

Adam Ferguson's Perception of History and Historiography : The Significance of "Virtues of Rude Men"

Hiroko Aoki

In the milieu of the Scottish Enlightenment that celebrated modern civilized society and its outcomes, Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) propounded confident views on its merits, but at the same time he was apprehensive about the consequences of increasing specialization, depersonalization of social relations, and acceptance of hedonism as a social force. In order to account for the multiple elements implicit in his thought as a whole and in his conception of "civil society," this paper reexamines Ferguson's historiography, perception of the history of humankind, and his characterization of stages in human history from savage to ancient civilized society. It attempts to indicate the complexity of his thought through a close examination of his use of the term *civilized*.

Assuming that the different views on modern civilized society of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers were influenced by

their evaluations — positive or negative — of precommercial society, this paper seeks to explain the significance of Ferguson's stress on the "rude" state of human societies early in their evolution. Because Ferguson considered natural human strengths — the "virtues of rude men" — to have been important throughout the history of humankind, it is difficult to analyze his views simply in terms of the dichotomy of rudeness and civilization. Drawing on Pocock's identification of Ferguson's "public spirit" not with "political participation" but rather with the human nature of "active man," this paper argues that Ferguson's unique perception of history can add significantly to our understanding of the way "civilization" and "civil society" have been understood in the past.

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