

which there was minimal government regulation of the economy.

Thus, for the Scottish philosophical historians, history was not, as it was for civic humanist thinkers, an endless cycle of decline and regeneration but a linear—and largely progressive—process. Like eighteenth-century Americans, these Scottish writers lived in a society that in relation to England was economically, socially, and culturally backward, and they eagerly hoped for change and development that would put their society on a par with the English. Hence, although Smith and Millar deplored the deadening intellectual and spiritual effects of specialization upon workers in manufacturing, while Ferguson, in more civic humanist terms, decried its impact upon public spiritedness, they mostly tended to stress the desirability of change and the relative benefits of the final stage of commercial and polished society. They celebrated the contributions of commerce and culture not just to material abundance but also, like Hume, to the enhancement of public order, good government, justice, security, liberty, personal independence, and civility. For most of them, these gains served as adequate compensation for whatever loss of civic virtue might have occurred. Indeed, except possibly for Ferguson, they saw little incompatibility between the reasonable pursuit of self-interest and the achievement of a moral, or virtuous, social order.

In place of the classical conception of man as a civic being and in amplification of the liberal image of man as a self-centered individualist, the philosophical historians had thus substituted a modern conception of man as a transactional being ensconced in an ongoing and largely progressive cultural process characterized by increasing specialization, division of labor, and diversification and refinement of institutions and personality. Precisely because it provided a framework that seemed to situate their societies within a broader process of social and cultural development, a process they had all passed through at an accelerated rate in their own progress from rudeness to refinement, the work of Smith, Millar, Kames, and the other Scottish philosophical historians exerted a profound appeal for American leaders of the Revolutionary generation.

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American Voices

ALTHOUGH THE emphasis in this essay has been upon the British and European intellectual heritage of the Revolutionary generation, Americans were not, of course, merely passive vehicles uncritically dependent upon the Old World for their conceptions of society and the polity. Not only did they make highly discriminating use of those inherited conceptions but they also made important contributions of their own to the intellectual world in which they lived. To be sure, for much of the colonial period their literary productions ran heavily towards religious sermons and tracts, and the overwhelming majority of these were produced in just two colonies—Massachusetts and Connecticut—by the intellectual and spiritual heirs of the early Puritan settlers, and these works neither circulated widely nor attained significant influence much beyond the boundaries of New England. Certainly the most prolific secular writer in the colonies was Pennsylvania printer and politician Benjamin Franklin (1706–90), whose numerous philosophical, scientific, and political tracts revealed both an intimate familiarity with the main Old World intellectual currents of the time and a special indebtedness to the literature of improvement associated with Defoe and Addison. Although Franklin's work, most of which was published in relatively short occasional essays and tracts, was not readily available, some of his more important writings were collected and published in London in 1779 under the general title *Political, Miscellaneous, and Philosophical Pieces*.*

By the end of the Revolutionary era, of course, American writers had produced an extensive political literature, most of which