Adam Ferguson

Selected Philosophical Writings

Edited by Eugene Heath

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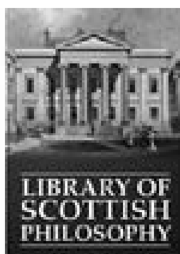
Edited and Introduced
by Eugene Heath



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Series Editor's Note

The principal purpose of volumes in this series is not to provide scholars with accurate editions, but to make the writings of Scottish philosophers accessible to a new generation of modern readers in an attractively produced and competitively priced format. In accordance with this purpose, certain changes have been made to the original texts:

- Spelling and punctuation have been modernized.
- In some cases, the selected passages have been given new titles.
- Some original footnotes and references have not been included.
- Some extracts have been shortened from their original length.
- Quotations from Greek have been transliterated, and passages in foreign languages translated, or omitted altogether.

Care has been taken to ensure that in no instance do these amendments truncate the argument or alter the meaning intended by the original author. For readers who want to consult the original texts, full bibliographical details are provided for each extract.

The Library of Scottish Philosophy was originally an initiative of the Centre for the Study of Scottish Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen. The first six volumes, published in 2004, were commissioned with financial support from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, and the texts prepared for publication by Mr Jon Cameron, administrative and editorial assistant to the Centre. In 2006 the CSSP moved to Princeton where it became one of three research centers within the Special Collections of Princeton Theological Seminary. The next four volumes were prepared for publication by the new administrative and editorial assistant, Ms Elaine James.

Acknowledgements

The CSSP gratefully acknowledges the support of the Carnegie Trust, the first class work of both Mr Cameron and Ms James, the enthusiasm and excellent service of the publisher Imprint Academic, and the permission of the University of Aberdeen Special Collections and Libraries to use the engraving of the *Faculty of Advocates* (1829) as the logo for the series.

Gordon Graham,
Princeton, May 2007

Editor's Note

In the closing paragraph of his introductory remarks to the *Principles*, Ferguson states that "a work of this sort, to be properly executed, ought to be calculated, not for any particular class of readers, but for mankind." That, I take it, is also a purpose of this Library. In this instance, the editorial corrections to the original texts include some updated spellings and alterations of punctuation (where helpful), as well as some unification of paragraphs (in the *Institutes*). Italicizations are original. All omissions—excepting the omissions of some of Ferguson's very few footnotes—are indicated by ellipses. All inserted remarks are indicated by the use of brackets: [ ].

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I thank Gordon Graham, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Scottish Philosophy, for his leadership in publishing this and other volumes in this series. At Aberdeen, Jon Cameron performed, most expeditiously, the original scanning of these works. And Anthony Freeman at Imprint Academic has proven both kind and patient.

Introduction

A philosopher and historian, Adam Ferguson occupies a unique place within eighteenth-century Scottish thought. A man of energy and verve, he made important contributions to social and moral theory, political philosophy, and to the study of history. Reared in the highlands of Scotland, he lived most of his life in the enlightenment world of Edinburgh, participating in the city's social clubs and in the broader public and intellectual life of his nation. Renown for *An Essay on the History of Civil* Society (1767), he also penned pamphlets on political issues, published works of moral and political philosophy, wrote a multi-volume history of the Roman Republic, and composed numerous manuscript essays. Distinguished by a moral and historical bent, his work is framed within a teleological outlook that upholds the importance of action and virtue in the emerging commercial society of the eighteenth century.

I

Born in 1723, in Logierait, Perthshire, the young Adam was the last and ninth child of Mary Gordon and Adam Ferguson, a minister in the Church of Scotland. After graduating from St. Andrews in 1742, he began Divinity Studies there but soon moved to the University of Edinburgh, where he became friends with other divinity students, including William Robertson, Alexander Carlyle, and Hugh Blair. These individuals, who would be among the moderates within the Church of Scotland, would remain Ferguson's friends, and would be joined by such significant thinkers as David Hume and Adam Smith.

Ferguson had been born just over fifteen years after the Union of Parliaments (1707) ended the independence of Scotland. Not all were happy with the union, and in 1745 Ferguson witnesses the last major Jacobite uprising (to restore the exiled Stuart kings). A

Gaelic speaker, he is appointed deputy-chaplain to a Highlander regiment, the Black Watch, having received an early ordination from the Church of Scotland. After eight years, Ferguson leaves the army, and by 1756 he is again in Edinburgh. There he publishes a defense of a citizens' militia, *Reflections* previous *to the Establishment of a Militia,* arguing that a militia—not permitted in Scotland since the uprising of 1745—is an important instrument for maintaining a vigorous public spirit among the citizenry. The alternative, an inactive citizenry and a standing professional army, would increase the risk of despotism.

In 1756, Ferguson marries Katherine Burnet, the niece of his friend, the chemist Joseph Black. The Fergusons have nine children, seven of whom survive infancy. Having left the ministry, in 1759 Ferguson secures a professorship, the Chair of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh. In five years, he is able to shift to the more appropriate Chair of Pneumatics (philosophy of mind) and Moral Philosophy.

Ferguson's greatest work, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, appears in 1767, with six editions to follow. The book achieved a notable success: Excepting the estimation of his friend Hume, the *Essay* is highly regarded, and by the end of the eighteenth century the work has been translated into several European languages. Two years later Ferguson publishes *Institutes of Moral Philosophy for the use of Students in the College of Edinburgh.* Two editions follow, as well as translations into the major European languages.

A few years later, as the colonists in America call for independence. Ferguson and other Edinburgh moderates voice their opposition. In 1776, he pens a pamphlet against Richard Price's defense of the American Revolution. In another two years, Ferguson journeys to America with the Carlisle Commission to negotiate the loyalty of the colonies. The Commission's efforts bring nothing but controversy and rejection, and Ferguson returns to England by December. In 1779 he is back in Edinburgh.

At the age of 57 Ferguson suffers what may have been a mild stroke; he gradually recovers, perhaps as a result of dietary recommendations from Joseph Black. In 1783, his three-volume

work, *The History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic* is published. Later translated into French, German, and Italian, this may have been Ferguson's favorite work, even though it did not garner the favorable notice lavished on the *Essay*.

Citing ill health, he resigns his professorship in 1785, but the remainder of his long life is quite productive. In 1792 he publishes his *Principles of Moral and Political Science*, an elaboration of his university lectures. Not so well acclaimed as his earlier works, the two volumes nonetheless receive both German and French translations. Into the first decade of the nineteenth century, Ferguson continues to write, composing drafts of essays—ranging across political, historical, moral, and aesthetic topics—that seek to resolve and elaborate on themes undertaken in earlier works. By the fall of 1809, having outlived his wife and many friends, he moves to St. Andrews. In February of 1816, a few months from his ninety-third birthday, he succumbs to fever and dies. He is buried in the seaside cemetery adjoining the cathedral ruins of St. Andrews. In one draft of his epitaph, Ferguson included these words: "We whose Bones are buried here have trod like you this Stage of Earth And seen these works of God from Earth to Heaven. The Sight is Glorious[;] it is now your Turn[.] Enjoy it and be glad."

II

In all of Ferguson's work, there reigns an overarching moral point, that the individual should bring to completion the qualities of human nature productive of virtue and happiness. Towards the close of a dialogue written late in life, and included in this collection, he affirms that, "the important and genuine question of moral philosophy [is] *de finibus*, or what is the end." The idea of a proper end resonates throughout his works and helps lift Ferguson's voice to a unique place in eighteenth-century Scottish philosophy. His focus on history, his emphasis on action and circumstance, his contention that virtue and happiness are the same, and his prescient understanding of how one's concerns may become so narrow, so

focused on idle pleasure, that one is alienated from self and society, are themes that engage us today.

Ferguson's thought reflects a variety of influences. Acquainted with Highland clans and Edinburgh elites, he was the child of a minister, a student of divinity, and a chaplain. His religious training, not to mention his own reading of natural law theorists, inclines Ferguson to the acceptance of the clear evidence of basic moral propositions. Yet his outlook is also preeminently historical and imbued with a sense of contingency. Though he holds the human being, individually and socially, to be capable of development and improvement, he does not argue for inevitable progress or for some politics of perfection, to be wrought at the expense of liberty or in blindness to circumstance. The progress of society is achieved less by lawgivers than by the unintended accumulation of the actions of agents engaged in specific situations. In tracing the emergence of polished society, enriched by the goods of commerce, Ferguson inclines towards classical liberalism. But he also counsels caution in the face of modern pressure to retreat from public ends and embrace only private tasks and pleasures.

It is not unreasonable to understand Ferguson's outlook as expressing, in significant part, a unity of Christianity and Stoicism. Ferguson had read widely in the texts of ancient Greece and Rome and was, by his own admission, heavily influenced by Stoic thought, referring frequently to Roman thinkers. The Stoic emphasis on the reasoned order of the universe, the sufficiency of virtue to happiness, and the way in which virtues, like skills, might be honed and progressively developed, are doctrines easily unified with the providential design of God. Thus, virtue and self-interest do not conflict, for it is in one's interest to acquire non-material qualities of excellence, including a concern for the well-being of others.

Having begun his professorial career teaching natural philosophy, Ferguson, like most Scots of his circle, was acquainted with currents of modern science, with its appeals to experiment and law, including Francis Bacon's charge to observe, describe, classify, and systematize the regularities of nature. Ferguson nonetheless recognizes that if one

is to develop a moral science, then one must study human nature and society. He is one of several eighteenth-century thinkers who seek a natural history of the human species as the basis of further progress in knowledge. The appeal to natural history also reflects the natural law jurisprudence of such seventeenth-century thinkers as Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf, each of whom (like Lord Shaftesbury and Frances Hutcheson) recognized an innate human sociability—a sociability rejected by the most famous of contract theorists, Thomas Hobbes. Ferguson was also acquainted with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's account—in his *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality,* 1755—of man's development from a primitive state of nature into a corrupt social state, but Ferguson regards Rousseau's account as too speculative. A more signal influence on Ferguson is Montesquieu. In Part I of his *Essay*, Ferguson admits, "When I recollect what the President Montesquieu has written, I am at a loss to tell, why I should treat of human affairs." Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Causes of the Romans' Greatness and Decline* (1734) and *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) contain explanations—of law and the emergence of modern European states—that appeal to the interaction of human nature with circumstance. Enamored of the liberty enjoyed by the English, and of the virtuous love of country manifest in ancient Greece and Rome, Montesequieu, like Ferguson, worried that citizens might pursue private rather than public good, allowing thereby a decline into despotism.

III

This collection includes selections from all six parts of Ferguson's richest work, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. The "civil society" to which the title refers is a whole society governed by political institutions, at least of the sort that are not despotic. The history that the title promises is not a factual narrative of specific events but a reconstruction of the gradual emergence of civil society from rude or less polished states. This sort of history, also found in the work of other eighteenth-century Scots (such as Lord Kames and Adam

Smith), is what Dugald Stewart, a student of both Ferguson and Smith, would later describe as "theoretical or conjectural history."

Ferguson's natural or conjectural history begins with an account of human nature and the basic circumstances of society, emphasizing what is typical about human beings and their interactions. The features of human nature, like the facts of society, are drawn from experience and observation, with examples elicited from Asia and from the reports of travelers and missionaries to North America. The narrative does not commence in some primordial state of nature from which a society emerges via social contract. For Ferguson, we are forever in a state of nature: We are always found in groups and it is only within these groups that we may realize our natural qualities. The propensities of human nature, not reducible to some single motivation, include inclinations to self-preservation, to affiliate and identify with a larger whole, and to communicate to others one's passions and sentiments. Ferguson also notes a complementary disposition to distinguish oneself in opposition to others, a tendency instrumental in the development of civil society and the maintenance of liberty. As Ferguson will confess, "he who has never struggled with his fellow-creatures, is a stranger to half the sentiments of mankind." We also manifest a natural desire to improve and excel—a "principle of progression" or ambition—the proper object of which is the realization of moral qualities.

Others in the eighteenth-century, such as Adam Smith, describe how society develops through stages (typically, four). Ferguson offers a summary account of three stages—the savage, the barbaric, and the polished—each of which manifests a particular economic, social, and moral character. However, he does not relate the causes that move us from one state to another, nor does he specify any mechanism of change. Features present in polished commercial societies may not appear in earlier societies, and elements of conduct that flourish in earlier states may not survive in a modern state. Within the savage state, for example, individuals are distinguished by natural ability, age or sex, but otherwise this stage manifests no

inequality, no government, and no property, the latter institution emerging only in the barbaric stage.

Ferguson rejects the idea that government could have been designed from a plan or that it requires some great lawgiver of uncanny foresight. In general, he refers to social structures and regularities as emerging gradually or by degrees: Complex and orderly outcomes arise as the cumulative and unintended effect of the interaction of individuals who are motivated more by felt instincts and discrete beliefs than systematic plans and ideas. As he explains, "Mankind, in following the present sense of their minds, in striving to remove inconveniences, or to gain apparent and contiguous advantages, arrive at ends which even their imagination could not anticipate…." Among the outcomes described as unintended are language, property, laws, traits and dispositions, as well as the very ethos of a social order. For example, the disposition to industry, or industriousness, is acquired by "many and by slow degrees", just as commerce also brings about the virtues of punctuality, enterprise, and liberality. (The idea of the spontaneous emergence of institutions and complex regularities is also incorporated into the theories of other eighteenth-century thinkers, such as Bernard Mandeville, and Hume. Adam Smith's reference to the "invisible hand" metaphorically summarizes the process of spontaneous emergence.)

Even if beneficent improvements result spontaneously, it is possible nonetheless that a society becomes corrupt and declines into despotism. Having adumbrated how the law is a response to the emergence of property, and having argued that liberty is preserved by opposition and pluralism, Ferguson proceeds, in the latter parts of the *Essay*, to consider how a decline may occur. Thus, he remains aware that within the freedom of commercial society, perfection is not possible. Not only may the very specialization of labor lead to fragmentation and the loss of a common perspective, but property and wealth may be confused with virtue or mistaken for happiness itself. Although the division of labor improves the quality and quantity of goods, some increasingly specialized vocations

require little of the mind or heart, only repetitious physical acts. To Ferguson's chagrin, governing itself becomes a specialized occupation, rather than an obligation of all citizens.

Some scholars suggest that Ferguson believes there to be some inherent conflict between commercial life and virtue. Yet it is not clear that this is Ferguson's position. In his discussion of luxury, for example, Ferguson rejects the view that the mere existence of luxury goods is corrupting or that vice is proportioned to luxury. He does suggest, as has been noted, that the citizenry should be not only involved in the defense of the nation (a militia) but also engaged in social and political concerns that extend beyond the particularities of trade or vocation. However, when the enjoyment of luxury leads to a neglect of the "political spirit", corruption results.

The good life, therefore, is found not simply in trade but in activities embedded within a moral framework. The true good is virtue—this is what perfects us. If we lose this moral perspective or the will to defend it, then we are corrupted from our true ends. A degeneration into despotism may proceed slowly and insensibly. What is required is the spirit to resist:

> Liberty is a right which every individual must be ready to vindicate for himself, and which he who pretends to bestow as a favor has by that very act in reality denied. Even political establishments, though they appear to be independent of the will and arbitration of men, cannot be relied on for the preservation of freedom; they may nourish, but should not supersede that firm and resolute spirit, with which the liberal mind is always prepared to resist indignities, and to refer its safety to itself.[1]

---

[1] *Essay,* VI.V, "Of Corruption, as it tends to Political Slavery".

IV

Ferguson's pedagogical practice involved speaking from notes rather than reading lectures. In 1769 he published a finished outline of these notes, *The Institutes of Moral Philosophy.* Along with the introductory remarks, included here, the *Institutes* includes five parts, the first delineating the natural history of humankind, the second an account of mind (to include the understanding, will, and passions). The remaining three sections focus on God, moral laws, and jurisprudence. In the introduction, one glimpses Ferguson's empiricist outlook, with its Baconion inductivism and its Newtonian appeal to law. The objects of knowledge are either facts or rules, whether empirical or normative. A general rule or natural law either explains some particular fact (empirical science) or serves to guide conduct (morals). Ferguson challenges the Cartesian notion—carried forth by John Locke and Hume—that knowledge and thought are to be explained by such notions as "idea, image, or picture." These, Ferguson suggests, are metaphorical and "cannot explain human knowledge or thought", conclusions redolent of the common sense realism of Thomas Reid. As to facts not secured within some natural or moral law, these are the province of history. Since the general laws of morality rest on ultimate facts about human beings and society, history is the very foundation of our knowledge of mind and morals. In the third section, Ferguson affirms that belief in God is universal, so this belief is either part of human nature or suggested by some universal feature of life. After asserting that we perceive, plainly, final causes in nature, Ferguson explains how the goodness of God is compatible with physical or moral evil.

After the publication of the *Essay* and *Institutes*, Ferguson's next great work is a traditional narrative history, not a conjectural one. His *History of the Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, delineating how a republican government degenerates into despotism, joins other great eighteenth-century histories, including David Hume's *The History of England* (1754–1762), William Robertson's *History of Scotland* (1759) and his *History of Charles V*

(1769), and Edward Gibbon's classic, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88). A brief excerpt of Ferguson's History is included in this collection to remind the reader of the breadth of his interests and to illustrate how Ferguson understood the distinct philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism to have affected the Romans.

Ferguson, of course, favors the Stoic doctrine, and he admits as much in the Introduction to *Principles of Moral and Political Science*. His aim, in these two volumes, is "not novelty, but benefit to the student." Any normative benefit requires that one recognize the ultimate facts of human nature and society, gleaned from history and experience. These are taken up in the first volume, the second addressing normative obligations. In his account of the operations of mind, Ferguson discusses four sources of knowledge. Conscious reflection and sensory perception are primary sources, but testimony and inference are also crucial (though each is dependent on a prior act of consciousness or perception). Ferguson's account of perception recalls, again, Reid's realism: In the case of a "clear and determinate" act of consciousness or perception, it is not necessary to search for additional reasons or evidence. Ferguson points out, for example, that one need not seek, as René Descartes had suggested, for a reason to establish one's own existence.

Of course, for Ferguson, the goodness of human existence lies not so much in the contemplative as in the active life. However, action need not assume only a rational or purposive form, but may include individual and social habits. These render us at ease in a variety of circumstances, and help to ensure a regularity and stability that bonds individuals within a whole. Along with his discussion of habit, Ferguson revisits and extends his discussion of ambition—"the desire of something better than is possessed at present." Unlike Hume or Smith, who also take up the topic, Ferguson focuses on a mode of proper ambition whose motivating force draws less from the acclaim of spectators than from a sense of excellence discernable within any field of endeavor. Even when ambition is not aimed

toward its true end, it remains a powerful and generally beneficent propensity.

Our true moral qualities are not, however, reducible to habit or custom. It is by rational intelligence that we discern distinctions between moral excellence and defect, as they exist in qualities of character (wisdom, justice, self-control, courage, and benevolence). Since our judgments neither reflect any agreement or convention, or reduce to some sentiment or aggregation of sentiments, Ferguson is an objectivist or realist about morals. Yet he maintains that the act of discernment also generates, in some way, a moral sentiment (which would appear to affect motivation and to find expression in praise or blame). His account is not as full as one might wish, but he obviously rejects, both here and elsewhere, some of the leading eighteenth-century accounts of moral judgment, including Samuel Clarke's rationalism, utilitarianism (which Ferguson elsewhere attributes to Hume), Smith's conception of sympathy and the impartial spectator, and the doctrine of moral sense (which, he suggests, is but a figurative expression).

In the last selection included from the *Principles,* Ferguson contends that compulsion should be utilized only to protect a right. He does not explicitly preclude the use of compulsion to obtain other goods but, he maintains, it is an inadequate means for achieving religious or moral ends: "Benefits extorted by *force* are robberies, not acts of beneficence." The rights to be protected may be understood as personal or real, natural or artificial. All natural rights are personal, but real rights, including those of property, are artificial. Property may be established either by occupancy or by labor. In the case of property secured by labor, if one expends one's labor on some unoccupied or otherwise unappropriated resource, then so long as one's effort is "productive of some permanent effect", one secures a right to that effect. This suggests that when one's labor generates a property right, one's right does not extend to the substance underlying one's productive *effects*! As a solution, Ferguson proposes that if the substance cannot be occupied without

encroachment on the effects, then one may exclude others from the substance.

After the publication of his *Principles*, Ferguson continued to write, and between 1799 and 1810, he penned numerous essays (including two dialogues), many of which were left in a fragmentary state. The last entry in this collection is a more polished dialogue that revisits the discussion, in the *Principles*, on moral judgment. It is largely a matter of speculation as to whether this dialogue is based on an actual conversation or is a fictional or imaginative reconstruction. There are three characters in conversation: General Robert Clerk, David Hume, and Adam Smith. As a matter of fact, General Clerk served with Ferguson and Hume on an ill-starred military expedition in 1746. It would appear that Ferguson intends Clerk to give voice to his (Ferguson's) views, though the General dismisses brusquely the work of both Hume and Smith. Clerk portrays Hume's moral theory as utilitarian, though it would seem to be something more than that. Clerk also suggests that Hume holds that moral approval attaches to the external consequences of one's intentions—a suggestion that fails to capture Hume's view that we judge an intention when it tends to give rise to certain effects. When Adam Smith enters he is quickly apprised of Clerk's view of his moral theory—"a heap of absolute nonsense." Clerk follows this rude dismissal with several interesting reasons as to why Smith's use of sympathy—the agreement of passions or sentiments between spectator and agent—could scarcely generate a moral standard or a moral sentiment.

V

Ferguson achieved wide fame in his time. Of all of Ferguson's works, it is the *Essay* that has wielded the greatest influence, for it was read well into the nineteenth century, especially among German readers, including G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx. For many contemporary philosophers, Ferguson's legacy has faded. Nonetheless, his readers still include philosophers, and a wide array of sociologists, political

theorists, and historians. His insights, observations, concerns, and arguments remain valuable for all. His recognition of the contingencies of circumstance and history, his observation of the social (and anti-social) aspects of human beings, his unrelenting adherence to the idea of improvement, his advocacy of a life lived vigorously and with an eye to the good, and his attention to the interplay between culture and commerce, alert us to the tension between the demands of progress and the facts of imperfectability. That the establishments of society often emerge in an unintended fashion serves as a useful reminder that systematizing reason has its limits, that not everything is possible, and that good societies require good persons more than wise legislators—citizens who recognize excellence, understand the limits of history, and possess the will to act.

An Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767)

[1]

PART I: Of the General Characteristics of Human Nature

Section I: Of the question relating to the State of Nature

Natural productions are generally formed by degrees. Vegetables grow from a tender shoot, and animals from an infant state. The latter being destined to act, extend their operations as their powers increase: they exhibit a progress in what they perform, as well as in the faculties they acquire. This progress in the case of man is continued to a greater extent than in that of any other animal. Not only the individual advances from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization. Hence the supposed departure of mankind from the state of their nature; hence our conjectures and different opinions of what man must have been in the first age of his being. The poet, the historian, and the moralist, frequently allude to this ancient time; and under the emblems of gold, or of iron, represent a condition, and a manner of life, from which mankind have either degenerated, or on which they have greatly improved. On either supposition, the first state of our nature must have borne no resemblance to what men have exhibited in any subsequent period; historical monuments, even of the earliest date, are to be considered as novelties; and the most common establishments of human society are to be classed among the encroachments which

[1] *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Duncan Forbes, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966). Forbes' edition is based on the first (1767) edition.

fraud, oppression, or a busy invention, have made upon the reign of nature, by which the chief of our grievances or blessings were equally withheld.

Among the writers who have attempted to distinguish, in the human character, its original qualities, and to point out the limits between nature and art, some have represented mankind in their first condition, as possessed of mere animal sensibility, without any exercise of the faculties that render them superior to the brutes, without any political union, without any means of explaining their sentiments, and even without possessing any of the apprehensions and passions which the voice and the gesture are so well fitted to express. Others have made the state of nature to consist in perpetual wars, kindled by competition for dominion and interest, where every individual had a separate quarrel with his kind, and where the presence of a fellow-creature was the signal of battle.

The desire of laying the foundation of a favorite system, or a fond expectation, perhaps, that we may be able to penetrate the secrets of nature, to the very source of existence, have, on this subject, led to many fruitless inquiries, and given rise to many wild suppositions. Among the various qualities which mankind possess, we select one or a few particulars on which to establish a theory, and in framing our account of what man was in some imaginary state of nature, we overlook what he has always appeared within the reach of our own observation, and in the records of history.

In every other instance, however, the natural historian thinks himself obliged to collect facts, not to offer conjectures. When he treats of any particular species of animals, he supposes, that their present dispositions and instincts are the same they originally had, and that their present manner of life is a continuance of their first destination. He admits, that his knowledge of the material system of the world consists in a collection of facts, or at most, in general tenets derived from particular observations and experiments. It is only in what relates to himself, and in matters the most important, and the most easily known, that he substitutes hypothesis instead of