

# Corruption and Partisanship: Rousseau, Ferguson and Two Competing Models of Republican Revival

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There is something about partisanship that inspires ambivalence. The widespread view that parties are necessary does not diminish from the equally widespread suspicion that to be partisan is to be insufficiently attuned to the common good. The acceptance of parties as a healthy part of civic life is relatively recent; historically, partisanship has tended to be thought to verge on corruption. The concept of corruption, after all, is tied to qualms about division and disunity. The term itself refers literally to a breaking apart or dissolution (from *rumpere*, to break); the classical model of the harmonious society runs aground when political office becomes a source of zero-sum competition. Aristotle's deviant regimes—in which rulers rule in their own interest at the expense of the ruled—are forms of anti-politics, in which civic friendship has broken down and some are treated in the manner of slaves. For rulers to seek goods for particular groups at the expense of the whole is the hallmark of corruption.

It is not surprising, then, that to be partisan has, historically, been classed somewhere on the spectrum between a sin and a crime, indistinguishable from “faction” and incommensurable with the public good. The party, after all, is a part of the whole, and the partisan is one who would make the whole serve the part. The rise of “party” as a word not indicative of a vile and anti-public sentiment of division is a predominantly English story, and it is a product of thought catching up with parliamentary practice (Gunn, 1971: 3). Burke, ever the master of making the real rational, gave party its classic justification, though sporadic defences of the practice of opposition had found voice throughout the eighteenth century, particularly in Britain.<sup>1</sup> But even though parties and partisanship have mostly achieved respectability in the world of representative democracies, they have never

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entirely lost the aura of being somehow insufficiently concerned with the common good. We denigrate one another for advancing *mere* partisan positions, and parties are at the centre of the study of political corruption in the modern state. Most multi-party democracies have experienced periods in which the spoils of elections go to party loyalists and patronage is employed to grease the “machine” and ensure cohesion. Many corruption scandals today centre on around party finance. And there is a sizeable current of thought in deliberative-democratic circles highly skeptical of the manner in which partisanship corrupts democratic deliberation (well surveyed in Rosenblum, 2010). Even among party’s defenders, there is a tendency to think it a necessary evil rather than a positive good. In the civic republican tradition, in particular, one can observe a marked tendency to denigrate party and partisanship as indicative of both servile abandonment of individual judgment and unpatriotic abandonment of public duty. Saint-Juste fulminated, “Je ne suis d’aucune faction; je les combattrai toutes” (2011: X, 588). Jefferson was as jealous of his independence as he was suspicious of division: “If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all” (1999: 410). But this suspicion of partisanship—which persists in democratic theory and in the widespread sentiment favouring post-partisanship—is far from universal. There is an equally powerful strain of thought that sees politics in agonistic terms and conceives of the post-partisan impulse itself as profoundly corrupting (Mouffe, 1993).

Champions of party and partisanship have often looked to modernity’s greatest republican, Machiavelli, for the origin of the view that social division could be a public good (Sartori, 1976: 5). After all, Machiavelli did offer the strikingly novel argument that the clash between the plebeians and the senate was the cause of Roman greatness, not the source of its troubles (Machiavelli, 1990: I.4). But at the same time Machiavelli also condemned factions as a primary symptom and source of corruption. For some, this is a sign of an ambivalent attitude. Nancy Rosenblum (2010: 67) treats Machiavelli as someone who employs Rome as a “cautionary archetype” warning against the danger of party; she treats his celebration of conflict between the plebeians and the patricians as something that merely “mitigates a portrait of Machiavelli as antiparty.” But these two competing positions—celebrating division and denigrating faction—were not contradictory: faction is to salutary conflict between the orders as calumny is to public accusation. The one is secret and promotes private revenges and private dependencies; the other is public and promotes the public good. The Romans—at least before their corruption—exemplified the good sort, institutionalizing division in the very constitution. They thus learned to channel the powerful energy of hatred and to turn it to a public end. This is, indeed, one of Machiavelli’s most novel claims.<sup>2</sup> The most important passages on this subject are from the *Florentine Histories* in which Machiavelli argued that “The enmities ... in Rome always

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**Abstract.** Partisanship inspires a degree of ambivalence. There is a widespread tendency—which has a long history in republican political thought—to decry division and partisanship as corrupting, undermining individual judgment, and promoting clientelism, dependencies and loyalties antithetical to the common good. Yet there is an equally widespread intuition that excessive unity is corrupting, undermining the vigour of civic life. Contemporary political theory remains divided on the normative implications of division and unity—witness the battles between agonistic and consensus-oriented schools of democratic theory. In this article I examine the thought of two eighteenth-century writers who, while often treated as contributing to a common intellectual project of reinvigorating classical civic virtue, took opposite positions on the desirability of division. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson offered competing accounts of what corrupts civic virtue, one decrying party divisions and the other lauding them. The article examines the underlying philosophical presuppositions of Rousseau and Ferguson’s competing claims and suggests, ultimately, that both positions suffer from neglecting to attend to an important distinction between salutary and harmful divisions.

**Résumé:** L’esprit de parti inspire une certaine ambivalence. La pensée politique républicaine a souvent dénoncé les divisions et l’esprit de parti comme des phénomènes corrupteurs qui portent atteinte au jugement individuel et qui promeuvent un clientélisme, des dépendances et des loyautés contraires au bien public. Mais il existe également une intuition – aussi très répandue – voulant que l’unité excessive soit corruptrice, portant atteinte à la vigueur de la vie civique. La pensée politique contemporaine demeure divisée à l’égard des implications normatives de la division et de l’unité (pensons, par exemple, aux débats dans la théorie démocratique entre les champions de l’agonisme et ceux du consensus). Dans cet article, nous considérons la pensée de deux écrivains du dix-huitième siècle qui, quoique souvent traités comme des alliés dans le projet de faire revivre une vertu civique ancienne, prirent des positions opposées sur la désirabilité de la division sociale. Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Adam Ferguson offrirent deux conceptions distinctes de ce qui corrompt la vertu civique : l’un déplora les divisions partisans tandis que l’autre les loua avec enthousiasme. L’article examine les présupposés philosophiques sur lesquels reposent leurs positions divergentes et suggère que ces deux positions négligent de considérer une importante distinction entre les divisions salutaires et les divisions néfastes.

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increased military virtue, those of Florence eliminated it altogether” (1990: III.1). His great puzzle was to find out why one sort of division had been so poisonous and the other so beneficial.

Parties as we know them—which line up neither with the orders of whose struggle Machiavelli approved, nor with the conspiracies and personal dependencies of which he disapproved—are generally accepted as necessary today. But there remains a residual tendency to think in holist terms and to see partial interests as corrupting. On such a view, the clashing of partial interests is perhaps a necessary evil, a concession to the ineradicability of uncivic interests and a liberal lowering of our moral sights, but it is hardly conceivable as a positive good. For other republicans, however, radical unity is the death-knoll for the “public,” the open space of disagreement and disharmony that is the sign of political life (Arendt, 2006). What types of divisions and contest are consistent with healthy unity and civic duty is a question running through modern republican thought.

In this article I wish to examine the problem of partisanship in republics by comparing the thought of two eighteenth-century thinkers who attempted to revive classical republican ideals of civic duty: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Ferguson. Both Rousseau and Ferguson thought modernity vitiated by anti-civic inclinations and both had imaginations fired by the exemplars of ancient heroism from Roman and Greek history. Yet for all their similarities, they exhibited radically divergent positions on the degree to which division within a republic is a source of corruption. My intention is to examine the philosophical underpinnings of their competing intuitions regarding division and holism. Rousseau and Ferguson offer us two competing arguments for the reinvigoration of civic spirit. Throughout we will make some thematic comparisons to Machiavelli, who, as we have noted, managed a careful balance between the competing imperatives of holism and division, both denigrating faction yet celebrating the salutary struggle between the orders. Rousseau and Ferguson, I argue, represent two competing poles of republican thought on the question of the effect divisions have on civic virtue. Their divergence on the question of division derives from their radically opposed accounts of human nature and felicity. But I will argue that both of them neglected to attend to the possibility that there is an important distinction to be made between healthy and unhealthy party divisions. I will conclude by suggesting that in our ambivalence towards division we have a tendency to lean towards one of the two poles in republican thought: Rousseauan unity or Fergusonian struggle. It may be that in so doing we fail to attend to the insight—available in Machiavelli's oeuvre—that both unity and division are necessary for the health of a republic.

### **Holism and the Citoyen de Genève**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau provided one of the more enduring paeans to stern, classical civic virtue of the eighteenth century. He idolized Sparta and republican Rome for reasons that are highly reminiscent of Machiavelli: he insisted on a clash between political virtue and Christian morality, he championed the austere, arms-bearing citizen and denigrated slavish societies replete with inequalities, personal dependencies and mercenaries. J.G.A. Pocock, indeed, went so far as to term Rousseau the eighteenth-century Machiavelli (1975: 504). But Rousseau was quite distant from most champions of Roman republicanism in his staunch opposition to imperialism; he was also—more importantly for our purposes—unsympathetic with the Machiavellian enthusiasm for the conflict between the nobles and the people. On the contrary, he insisted that “les dissensions, le tumulte, annoncent l’ascendant des intérêts particuliers et le déclin de l’État” (1964: IV.2, 439). Faction elevates a particular will to the point of overpowering the

general. This can happen when the government starts to usurp the sovereign; it can happen when parts of the people group together to overwhelm and silence the general will. Frequently both happen at the same time.

Rousseau's holism is well known; indeed, it engenders malaise among many of his readers.<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that he should have evinced no sympathy with Machiavelli's celebration of division: as we have noted, holism was a much more commonplace tendency in occidental political thought, in spite of Rousseau's rather extreme version of it.<sup>4</sup> It is somewhat surprising, however, that he should have made direct appeals to Machiavelli in his opposition to divisions.

In his constitutional proposal for Corsica, Rousseau took a Machiavellian line on the danger of disunity. "Les divisions des Corses ont été de tout temps un artifice de leurs maîtres pour les rendre faibles et dépendant" (1964: 903). Faction is a tool for domination and a sign of corruption; it can, however, be vanquished in moments of war against external aggression: the Corsicans, he notes, are free and virtuous because of their fight against the Genoese, "Mais quand le péril qui les a réunis s'éloignera, les factions qu'il écarte renaîtront parmi eux et, au lieu de réunir leurs forces pour le maintien de leur indépendance, ils les useront les uns contre les autres et n'en auront plus pour se défendre, si l'on vient encore à les attaquer." (903; compare Machiavelli, 1995: II.25, III.16). So unity is needed and Rousseau was proposing that a great shock can forge civic virtue where corruption is endemic. But Rousseau balked at the price of such unity: he did not propose to forge unity by encouraging war. His solution was to seek institutional mechanisms that cultivated unity artificially. He envisioned a republic whose unity was forged in the constant enactment of martial ceremonies, yet whose foreign policy was pacific and, to the imperialist eye, unambitious.<sup>5</sup> This paradoxical martial pacifism emerges clearly in the chapter from the *Social Contract* on civil religion (1964: IV.8), in which Rousseau speaks of the religion of the citizen as both necessary for a robust civic community and yet violently intolerant and sanguinary (456).<sup>6</sup> The quest to reconcile the universalist "religion of Man" with the "religion of the citizen" falters in the creed of the tolerant (but illiberal) civic religion.<sup>7</sup> Throughout Rousseau's political works, one sees the repeated call for enacting martial virtues in a bid to bond citizens passionately, educating their emotions towards unity. But it is never with a view to imperial expansion, nor, indeed, with a view to war at all, a practice Rousseau thought monstrous. The Swiss, he thought, had corrupted themselves in turning their military virtue into a commodity to be sold (915). Machiavelli admired the Swiss for their military virtue, but he knew that unused swords become rusty; mercenary Swiss activity is a source of continual vigour. Rousseau might have objected to the cosmopolitan demand for universal love that excused one from loving one's own, but he was, in his call for universal peace through federal

arrangements, exhibiting a fundamentally anti-bellucose ideal. I do not propose a detailed discussion of Rousseau's views on universal peace; I merely wish to indicate that in spite of his awareness that unity can issue from opposition to a common enemy, his imagination was guided by dreams of civic and international harmony. Rousseau wanted to have his Spartan black broth and eat it, too.

The most well-known passage on the dangers of division, naturally, is *Social Contract* II.3 in which Rousseau calls for deliberation without discussion. The key is for individuals to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of a proposal independently and not be swayed by communities of interest: "Il importe donc pour avoir bien l'Énoncé de la volonté générale qu'il n'y ait pas de société partielle dans l'État et que chaque Citoyen n'opine que d'après lui" (1964: 372). In support of this claim, Rousseau cites a passage in the *Florentine Histories* in which Machiavelli points out that some divisions are harmful while others are helpful; those that are harmful are those accompanied "dalle sette e da partigiani" (sects/factions and partisans). Since enmity is inescapable in a republic, the Machiavelli quotation continues, one should at least prevent the emergence of sects. Rousseau's footnote quotes Machiavelli at length:

Vera cosa è, dit Machiavel, che alcuni divisioni nucono alle Republiche, e alcune giovano : quelle nucono che sono dalle sette e da partigiani accompagnate : quelle giovano che senza sette, senza partigiani si mantengono. Non potendo adunque provvedere un fundatore d'una Republica che non siano nimicizie in quella, hà da proveder almeno che non vi siano sette. Hist. Fiorent. L. VII. (1964: 372)<sup>8</sup>

It is striking, however, that Rousseau never offers an account of which divisions are beneficial.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Rousseau appears to read this passage as if every division is partisan, for his very next line canvases the possibility not that there are salutary divisions in a state, but that "partial societies" might be inevitable. The remedy he proposes for this danger is the multiplication of parties. Note that this entirely evades the larger Machiavellian question about which divisions are useful: there are no useful divisions; there are merely parties that are more and less dangerous. The solution—multiplying parties—is a manner of preventing people from coalescing into the type of groups that can dominate the rest of society. If divisions are multiplied, we find ourselves increasingly approaching the condition of having no parties at all. We approach the desired condition of generality.

I have rendered Machiavelli's word *sette* equivocally as "factions" and "sects." In the Machiavellian context, it is clear that the word *sette* refers to both religious and secular groups.<sup>10</sup> The overlap between the two types of division is quite common in eighteenth-century thought, in which the multiplication of sects serves as a kind of collective defanging.<sup>11</sup> The same is

true for Rousseau's treatment of religious pluralism. For Rousseau's attempt to marry toleration to his unitary civil religion depends on reducing the articles of faith to a bare minimum and then permitting a radical multiplicity in religions, merely insisting that they all be tolerant. There is no space to go into this here, but this call for toleration is actually one of the more extreme elements of Rousseau's doctrine, for tolerance, on his reading, requires people not to believe that their church offers the sole path to salvation: to believe in the exclusive truth of one's faith he thought incompatible with peace. Since everyday experience in pluralistic societies belies Rousseau's claim, one might think his suggestion somewhat overreaching. But the important matter for our purposes is that this type of division is rendered harmless and unity restored by pluralizing sects and creating a pious love of the patrie.

Among the partial societies denounced by Rousseau we are meant to include the types of class-based bodies that were part of Machiavelli's healthy Roman divisions. In his *Discours sur l'économie politique*, Rousseau gives a number of examples of partial societies: religious sects, armies, guilds.<sup>12</sup> But he also includes senators: "Il est vrai que les sociétés particulières étant toujours subordonnées à celles qui les contiennent, ... que les devoirs du citoyen vont avant ceux du sénateur ... mais malheureusement l'intérêt personnel se trouve toujours en raison inverse du devoir, et augmente à mesure que l'association devient plus étroite" (1964 : 246). Elsewhere it is not the party of the senate that is the danger, but the popular party: in *Social Contract* IV.4, Rousseau condemns the Roman Comitia Tributa in which plebeians voted on laws affecting all. Here they form a party ruling the whole; excluding senators offends against the principle of generality. All groupings—class-based parties included—have the tincture of conspiracy and tyranny to them, for they are inherently incapable of looking to the public good: they entail a part attempting to rule over the whole. Rousseau, indeed, tells us that any system in which a particular will rules over the general will follow maxims similar to those found in Machiavelli's "satire," *The Prince* (1964: 247).

Division, then, is always viewed through the lens of Machiavellian corruption, never as a source of virtue. We can better understand Rousseau's reluctance to recognize healthy partisan division if we attend to the mechanism ensuring generality. Recall Rousseau's somewhat difficult argument about the manner in which the will of all gets transformed into the general will by taking all the individual wills together, with the "pluses and minuses" cancelling one another out (1964: II.3). The difficulty with party is that it corrupts individual deliberation; instead of evaluating a decision in an independent way, simply thinking about one's interests and whether one wants a given law to apply to oneself and to all, one ceases to perform the mental function of generalizing; one thinks primarily of one's group. The argument Rousseau gives in the *Social Contract* for

eliminating partial societies has engendered much confusion. It appears to hang on the number of voters involved: in a partisan election, Rousseau writes, it is really as if the party blocks themselves are voting. Thus it is as if there really are only so many voters as there are parties; in contrast, in an election where voters are isolated, there are many more voters, and therefore a greater diversity of opinion. Readers often stumble on this passage and many make the incorrect inference that Rousseau is making a statistical argument here. On this reading, the general will's incapacity to err is to be understood in light of Condorcet's jury theorem, as if the point of voting is to employ the wisdom of the crowd to discover objectively true phenomena (Estlund, 1989; Grofman, 1988). But the only thing being discovered in the Rousseauan vote is the nature of the general will itself. That is, voting runs together both expressive and epistemic elements: the "truth" being discovered is precisely the will of the community as a whole that is being expressed (1964: II.4).<sup>13</sup> The statement that the "general will can never err" is, in fact, a tautology. Rousseau is arguing that the general will can never not be the general will (he is not arguing that the general will can never make bad decisions). But why does a majority attained by a voting public of isolated individuals somehow succeed in having its will transformed into the general will whereas a public coalesced into interested groups does not? The way the argument is made in *Social Contract* II.3 makes it seem as if a larger number of voters is always better, but surely this can't be Rousseau's meaning, for it would undermine his preference for small republics. There is, in Rousseau's argument something similar to Madison's view in *Federalist* 10 about diluting the danger of factions by multiplying them (a comparison that grows stronger when one compares Madison's federalism with Rousseau's federal proposals for the large republic of Poland). But again, Rousseau differs from Madison in that his argument does not rest upon the desirability of enlarging the republic; it is, indeed, more about psychology than arithmetic.<sup>14</sup> In the passage from *Discours sur l'économie politique* cited above we see this hinted at. Closeness to our fellow partisans renders us incapable of seeing the general good—"l'intérêt personnel...augmente à mesure que l'association devient plus étroite." Group-feeling diverts one's attention away from simple reflection on one's interests and the public good; one reflects rather on what is best for one's group. When one loses a vote under such conditions, one tends to feel that one's side has lost, that one's group is merely being dominated by another group. In a situation in which there is a wide variety of opinions that are neither consolidated into groups nor known to the elector prior to the vote, it is much easier to say to oneself post-vote, "je m'étais trompé" (1964: 441). This psychological reading could also account for Rousseau's unexplained preference for a higher majority threshold in matters of greater importance.<sup>15</sup> Rousseau was attempting to craft a system that would remove the psychological props for amour-



propre. The tyrannical desire for eminence is fed by partial associations; their elimination makes civic virtue easier to attain.

Machiavelli's distinction between useful and harmful divisions hangs in part on the publicity of the first and the secret nature of the second. But Rousseau had no faith in publicity: he thought secret or tacit divisions occur *in public* when orators are permitted to start swaying crowds and consolidating opinions. One need not talk of conspiracies; it suffices to have public speakers "qui pour des vûes particulieres fait éluder la disposition naturelle de l'assemblée" (1964: 246). The assembly's natural disposition is what emerges when every individual is performing the basic mental function of asking what laws he wants to pass for himself and for all. It is important for voters to be isolated in order to prevent their reflection from ceasing to be general. For if there is communication, there is the danger of orators forging group loyalties, undermining solidarity and corrupting the very simple thought process that ought to guide the individual citizen's deliberation. What Machiavelli thought was merely a product of public deliberation in a corrupted society in which inequality and private dependencies undermined the capacity of people to speak frankly (1990: I.18) was, for Rousseau, a danger inherent to all public discourse where orators stir up particular passions for private ends. The Spartan practice of having the populace simply decide rather than debate on questions was much more in line with Rousseau's ideal than the "tyranny" of orators found in Athens.

Naturally, Rousseau's response to the danger of faction and disunity goes well beyond the procedures for deliberating and voting. Of greater importance is the transformation of the individual into a citizen. For Rousseau is not content merely "to take men as they are": legislators must transform men into citizens, "substituer une existence partielle et morale à l'existence physique et indépendante que nous avons tous reçue de la nature" (1964: 381). As the famous passage in *Émile* has it, "L'homme naturel est tout pour lui; il est l'unité numérique, l'entier absolue, qui n'a de rapport qu'à lui-même ou à son semblable. L'homme civil n'est qu'une unité fractionnaire qui tient au dénominateur, et dont la valeur est dans son rapport avec l'entier, qui est le corps social" (1966: 39). "Denaturing" man such that he is fit for a just community involves all the well-known institutions associated with Rousseauan civic consciousness: the cultivation of a national character, the civic religion modeled on the creations of Numa or Moses, the Spartan-style education, the military ceremonies and preparations, the patriotic festivals and songs, and so on. Now, there is much more to be said about just what degree of radical unity Rousseau advocated. I am wary of the reading that ascribes to Rousseau a call for strict ideological or religious uniformity; certainly he never claimed that opinions should always converge on issues. Rousseau's antipathy to partial associations, indeed, is based on his assumption that there will always be differences of opinion. By eliminating

partial societies one does not remove diversity of opinions; rather, one removes a psychological crutch that allowed people to hold their personal opinion to be more worthy of obedience than the general will. Regardless of how homogenous one takes Rousseau's ideal republic to be, the key for our purposes is to note that a "partial existence," being part of any grouping, is itself unnatural: the baseline condition of radical independence that characterizes the Rousseauian natural condition is to be overcome with a radical interdependence that can only be made legitimate when each legislates for all. All else is corruption; Rousseau took to heart the Machiavellian dictum that "from partisans arise the parties in cities; from parties their ruin" (Machiavelli, 1995: 24); he entirely passed over the Machiavellian praise of *tumulti*, for he thought the struggle between the orders was simply another dangerous factionalism.

### The Chaplain of Noble Struggle

If Rousseau sought to draw people together and to tamp down on the type of passions that gave birth to animosities between partial societies, Adam Ferguson offered a thorough praise of tensions and the passions to which they give rise. Was Ferguson offering a Machiavellian justification of the tumultuous republic? If Pocock designated Rousseau the Machiavelli of the eighteenth century, he called Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* the "most Machiavellian" text on virtue and corruption in the Scottish Enlightenment (1975: 499). But as with Rousseau, I would like to suggest that Pocock's characterization of Ferguson is imprecise. On one level, of course, Machiavellian themes in Ferguson's work leap off the page. Ferguson was preoccupied with the opposition between corruption and a highly militarized virtue, and he was a great advocate of civic participation in the form of a militia (against the modern, professional army and the atomised, commercial state).<sup>16</sup> But on the subject of unity and division, I would like to suggest that Ferguson's view bears a resemblance to only one side of the Machiavellian argument, and Ferguson's reasons for taking this position are somewhat different from the Florentine thinker's.<sup>17</sup> While Ferguson embraced something akin to Machiavelli's highly unusual praise of division, he did not differentiate between harmful and beneficial divisions in a Machiavellian manner. Ferguson was much more indiscriminate in his praise of division, and his defence of it was based on a very different anthropology and a moralization of conflict. Ferguson's view is a photo-negative of the Rousseauian argument.

Ferguson thought liberty safeguarded by divisions. However "ignoble" he thought partisans, he saw party conflict in England as highly "noble" in its effects: "it is undoubtedly one principle of life in our constitution" (1776: 214). This was so for the Montesquieuan reason that liberty was protected

by power checking power, but, more importantly, it was also so because civic virtue was dependent upon a degree of tension and struggle. Far from being corrupting, division was invigorating.

The key to this teaching is in Ferguson's agonistic anthropology. In opposition to Rousseau's imagined pre-civil condition of radical atomism, Ferguson suggested that the evidence from human history supports the view that human beings are essentially passionate, gregarious creatures who love nothing more than exertion in the aim of their group. There is simply no evidence supporting Rousseau's speculation about the pre-social condition. Beyond his critique of Rousseau, Ferguson was skeptical of theories that tried to understand the essence of human beings in distinction from any group to which they belong. There is, for instance, no room in Ferguson's thought for the image of human beings as purely egoistic, rational actors. Human beings are not creatures that seek the greatest personal gratification for the least amount of effort. On the contrary, muscles are meant to be flexed, and humans love to flex them. We are egoistic, to be sure (Ferguson derides the simplistic opposition between egoism and altruism), but the pleasures we seek often entail social virtues such as courage. Indeed, we seek to exert ourselves for others; paradoxically, "the ardour and intensity of the effort seems to increase in the pleasure it gives" (1792: 15). The greatest pleasure Ferguson sees in life is active struggle for those we love. The story is often told that Ferguson, when chaplain for a Highlander regiment in the war of Austrian succession, risked losing his commission as a chaplain and grabbed a sword, so keen was he to leap into the fray. Whether or not this story is apocryphal, the joyous whoop of "Damn my commission!" (Heath, 2008: 9) captures the root of his moral philosophy. We love to expend effort in difficult and dangerous pursuits for the good of our own. This is not amour-propre, Ferguson insists (1995: 23),<sup>18</sup> nor is our tendency to gather together in groups a mere quest for profit or security, for history is replete with people gladly laying down both of these things for their family, party or nation. But love does not easily exist in the absence of aversion. Foreshadowing the extravagant thesis of Carl Schmitt, Ferguson insisted that "it is vain to expect that we can give to the multitude of a people a sense of union among themselves, without admitting hostility to those that oppose them" (1995: 29, 99). This is not something he lamented; on the contrary, he assured his readers that opposition is itself a good, giving the "greatest triumphs to a vigorous mind; and he who has never struggled with his fellow creatures, is a stranger to half the sentiments of mankind" (28). "Our very praise of unanimity," he insisted, "is to be considered a danger to liberty" (252).

Given this doctrine, it is difficult to class him among "Aristotelian theorists" as some have done (Pocock, 1975: 500). After all, if Aristotle thought the city existed for more than mere commerce and security, he

never indulged in this heady idolization of arms. Arms are the necessary condition of not being a slave, but war exists for the sake of peace, and the activity that is most admirable is political or philosophical (Aristotle, 1996: 1333a). Ferguson saw political activity as a source of happiness primarily for its capacity to allow us to engage in struggle; Aristotle would have thought he had placed the cart before the horse. If Ferguson's view was distant from Aristotle, it was also somewhat distinct from the Machiavellian creed that saw in the conflict of the orders a basis for containing the avarice of the ambitious *grandi*. For Ferguson, conflict served this purpose of containing the ambitious, but more importantly it trained people to civic passions. There was, in his view, no way of thinking friendship without enmity and struggle.

This view entailed a certain bellicosity. Foreign conflicts were necessary. But this led to a danger. Machiavelli had understood that republican imperialism ultimately led to the death of republican institutions, but in the end he had celebrated Rome's imperial republic over the more stable but less glorious republics of Sparta or Venice. Machiavelli thought one had to choose between republics for expansion, which had internal conflict but greater glory, and republics for preservation, which might—if they were not destroyed in the perpetual rise and fall of states—retain a degree of internal harmony because of their fixity in size and political composition. He clearly opted for the Roman model. Ferguson, however, wanted tension and conflict without imperialism. Iain McDaniel (2013b: ch.5) highlights Ferguson's worry that Britain risked following the Roman example and moving from a balanced constitution to a military despotism (a vision inspired by Montesquieu's reading of Rome's decline).<sup>19</sup> Unlike Machiavelli (who embraced empire in spite of its tendency to become corrupted by success), Ferguson did not think Rome's imperialism salutary or productive of greatness. Rome's rapacity was "ruinous to the virtue and the happiness of mankind," (1995: 60, 256–57) for it destroyed the very divisions that allowed nations to compete and to imitate each other on the basis of equality. And if one were to counter that at the very least empires bring the benefit of peace, Ferguson would respond that such peace is a great harm. It causes decadence and it is a source of military government (that radical opposite of an armed citizenry).

War and contest are the cradles of virtue. And Ferguson's Rousseauan-sounding anxieties about modern commercial society turning us into cold-hearted, atomistic calculators who treat our fellow beings as mere human resources are premised on the dangers of peace for solidarity. The bulk of writing on Ferguson rightly emphasizes the clash between commerce and virtue and the spiritual effects of the division of labour between the soldier and the citizen. On this subject, Ferguson agreed with the citizen de Genève. But if both writers saw mercenaries and professional armies as the symbols *par excellence* of an attenuated civic virtue, they did so

for different reasons. For while Rousseau recognized that conflict could create solidarity, we have seen that he ultimately tried to combine martial duty and solidarity with a universal, irenic spirit. There was a tension between the two that remained unresolved in his political philosophy. Ferguson, by contrast, thought virtue required avenues for martial courage to manifest itself. Real wars were a boon. If there was a tension in Ferguson's thought it was that he wanted war without conquest. This was the difficulty all nations faced: it was difficult to avoid letting one's martial virtue slip over into a fatal desire for conquest that led to empires and the extinguishing of virtue. "The equality of those alliances which the Grecian states formed against each other, maintained, for a time, their independence and separation, and that time was the shining and the happy period of their story" (1995: 147). But when this spilled over into the love of conquest, they planted the seeds of their own servility.

It is not merely external enemies that serve freedom, vigour and benevolence; internal struggles, too, have merit: "The rivalry of separate communities, and the agitations of a free people, are the principles of political life, and the school of men" (1995: 63). This is the life of free nations, and the corruption of modern times was that they pacified these tendencies. "Our ancestors, in rude ages, during the recess of wars from abroad, fought for their personal claims at home, and by their competitions, and the balance of their powers, maintained a kind of political freedom in the state" (58). This competition for eminence, precisely the sort of thing Rousseau thought so poisonous, was invigorating. And though this "rude" age was replete with private crimes, Ferguson continues, it had the advantage of not fostering a selfish, possessive independence that is the hallmark of commercial ages. Differences, debates, even quarrels, were part of what made a state free and strong. "Nothing ... but corruption or slavery can suppress the debates that subsist among men of integrity, who bear an equal part in the administration of a state" (63). This is one of the advantages of republics: "The republican must act in the state, to sustain his pretensions; he must join a party, in order to be safe; he must form one, in order to be great" (181). Straightforward monarchies do not permit this: they enfeeble by protecting people and relegating them to their determined stations. Ferguson (who largely followed Montesquieu's distinction between monarchies and republics) clearly saw in Britain's mixed regime republican elements that needed to be cultivated.

Ferguson quoted a passage in Plutarch praising division in Sparta: "[the Spartan legislator] considered emulation the brand by which their virtues were kindled; and seemed to apprehend, that a complaisance, by which men submit their opinions without examination, is a principal source of corruption" (63). The passage is not from Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, but from the *Life of Agesilaus* (Plutarch, 1831: 417) where the king is denigrated for undermining the mixed constitution by cultivating

too much friendship and concord with the senate. This praise of dissention is worth comparing with a law of Solon against trimming, cited by Montesquieu from Plutarch's *Life of Solon* (Montesquieu, 1979: XXIX.3; Plutarch, 1831: 966). Plutarch describes a curious law that threatened citizens with disenfranchisement if, during a factional contest, they refused to take a side. For Plutarch, the law was made to punish those who took an insufficient interest in their city; lack of participation was proof of weak patriotism and insufficient zeal. For the less excitable Montesquieu, the law had the opposite purpose: to make the more moderate citizens (who would reasonably want to sit out violent contests) take part, thus diluting the influence of the hot-headed. Ferguson leaned towards the sentiment expressed in Plutarch's interpretation. But it is worth noting that Ferguson's praise of contest celebrated Spartan, not Athenian, practice. And Spartan practice is known more for its celebration of quarrels than reasoned debate. Indeed, Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* does not emphasize Spartan debate; the people themselves were not allowed to debate but to accept or reject the proposals debated by the king and senate (1831: 32). Plutarch emphasized tensions and bellicosity, describing such institutions as the educational practice of encouraging quarrels among the youth for the development of character (37).

Perhaps Ferguson's preference for Spartan over Athenian practice tells us something about how he envisioned debate: it is, after all, not the logos of the *zoon politikon* who realizes his nature in the discussion of the just and unjust, the prudent and imprudent (Aristotle, 1996: 1253a)<sup>20</sup> but rather a subdued warfare that is sufficiently peaceful to allow for coexistence. In this, he was clearly drawn to a Machiavellian view of Roman liberty as the struggle between orders: "These different orders of men are the elements of whose mixture the political body is generally formed ... The people themselves are a party upon occasion; and numbers of men ... become, by their jarring pretensions and separate views, mutual interruptions and checks" (1995: 124, 156). The clash between parties, struggling for their partisan interests, is a source of liberty and public good. But unlike Machiavelli, Ferguson did not differentiate the clash of orders from the clash of parties; England's division between the orders had given way to the division between parties that cut across classes.<sup>21</sup> *Both* were salutary, containing the ambitious and training the passions.

This Montesquieuan sentiment that power should check power has an un-Montesquieuan aspect in Ferguson's agonistic enthusiasm. Indeed, Ferguson was ambivalent about the central Montesquieuan virtue, moderation.<sup>22</sup> Like Montesquieu, he associated monarchies with moderation and republics with extreme virtue of a sacrificial nature. But unlike Montesquieu, he did not think ancient republics contained a monkish suppression of desire: on the contrary, in republics like Sparta, humanity's most ennobling desires found expression. It is the monarchical age that, in its

passivity and “effeminacy,” is more revoltingly monkish (1995: 244). Ferguson’s agonistic ethic looked askance at so tame a virtue as moderation: “The merit of a man is determined by his candour and generosity to his associates, by his zeal for national objects, and by his vigour in maintaining political rights; not by moderation alone, which proceeds frequently from indifference to national and public interest, and which serves to relax the nerves on which the force of a private, as well as a public, character depends” (189, 201). The muscles must remain tensed: “The suppression ... of ambition, of party animosity, and of public envy, is probably, in every such case, not a reformation, but a symptom of weakness” (245).

Ferguson was not, however, entirely without ambiguities on the virtues of faction. In his later history of Rome, he both praised and denounced the class divisions that produced “some good, and... much harm” (1834: 8). He lamented that “the state seems to have carried, in all its establishments, the seeds of dissention and tumult” (1834: 22). But though he deplored that Rome was a “continual scene of contradictions and inconsistencies,” he also reminded his readers that this very constitution had the advantage of “being the most excellent nursery of statesmen and warriors, and in forming the most conspicuous example of national ability and success” (10). He wrote of Rome, “The ambition with which the lower ranks of the people endeavoured to watch their superiors, the solicitude with which the higher order endeavoured to preserve its distinction, the exercise of ability which, in this contest, was common to both, enabled them to act against foreign enemies with a spirit that was whetted, but not worn out, in their domestic quarrels” (16).

Did he have his own manner of distinguishing between good and bad division? Yes and no; there were no types of division that were essentially problematic, but there were constitutional and moral conditions that would render destructive our healthy propensity to divide. Armed elites leaning on the mob were problematic, but the remedy to this was opposing faction.

Faction is ever ready to seize all occasional advantages; and mankind, when in hazard from any party, seldom find a better protection than that of its rival. Cato united with Pompey in opposition to Cæsar, and guarded against nothing so much as that reconciliation of parties, which was in effect to be a combination of different leaders against the freedom of the republic. (1995: 130)

The real danger is if the people are unarmed. The “alliance of faction with military power” (256) was possible when one had an enervated and passive population; faction here was dangerous because there *wasn’t enough of it*, the despot having “curb[ed] the spirit of dissension.” (254). The people are corrupted by their lack of participation. He laments that during the period of

Roman corruption, “in the minds of the people, the sense of the public was defaced; and even the animosity of faction had subsided” (211).

One other instance in which he spoke of faction in a negative manner was in contexts of excessively popular government. But here too it was a lack of martial spirit and ardour for others that reduced noble faction to selfish bickering. In a university textbook he suggested that the effects of faction differ in different regimes: discussing juries, Ferguson argued that monarchies require larger juries (which are more difficult to influence), whereas republics (here used to mean popular regimes) should have small juries (which are less factious). He then asserted, “The spirit of faction that in republics constituted corruption, in monarchies tends to prevent a greater corruption, servility to those in power” (1769: 313). This passage appears to contradict his repeated argument that republican faction is healthy and necessary and was the source of Rome’s greatness. But this line about corrupting faction referred to unmixed popular government. Consistent with his anti-democratic, anti-Athenian streak, this passage lamented that excessively popular constitutions allow the administration of justice to succumb to faction. This mirrors his lamentation in the *Essay* that governments by popular assembly are “subject to errors in administration” (1995: 156). In particular, he deprecated popular government in a society “composed of men whose dispositions are sordid” (178), that is, commercial society where people lack martial virtues and enlarged passions. He deplored “when the covetous and mercenary assemble in parties” (73) and thought such vices were the product of social conditions. “How can he who has confined his views to his own subsistence or preservation be intrusted with the conduct of nations?” (178). It is these people—“sordid” and “corrupt” because unarmed and unaccustomed to standing with and for their own—who bring “ruinous faction” to popular assemblies.<sup>23</sup> Only the radical corruption of a state—corruption stemming from a lack of passionate, partisan engagement itself and tied to the constitutional extremes of despotism or licence—can render parties harmful. As he wrote in a letter praising the British constitution, parties are “to be cherished in Speculation even while we censure & condemn them in Particular Instances. While the Constitution is safe, Ambition & Faction will be Vigorous & Free, & we may owe to them very great & Material Favours” (1780). In free peoples, partisan struggle is a spiritual exercise keeping them vigorous and ready for war. It is the school of virtue and the source of happiness.

### **Conclusion: Between Harmony and Division**

Two of the greatest eighteenth-century champions of the classical republican ideal grasped the civic creed by opposite ends. They both understood



corruption in terms of similar notions of civic virtue; they both worried about modern commercial nations tending towards a disavowal of the public good. But due to their radically clashing anthropologies and visions of human felicity, their conceptions of the relationship between social harmony and corruption diverged radically. Where Rousseau saw partisan division as corrupting and sought modes whereby society could be rendered harmonious, Ferguson moralized the argument for tension, celebrating it not merely as a necessary check on the abuse of authority, but as a constitutive element of a full human life.

In spite of their differences they shared a basic republican commitment to active citizenship. Indeed, their divergent positions on the merits of division were based on different diagnoses of the same disease. For the corruption that Rousseau thought came from partial societies was the abandonment of individual reflection on the public good—the individual submits to the charms of oratory and the myopia of particular loyalties. Ferguson worried about corruption as the abandonment of passionate and generous commitment to one's associates, the necessary condition for active engagement in public affairs. Both authors ultimately sought the same thing: passionate devotion to the public good and to public duty.

Given this shared commitment, both Ferguson and Rousseau would likely find modern practices of partisanship in mass democracy corrupting. Public will-formation in the era of mass media encourages neither the phenomenon of individual Rousseauan civic reflection nor the active Fergusonian virtues of taking a stand with and for one's own (petulance on Twitter is not quite civic courage). Neither the mass plebiscite nor the machine-politics governing modern elections fosters the civic spirit urged by these champions of republican virtue. Whether divided or united, whether tumultuous or harmonious, modern party politics appears destined to suffer from the corruption of the citizen into a mere subject.

But if this pessimistic suggestion is fair, we might nonetheless ask whether Fergusonian agonism or Rousseauan holism is a fitting response to our civic condition. We began with the Machiavellian argument that some divisions are salutary while others are destructive, and we noted that Rousseau—directly appealing to the key passage in Machiavelli's work—entirely transformed the argument, embracing Machiavelli's views about the dangers of faction but passing over in silence the claim that there are healthy divisions. Ferguson, in contrast, embraced division, describing excessive unity as corrupting. On his reading, all types of division—from the class-based clashes of the early Roman republic to the political parties in eighteenth-century Britain—can be healthy and invigorating so long as the people have martial spirit and the constitution retains its force. But in comparison with the argument made by Machiavelli, both of these models of republican revival seem extremely one-sided. For surely Rousseau is correct that an excessive partisanship

can bolster amour-propre and undermine both individual judgment and commitment to the common good. Yet equally surely the absence of opposition can lead to a weakening of civic fibre and to the complacency and corruption of rulers and ruled. Might it be that modern ambivalences about partisanship derive from the fact that we are in equal parts attracted to the Rousseauian denigration of partial societies and to the Fergusonian praise of ennobling struggle? Certainly the ongoing clash between the view that partisanship is corrupting—described by Rosenblum (with only slight exaggeration) as “the dominant view in all quarters of contemporary democratic theory” (2014: 269)—and the so-called “radical” school of agnostic democracy maps nicely onto the clash between the Rousseauian and Fergusonian poles in republican thought. In the end, I would like to suggest that political theorists of a republican bent would do well to revisit Machiavelli for insights on the relationship between civic virtue and social division that are lost if one pursues too doggedly either the ideal of harmony or that of struggle. To attend to Machiavelli would entail attending to his distinction between harmful and salutary tensions. It would entail paying heed to the difference between institutionalized, class-based struggle and factions that engender clientelistic dependencies. In thinking about the relationship between corruption and partisanship in contemporary democracies we would be well served to reflect upon the different modalities of division and unity and the fruitful tensions that can exist between them.

## Notes

- 1 Gunn’s volume (1971) is a collection of arguments on this theme from often-obscure pamphlet literature.
- 2 Claude Lefort (1992: 166–67; 1986: 475ff) highlighted this institutionalization of the social division between those desiring to dominate and those desiring not to be dominated. More recently, McCormick (2011) has argued for the radical democratic possibilities of institutionalized opposition.
- 3 Those who charge Rousseau with excessive holism are legion. Talmon (1960) famously called Rousseau a “totalitarian democrat.” For Starobinski (1988), the desire for radical transparency and unity was Rousseau’s defining pathology. Sandel (1996: 319–20) dismissed Rousseau for his insufficient pluralism.
- 4 Other champions of Machiavelli’s republicanism tended towards holism. James Harrington (1992: 218) proclaimed Machiavelli the restorer of classical prudence but disapproved of the *Discourses*’ insistence on class tension. He sought a constitution that would remedy the fundamental flaw of the Roman republic.
- 5 His suggestion that the Poles relinquish territory would have struck most republicans as pusillanimity. For his anti-bellicosity, see the *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité*, (1964: 179).
- 6 For a meditation on the tensions in this project, see Beiner (1993).
- 7 The classic treatment of the tension between man and citizen in Rousseau is Shklar (1965).

- 8 “It is true that some divisions are harmful to republics and some are helpful. Those are harmful that are accompanied by sects and partisans; those are helpful that are maintained without sects and partisans. Thus, since a founder of a republic cannot provide that there be no enmities in it, he has to provide at least that there not be sects” (Machiavelli, 1990: 276).
- 9 Strangely, Ronald Tercek (1997: 112) cites this passage in order to claim that Rousseau “distinguishes between conflicts that serve to protect and even invigorate the foundational principles of liberty from those that seek to advance private interests.” But what is remarkable about this passage is that Rousseau does *not* pick up on this aspect of the citation. There are no useful divisions.
- 10 I emphasize the religious less than Mansfield (1995).
- 11 Hume’s discussion of party quickly turns to religious factions; Madison, in *Federalist* 10 equally worries about factions of religious and secular varieties, and proposes to dilute them by expanding the republic and multiplying the factions.
- 12 “Tel peut être prêtre dévot, ou brave soldat, ou praticien zélé, et mauvais citoyen.” (1964: 246).
- 13 Paul de Man (1979: 270) points out the “performative” and “constative” dimensions of the general will’s enunciation.
- 14 As one anonymous reader from this journal notes, Rousseau, in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, suggested that only a federal arrangement could reconcile the smallness necessary for a virtuous republic with the size necessary for its defence.
- 15 Melissa Schwartzberg (2008) makes this point in her rejection of the Condorcetian reading of Rousseau.
- 16 Istvan Hont also notes the “Machiavellian chords” of Ferguson’s *Essay* (1983: 295).
- 17 Ferguson’s debt to Machiavelli is a controversial subject. Kettler (1965: 7) claims that Machiavelli was an influence, but Hill (2006: 39) notes the paucity of direct references to Machiavelli in Ferguson’s oeuvre, and there are many other thinkers, from the Stoics to Montesquieu, who had greater influence on him. I know of one direct reference to the *Discourses* in his oeuvre (1834: I.1). (I thank an anonymous reviewer for indicating this reference.) The suggestion that Ferguson is “Machiavellian” is based on the identification as Machiavellian of the view that public debt, luxury and standing armies were corrupting. If Pocock demonstrated Machiavelli’s importance in eighteenth-century debates, subsequent historiography finds plural sources for this series of concerns. Merolle (2006, xxvi-xxvii) is perhaps the harshest critic of Pocock’s “civic humanist” reading of Ferguson, emphasizing Ferguson’s Stoicism and the difference between Renaissance republics and eighteenth-century Britain. Ferguson’s involvement in Scottish debates over a militia led him to appeal to arguments with Machiavellian overtones, but there existed a widespread fear, with multiple intellectual sources, that centralized monarchs with standing armies had despotic propensities (Sonenscher, 2009). In any event, our concern here is not the extent of Machiavelli’s influence on Ferguson, but rather how similar he was to Machiavelli on the question of unity and division.
- 18 He differentiates authentic fellow feeling from the vain quest for approbation, which he associates with the instrumentalization of others (1995: 55–6).
- 19 The importance of this theme of universal monarchy, public debt and military despotism in eighteenth-century political thought is highlighted by Sonenscher (2009).
- 20 The anti-Athenian theme is evident in Ferguson’s 1776 pamphlet on the American rebellion (8–9).
- 21 Ferguson (1776: 16) thought the contest between the monarchical and the popular elements of the English constitution had reached an equilibrium. “In the contest of our times, the parties are the pretenders to office and the holders of office.”
- 22 Ferguson considers moderation compatible with despotism, an un-Montesquieuan sentiment (1995: 255).

- 23 Elazar rightly emphasizes Ferguson's disapproval of government by "the mere clerk and accountant" (2014: 786).

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