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology, in *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, ed. J. Saville, Lawrence & Wishart (London, 1954), p. 40. Meek added that "there is no doubt that Marx can properly be said to be the heir of the basic ideas of the Scottish Historical School", *ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁸ Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (CUP, 1976), p. 152. For a comprehensive criticism of Meek's point of view, see Andrew Skinner, 'A Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology?', in *Classical and Marxian Political Economy*, eds. I. Bradley and M. Howard, Macmillan (London, 1982), pp. 79-114. But Harro Höpfl, in *Journal of British Studies*, 17, no 2, 1978, (Univ. of Chicago Press), pp. 19-40, maintains that, in the Scots, there is no "evidence of a disposition, such as might be expected in 'materialists' or 'economic determinists' to minimize the significance of political as opposed to economic circumstances in conjectural accounts of society and social transformations; still less, to allot to economic circumstances an automatic causal priority..... No Scottish philosopher was prepared to assert anything comparable to the view that the character of the political institutions of a society is merely derivative from its economic arrangements", *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

⁹⁹ Meek, *ibid.*, p. 155. Echoing Marx, Meek adds that "the leading assumption of the French and Scottish *philosophes* was that everything in society and history, just everything in the physical realm, was bound together by an intricate concatenation of causes and effects which it was the main task of the student of man and society -i.e. the social scientist- to unravel", and that "the most typical and far-reaching product of this set of notions.... was the particular theory of socio-economic development.... this theory, in its most general form, was simply that the key factor in the process of development was the mode of subsistence", *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

The background of his work is, no doubt, Stoicism, from which he derives the ethics of the duty and the principle of commitment to political life: a principle which was exactly the opposite of that practised by Epicureanism, or the philosophical materialism of antiquity.

If in *An Essay* there is a clear prevalence of Romantic motives; if the *Principles* bears clear statements in this sense on the part of its author; the *Manuscript Essays*,¹⁰¹ written in advanced age, represent in reality a late chapter in the history of Stoicism, an attempt at giving an answer to contemporary philosophical debate, essentially on the basis of ancient philosophy.

In the eighteenth century not only Stoic moral philosophy, to the disappointment of Hume,¹⁰² but even Stoic cosmology, had not been superseded by the new conception of the universe. Newton had given scientific reasons to the intuitions of the Stoics, while, in Scotland, his pupil and follower, Colin McLaurin, in his *Account*,¹⁰³ described the operations of nature with a vocabulary that closely followed Cicero's terminology.

Shaftesbury, Adam Smith in his *History of Ancient Physics*, even Hume in *The Natural History of Religion*, and in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, repeated not only concepts, but even the wording of Cicero, particularly from the *De Natura Deorum*,¹⁰⁴ about the structure of the universe. Nor need one to forget that the *Mens*, or *Universal Mind*, of the Stoics, *was no more than the God of incoming Christianity*. And Cicero stated, on his part, the existence of a "reason that is transcendent and divine",¹⁰⁵ declared that "God does exist",¹⁰⁶ and added that there is "a single divine and all-pervading spirit".¹⁰⁷

Therefore, philosophical materialism is far from being the background, much less the premise, of Ferguson's philosophy, which finds its roots, instead, in the tradition of Christianity, is influenced by some of the contemporary, leading ideas, of the Enlightenment, but, in the main, is a more than mature intimation of Romantic ideas.¹⁰⁸

In the secondary, Marxist literature on Ferguson, Pasquale Salvucci, the author of *Adam Ferguson. Sociologia e Filosofia Politica*, deserves particular mention. His big book went through several reprints, and in the English speaking world was hailed with a review-essay by William Christian Lehmann.¹⁰⁹ Salvucci was an honest scholar, devoted to his work. His Bible was Marxism, and he eventually became an MP for the Italian Communist Party.

His book, needless to say, suffers from the ideological premises which move its author. According to whom, Smith, Ferguson, Millar, were certainly materialistic philosophers, but in the limits of Enlightenment, and Enlightenment was a

¹⁰⁰ Ferguson, *Principles*, I, Introduction, pp. 7-8. On Ferguson's Ciceronianism see above, text corresponding with notes no. 4, 42, 43, 49, 51.

The present author considers unnecessary, at least in the case of Ferguson, to "focus less on the words on the page, and more on the purposes of the agents using them". Quentin Skinner, 'Standards of Living', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 13 February 1976, as cited by Andrew Skinner, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁰¹ See them as *The Manuscripts of Adam Ferguson*, edited by V. Merolle, Pickering & Chatto (London, 2006).

¹⁰² On this subject see above, note 40.

¹⁰³ Colin McLaurin, *Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Discoveries*, P. Murdoch (London, 1748).

¹⁰⁴ On this subject see V. Merolle, 'Introductory Essay' to Ferguson's *The Manuscripts*, particularly pp. xv-xix. See also above, Conyers Middleton, as cited in text corresponding with notes 49 and 51.

¹⁰⁵ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II, 38.97.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., II, 5.16-17.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., II, 35-90. For the influence of Ciceronianism on Ferguson, particularly for Stoic moral philosophy, see D. Allan, *Adam Ferguson*, op. cit., chap. II, "'The Basis of Moral Nature": The Teacher and the Moralist', pp. 21-42.

¹⁰⁸ See Meinecke, *Die Entstehung*, op. cit., pp. 16-28.

¹⁰⁹ P. Salvucci, *Adam Ferguson. Sociologia e Filosofia Politica*, Argalia (Urbino, 1972). See W. C. Lehmann, in *History and Theory*, XIII, 1974, pp. 165-81.

<bourgeois> phenomenon, not yet conscious of the concept of class struggle. In their political philosophy there is, consequently, an "ambiguity, inevitable, owing to their class limit", and they are "philosophers bourgeois progressivist".¹¹⁰ This is, obviously, the application of the well known Marx's scheme, according to which *classical* economists, such as Smith and Ricardo "are the historians of the bourgeois ascent, who have no other mission than that of demonstrating how wealth is acquired within the relations of the bourgeois production, secondly that of formulating these relations in categories and laws, last that of demonstrating how these laws, these categories, are, as for the production of wealth, superior to the laws and to the categories of feudal society. Misery, to their own eyes, is no more than the pain that accompanies each birth in nature as in the industry".¹¹¹

Given these premises, the obvious consequence is that "it would be a violence to blame Ferguson and the other members of the Scottish school for not understanding that, from the development of civil society, would have been born, as its historical product, the proletariat, the class which would have taken the task of the liberation of itself and of the entire society." After all, even Hegel ... "obstinately will speak of plebs, although his concept of plebs bears mostly the characteristic features that will be proper to the Marxian concept of proletariat".¹¹²

And Ferguson "puts philosophy at the service of man and of his liberation.... (but).... he cannot go further. Only Marx will reach the mature consciousness that the elimination of private property opens the way to the total emancipation of man and to the absolute humanized human world".¹¹³

Unfortunately Salvucci's book rests, as his philosophical premises, on what Antonio Gramsci used to call the <materialismo volgare o metafisica della materia>,¹¹⁴ i.e., deterministic materialism, whose principle was that of *historical necessity*. And, as we know, Karl Marx, in the *Preface* to the first edition of his *Das Kapital*, (London, July 1867), wrote that "<even when a society has succeeded in catching sight of the natural law of its movement cannot jump over or eliminate with a decree the natural stages of the development.... My point of view (that) conceives the development of the economic formation of society as a process of natural history>".¹¹⁵

For Salvucci, Bernstein has written in vain, as in vain has written Antonio Gramsci:¹¹⁶ not to mention the concept of *open society*. His fideism is untouched, and each problem is solved from the beginning. But this kind of historiography, roughly materialistic, which makes of the economic factor a new metaphysics, brings to an uncritical reading of the texts of the authors, according to abstract principles, which do not find a correspondence in history: until, inevitably, they are swept away by history itself.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, first of all, one must distinguish again *philosophical materialism* from *historical materialism*, or Marxism.

That Marxism does not coincide with philosophical materialism, and replaces it with a 'philosophy of praxis', is clear from both Marx's and Engels's works.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ P. Salvucci, *Adam Ferguson*, p. 588.

¹¹¹ "Die Ökonomen, wie Adam Smith und Ricardo, welche die Historiker dieser Epoche sind, haben lediglich die Mission, nachzuweisen, wie der Reichtum unter den Verhältnissen der bürgerlichen Produktion erworben wird, diese Verhältnisse in Kategorien, in Gesetze zu formulieren und nachzuweisen, und wieviel diese Gesetze, diese Kategorien für die Produktion der Reichtümer überlegen sind den Gesetzen und Kategorien der Feudalen Gesellschaft. Das Elend ist in ihren Augen nur der Schmerz, der jede Geburt begleitet, in der Natur wie in der Industrie", Marx, *Das Elend der Philosophie. Antwort auf Proudhon's 'Philosophie des Elends'*, in *Werke*, IV, p. 142.

¹¹² Salvucci, *Adam Ferguson*, pp. 74-5.

¹¹³ Salvucci, *ibid.*, p. 599. But Lehmann maintains that "politically, Ferguson was very much the conservative and a defender of the status quo.... in a social and political structure that he, in most respects, approved of.... Even so modest a movement as Parliamentary Reform, demanding but a broadening of the franchise, he could not see fit to support", and adds that he questions "any attempt to fit this Scot into the general ideology of historical materialism", *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71. For Ferguson's Conservatism see D. Allan, above, n. 76.

¹¹⁴ "<materialism vulgar, or metaphysics of matter>", A. Gramsci, *Il Materialismo Storico*, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹¹⁵ "Auch wenn eine Gesellschaft dem Naturgesetz ihrer Bewegung auf die Spur gekommen ist... kann sie naturgemäße Entwicklungsphasen weder überspringen noch wegdekretieren mein Standpunkt, der die Entwicklung der ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation als einem naturgeschichtlichen Prozess auffaßt...", Marx, *Das Kapital*, in *Werke*, Band 23, pp. 15-16.

¹¹⁶ See Eduard Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus and die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie*, (Stuttgart, 1899), and Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ See in particular L. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

In the 'Thesen über Feuerbach' it is stated that "The principal fault of any materialism until today, including that of Feuerbach, is that the object, the real, the sensible, is conceived only in the form of object or intuition"; but not as 'activity human sensible', as activity practical, non subjectively" (Thesis I), while "philosophers have until now just 'interpreted' the world in different ways; but it is matter of changing it" (Thesis XI).¹¹⁸

Commenting on this subject, Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the Italian Communist Party, and the theorizer of neo-Marxism, admits that "Lange does not consider materialistic either historical materialism or the philosophy of Feuerbach... It is furthermore well known that the leader of the philosophy of praxis (i.e., Marx) never called <materialistic> his own conception and that, speaking about French materialism, criticizes it and maintains that criticism should be more exhaustive. He never uses the formula <materialistic dialectic> but <rational> in opposition to <mystical>".¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Gramsci insists on "the proposition of Engels that economy only <in the last resort> is the spring of historyto be directly connected to the passage of the preface of the *Criticism of Political Economy* where it is said that men become conscious of the conflicts which take place in the world of economy on the ground of ideologies".¹²⁰

A first point, therefore, is that both Marx and Engels, not to say Friedrich Lange, are well aware that historical materialism must be distinguished from philosophical materialism.

After all, the 'overturning' - the so-called *Umwälzung*- of Hegel's dialectic operated by Marx; the proposition that "the proletariat is the heir of German classical philosophy";¹²¹ is a declaration that Marxism, or historical materialism, is no more than an ideology: the ideology of the <classes historically progressive>,¹²² as Antonio Gramsci calls them.

And, one can add, as any ideology, it can *understand*, or *comprise*, only a *part*, not the *whole* of the reality, in the Hegelian sense.

Gramsci himself, moving from the reflections cited here above -essentially Hegelian dialectic that he knows mainly through Benedetto Croce¹²³ and the writers of Marxism- reaches a conclusion, -although in a context which, in some measure, limits its extent-, which needs to be extensively cited here:

¹¹⁸ "Der Hauptmangel alles bisherigen Materialismus (den Feuerbachschen mit eingerechnet) ist, daß der Gegenstand, die Wirklichkeit, Sinnlichkeit nur unter der Form des *Objekts oder der Anschauung* gefaßt wird; nicht aber als *sinnlich menschliche Tätigkeit, Praxis*; nicht subjektiv" (thesis I), in Marx-Engels *Werke*, Dietz Verlag (Berlin, 1958), Band 3, p. 5.; "Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert, es kömmt drauf an, sie zu verändern", (thesis 11), *ibid.*, p. 7. Translation by author.

¹¹⁹ "il Lange.... non considera materialistici né il materialismo storico e neanche la filosofia di Feuerbach..... E' noto, d'altra parte, che il caposcuola della filosofia della prassi (i.e., Lenin) non ha chiamato mai <materialistica> la sua concezione e come parlando del materialismo francese lo critichi e affermi che la critica dovrebbe essere più esauriente. Così non adopera mai la formula di <dialettica materialistica ma razionale> in contrapposto a <mistica>", A. Gramsci, *Il Materialismo Storico*, op. cit., p. 152.

According to *The Cambridge History of Philosophy*, edited by Th. Baldwin, (Cambridge, 2003), Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus* "despite the title it is primarily a denunciation of materialism from a Kantian standpoint", *ibid.*, p. 33.

¹²⁰ "l'affermazione di Engels che l'economia solo <in ultima analisi> è la molla della storia.... da collegarsi direttamente al passo della prefazione della *Critica dell'economia politica* dove si dice che gli uomini diventano consapevoli dei conflitti che si verificano nel mondo economico sul terreno delle ideologie", A. Gramsci, *Note sul Machiavelli*, op. cit., p. 32.

¹²¹ "il proletariato tedesco erede della filosofia classica tedesca", A. Gramsci, *Il Materialismo Storico*, op. cit., p. 32.

¹²² <Classi storicamente progressive>. I am having recourse again to Gramscian vocabulary, but this exact wording does not seem to occur in the *Prison Notebooks*.

¹²³ See Benedetto Croce, in particular *Saggio sullo Hegel*, first published in 1906 by Laterza, Bari, as *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel (What is alive and what is dead in Hegel's Philosophy)*.

"The philosophy of praxis is a reform and development of Hegelianism, is a philosophy that has freed itself from any ideological element unilateral and fanatic, is the full conscience of the contradictions, in which the philosopher himself not only comprehends the contradictions, but puts himself as one of the elements of the contradiction". Therefore, "if even the philosophy of praxis is a manifestation of the contradictions of history.... if one demonstrates that the contradiction will disappear, implicitly one will demonstrate that even the philosophy of praxis will disappear, namely, will be overcome".¹²⁴

What is, therefore, Marxism, in history?

The answer is that it is "*no more than a gigantesque utopia, that has vigorously modified the current social relations, and the order of society. But it cannot represent a complete conception of the world, because it contains in itself just one of the two elements of the contradiction, and, consequently, is a transient historical datum.*"¹²⁵

Since, again using Hegelian concepts,¹²⁶ it is, -or, rather, was-, no more than one of the two moments of the contradiction, it was necessarily destined to be absorbed in the perennial growth of history. And all of us know how Marxism ended its inglorious life.

Nevertheless, this could be considered as a prediction *post eventum*, i.e., when the events have already taken place, and could lead us think of Hegel's owl, which sets flying only at sunset.

And, no doubt, Marxism is, or was, no more than the ideology, i.e. the <science>, to call it so, of a particular social class, which could not embrace, conceive, or contain, what is universal: i.e., history itself.

Again, the distinction should have been, on the part of the Marxist writers, between what is particular and what is universal, i.e., between politics and science.

But these writers, i.e., substantially Ronald Meek and, with less finesse, Pasquale Salvucci, presumed to have found the truth, -almost a new Gospel-, from the beginning. They did not need to search it. They had just to demonstrate it for unbelievers.

In this way they raised a new metaphysics, a metaphysics of matter, which added something indeed to the knowledge of history, but which should have been considered for what it really was: an ideology, to serve to the

¹²⁴ "La filosofia della prassi è una riforma e uno sviluppo dello Hegelismo, è una filosofia liberata da ogni elemento ideologico unilaterale e fanatico, è la coscienza piena delle contraddizioni, in cui lo stesso filosofonon solo comprende le contraddizioni ma pone sé stesso come elemento della contraddizionese anche la filosofia della prassi è una espressione delle contraddizioni storiche..... se si dimostra che le contraddizioni spariranno, si dimostra implicitamente che sparirà, cioè verrà superata, anche la filosofia della prassi", Gramsci, *Il Materialismo Storico*, op. cit., pp. 93-4.

¹²⁵ I am here citing myself from 'Gramsci e l'Eurocomunismo', *Nuovi Studi Politici*, 3, 1978, pp. 97-8. But I am echoing, as often in this paper, Gramscian concepts and vocabulary.

I apologize for citing myself, but no more than this was the thesis of my first book, *Gramsci e la Filosofia della Prassi*, Bulzoni (Roma, 1974), whose central part was written in the fervid summer of 1972, in difficult conditions, by an impassioned and energetic young scholar, as I then was: impassioned for ideas of liberty and disdainful of rhetoric, which then used to run high, in my country, unfortunately not only among common people, but among too many *intellectuals*, as they used to call themselves.

Obviously, I do not claim any merit for this 'prediction' (although, *après moi le déluge*, as I used to say, during the last years of the Brezhnev era, to incredulous colleagues and teachers). I had simply studied with much attention and passion Hegel, Marx and the Marxist writers, and particularly Benedetto Croce, the *philosopher of liberty*, apart from Antonio Gramsci, the theorizer of neo-marxism, and many other historians and philosophers, reaching my conclusions, which would not have been difficult to reach, to anybody who refused rhetoric, to search the truth, instead.

And I want to conclude referring again to Socrates who, for refusing rhetoric in order to search the truth, was accused of impiety, and condemned to drink the hemlock.

¹²⁶ See Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, particularly Buch I, 'Die Lehre vom Sein'.

needs of a political party, not to the *truth*: a moment, one of the many, constituting the truth, in a philosophical sense, but no more than a moment.

To conclude, concerning Ferguson, the inadequacy both of Marxist and civic-humanist schemes to grasp his philosophy is clear.

The historical and metaphysical task of man is that of getting hold of the secrets of nature, and, consequently, cannot consider itself as exhaustive a philosophy whose end is that of modifying the social relations, instead of understanding their origin, the reasons for them, and the origin of the world.

The Marxist writers, and, with them, the so called Republicans or Civic Humanists, have chosen to modify the world, instead of understanding it. They have chosen politics, instead of choosing science.

Vincenzo Merolle
University of Rome 'La Sapienza'