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Reasoning with Savages:

The Anthropological Imagination of the Scottish Enlightenment

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Randall Joseph Holt

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reasoning with Savages:

The Anthropological Imagination of the Scottish Enlightenment

by

Randall Joseph Holt

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Peter Hanns Reill, Chair

This project examines the origins and history of early anthropological thought in the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment during the last half of the eighteenth century. The aim of this investigation is to set into historical context the intense interest in tribal societies exhibited in the writings of the leading members of the Scottish intelligentsia. Increasing contact with and awareness of non-European societies in the eighteenth century raised the problem of accounting for both the diversities and uniformities existing among the world's peoples and their societies. After midcentury many enlightened moral theorists drew upon the methods and epistemologies of the new natural sciences to reestablish the moral sciences on natural historical foundations. Human and social development were

understood as analogous to generative theories posited in the vitalist life sciences of epigenesis, which was instrumental, most notably, in the stadial or "four-stages" theory of progress articulated by Adam Smith. Reinterpreting the Scottish Enlightenment in the context of vitalist thought offers greater insight into what is perhaps its preeminent idea, that of "spontaneous order." The theorization of moral and social systems as products of human nature allowed for a far-reaching revision of the human sciences and the systems of thought upon which they were based, including natural law theory.

The mainstream of anthropological theorists understood the continuities among human societies as evidence of a uniformity in human nature. A minority, however, located divergences in civilizational progress in racial difference. This study attempts to draw out the implications of these understandings of humanity and connections between empire and anthropology, which were constitutive strands of the late eighteenth-century Scottish human and moral sciences. Recognizing in British imperial and commercial expansion nascent processes of globalization, enlightened Scots made its theorization a part of the moral and human sciences. Smith posited that it was familiarity with others mediated through the imagination that produced sympathy. With increasing contact between unequal societies, the more liberal Scottish theorists reasoned with "savages" sought in part to cultivate humanitarian and egalitarian sentiments towards them among their readers through the creation of an anthropological imagination.

The dissertation of Randall Joseph Holt is approved.

David W. Sabeau

Anthony Pagden

Patrick Coleman

Peter Hanns Reill, Committee Chair

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I have been most fortunate to have a dissertation committee composed not only of scholars of the highest caliber, but also of men of great generosity and humaneness. I thank Peter Reill, my committee chair, for his encouragement and support. After I was tasked with presenting a paper on Adam Smith (who was not the subject of my paper proposal) to the annual conference of the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society (ECSSS) in 2012, I turned to Peter's research in order to say something about Smith that would be novel to ECSSS members. His work on eighteenth-century vitalism subsequently became a key part of the interpretative constellation within which I have attempted to situate the Scottish Enlightenment and a crucial point of departure for my approach to it. I am also grateful to David Sabean for his support and advice. His critical reading and queries set me rethinking and rewriting several early pivotal chapters, and many other passages besides. Thanks, too, for his "setting a fire" beneath me - and, on occasion, beneath others. Anthony Pagden provided a scholarly model

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Introduction

The term "Scottish School," referring primarily to Common Sense philosophy, was coined around 1900, but the use of the more general "Scottish Enlightenment" to refer to the intellectual culture of eighteenth-century Scotland has been a fairly recent academic invention. It did not become a subject of study before the late 1960s when Hugh Trevor-Roper and Duncan Forbes began to question the existing historiography, which in the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, had identified the historical method of eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers as either a precursor of historicism or of Marx's historical materialism. The works of Forbes and Trevor-Roper gave new importance in modern historiography to Enlightenment in Scotland as the birthplace of the social sciences, political economy, and the idea of progress.¹ In subsequent decades, the historiography of the Enlightenment has undergone extensive and critical revision among cultural and intellectual historians.

Since the early 1970s the Scottish Enlightenment has become a field defined as an intellectual movement of relatively brief duration existing within a broader European context, and scholarly investigations of the last four decades have expanded our understanding of its particular contours. These historiographical investigations have called into question many previous assumptions about what constituted Enlightenment in Scotland. Much of the recent

¹ Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment" (1967), in *History and the Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Essays*, ed. John Robertson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 17-33; Duncan Forbes, "Scientific Whiggism: Adam Smith and John Millar," *Cambridge Journal* 7 (1954): 643-70; Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

general reassessment of Enlightenment thought has been undertaken in the wake of the postmodernist critique, which has indicted it as having given birth to modern sexism, racism, fascism, and even genocide.² Not only have the aims and content of the Enlightenment been contested, but also the view that Enlightenment can be encompassed within a singular vision of history.³ Indeed, eighteenth-century specialists have debated whether there existed *The European Enlightenment* understood as a coherent movement or “project” or multiple enlightenments understood as independently shaped by regional or national contexts.⁴ The danger of this first interpretation is that it threatens to collapse differences and to assert a rigid unity of thought often at odds with historical realities, while that of the second is that it empties the Enlightenment of coherent meaning.

² The seeds of postmodern critique can perhaps be found in work originally done in the mid-1940s. See, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997). Enlightenment as the source of modern ills has been variously iterated since the 1970s, and the literature is extensive. I would only note here, however, that Adorno and Horkheimer distinguished between the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and “enlightenment” as instrumental rationality as an aspect of Western culture since the Greeks. For a critical engagement of scholars with the challenge, see Keith M. Baker and Peter H. Reill, *What’s Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

³ On this contestation of the Enlightenment as multiple and singular phenomena, see respectively, John G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. I: *The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment and Enlightenment Contested* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On the Scottish Enlightenment.

⁴ *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), see Nicholas Phillipson, “The Scottish Enlightenment,” 19-40. See also, Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. I: *The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon 1737-1764*; vol. II: *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); vol. IV: *Barbarians, Savages and Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and, Pocock, “Historiography and Enlightenment: A View of Their History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 5 (2008): 83-96.

In the Scottish case an emphasis upon national or local aspects has opened up the study of larger social and cultural life. It has extended Enlightenment to the late seventeenth-century through the study of earlier intellectuals and to the importance of regional differences. Attention has also recently been directed towards the study of universities and social networks of the literati.⁵ Other scholarship has shifted away from Edinburgh as the "Athens of the North" to regionalized centers of enlightenment, particularly Glasgow and Aberdeen.⁶ Research has also lately examined the role of British and American publishers in the dissemination of Scottish Enlightenment and its reception among readers, as well as the limits of its translation across cultural boundaries.⁷ Ideally, historians of the eighteenth century should attempt to provide nuanced specificity that prevents "Enlightenment" from otherwise being rendered virtually meaningless by encompassing too much or too little and focus upon the

⁵ Roger Emerson, "The Social Composition of Enlightened Scotland: The Select Society of Edinburgh 1754-1764," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 114 (1973): 291-329; Emerson, "Scottish Universities in the Eighteenth Century, 1690-1800," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 167 (1977): 453-74; Emerson, *Professors, Patronage and Politics: The Aberdeen Universities in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

⁶ *The Glasgow Enlightenment*, ed. Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995); *Glasgow*, vol. I, *Beginnings to 1830*, ed. Thomas M. Devine and Gordon Jackson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); *Aberdeen and the Enlightenment: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of Aberdeen*, ed. Jennifer J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock (Aberdeen University Press, 1987); and, Paul B. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: The Arts Curricula in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993).

⁷ Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); David Allan, *Making British Culture: English Readers and the Scottish Enlightenment, 1740-1830* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Mark R. M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); and, Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

interpretation a set of general social and intellectual concerns common to the eighteenth century.

In the attempt to maintain the Scottish Enlightenment as a unified concept, Silvia Sebastiani has identified three main historiographic approaches.⁸ The first of these she finds exemplified in the work of John Robertson, who draws on the tradition of Trevor-Roper and Franco Venturi, to emphasize several central ideas and fields of investigation. Robertson cautions against merging "the enlightening of Scotland and the Scottish Enlightenment," and makes the case for the latter as an intellectual, as opposed to cultural or social, movement. In Robertson's work, the Scottish Enlightenment revolved around the exploration of the progress of society undertaken in moral philosophy, history, and political economy, which he finds characterized by a cosmopolitan perspective that reflected a concern with problems common to multiple European intellectual contexts. Robertson's comparative study, *The Case for Enlightenment*, thus examines the affinities of the early intellectual and cosmopolitan contexts of Scotland and Naples.⁹

Sebastiani identifies the second approach to the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment with the work of Roger Emerson and Paul Wood who emphasize the Baconian method as developed in medicine, chemistry, and natural history. This approach situates the Scots within the European Republic of Letters and stresses the reception in

⁸ The following owes a debt to the discussion of Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. Jeremy Carden (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4-6.

⁹ John Robertson, *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Robertson, "The Enlightenment above National Context: Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and Naples," *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 667-97.

Scotland of the new physical science of the late seventeenth century. Emerson has argued that the group of *virtuosi* forming around Sir Robert Sibbald in the 1690s began to lay out the reform agenda eventually taken up in the eighteenth century within the networks of institutional patronage, most notably through the auspices of the Third Duke of Argyll.¹⁰ Similarly, Wood has convincingly argued for a greater recognition of the role of the sciences in the Scottish Enlightenment science of man.¹¹ Richard Sher modifies this approach by viewing the Enlightenment in Scotland as corresponding to the culture of the men of letters distinguished more by the values of cosmopolitanism, toleration, sociability, and moral and economic progress than by particular fields of inquiry.¹²

A third interpretative approach to Enlightenment historiography, Sebastiani suggests, is delineated, though from rather different perspectives, in the work of John Pocock and Jonathan Israel. Both historians effectively bracket off Scotland from broader intellectual currents, making Enlightenment in Scotland an insular and particularly *British* phenomenon. In his multivolume *Barbarism and Religion*, for instance, Pocock has argued that Scotland was part of a clerical and conservative British Enlightenment that rejected all forms of

¹⁰ Roger L. Emerson, *Patronage in the Scottish Enlightenment: Glasgow, Edinburgh and St. Andrews Universities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); Emerson, "Science and the Origins and Concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Science* 26 (1988): 333-66.

¹¹ Paul Wood, "The Science of Man," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Second, and Emma Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 208-32; Wood,

¹² Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 15; Sher, "Science and Medicine in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Lessons of Book History," in Paul B. Wood, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (Rochester and Woodbridge, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 37-62.

Spinozism and Epicureanism. The continued dialogue between London and Edinburgh, Pocock contends, produced the Scottish Enlightenment, and thereby conflates it with a conservative and unified "British Enlightenment."¹³ Jonathan Israel reaches the same position, though from a different perspective. In his view, the British Enlightenment, based in the thought of Locke and Newton, was institutional and religious. Whereas the French and Dutch Enlightenments were "radical," that is, atheist or deist, republican or democratic, and Spinozian. For him, the British Enlightenment was socially and religiously conservative, and consistent with ideas of racial hierarchy and empire.¹⁴ This approach ignores, however, the degree to which the Scottish literati around midcentury were still deeply engaged with Continental intellectual developments. While it is true that the Scots did not openly challenge the status quo in the manner of their European counterparts, the implications of much of their work were often philosophically, if not politically, radical.

The Scottish Enlightenment is clearly now undergoing a broad intellectual, social, and geographic re-conceptualization. The present work aims to be a contribution to this general reinterpretation of late eighteenth-century Scottish intellectual culture. I take seriously the degree to which the most preeminent members of Scotland's literati made the study and understanding of non-European

¹³ Pocock, "Clergy and Commerce: The Conservative Enlightenment in England," in *L'età dei lumi: studi storici sul settecento europeo in onore di Franco Venturi* ed. Raffaele Ajello, Massimo Firpo, Luciano Guerci, and Giuseppe Ricuperati (Naples: Jovene 1985), I: 525-62.

¹⁴ Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 209-269; Israel, "Enlightenment! Which Enlightenment?" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67 (2006): 523-45.

societies the centerpiece of moral and social philosophy. I argue that a science of man, which had been proposed by Hume earlier in the century, was consciously reoriented after 1750 by enlightened social theorists upon the model of the new natural sciences. The translation of new methodologies and theories from the natural sciences to moral philosophy contributed to its reestablishment largely as philosophical anthropology. Though the use "savages" as a foil for and critique of European society was as old as Montaigne, Scottish theorists, though none of them conducted the sort of "fieldwork" Rousseau proposed be undertaken by French *philosophes*, mined the information related by ancient historians and present-day travelers for empirical, historical evidence of an essential human nature and a pattern of societal development.

The most significant Scottish Enlightenment histories of society were instances of what Harry Liebersohn has termed "anthropology before anthropology."¹⁵ "Enlightenment anthropology," though distinctive, perhaps did not represent a definitive origin of the modern discipline of anthropology. Rather, Liebersohn suggests that, the eighteenth century might be thought of as a moment when tensions emerged between a set of preconceptions and empirical evidence. Yet Enlightened thinkers sought to resolve these tensions in part through the "investigation" non-European "primitive" societies and the belief that efforts to understand society were problematic if studied as distinct from nature or the state.¹⁶ John Zammito, however suggests that enlightened Scots were major contributors to the late eighteenth-

¹⁵ Harry Liebersohn, "Anthropology Before Anthropology," in *A New History of Anthropology*, ed. Henrika Kuklick (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 17-31.

¹⁶ Liebersohn, "Anthropology Before Anthropology," 25-6.

century "birth of anthropology" through their systematization of natural knowledge concerning human societies and recasting it into a general theory of historical progress.¹⁷ In short, Scottish Enlightenment philosophical anthropologists in their extended, figurative reasoning with "savages" aimed to re-imagine the history of human society and promote greater self- and cross-cultural understanding, which clearly had implications for modern European societies.

In the chapters that follow, I examine the sources and development of Scottish Enlightenment anthropological discourse as the underpinning for much of its moral and social thought. This study argues that the novelty of the Scottish human sciences from the 1750s through the 1780s stemmed in large part from the engagement of the literati with the natural and moral philosophy of their Continental counterparts and their attempts to renegotiate their position and that of Scotland in emergent transnational and transimperial contexts.¹⁸ The intellectual triumvirate of Bacon, Locke, and Newton has long been regarded by historians as central to Scottish social thought.¹⁹ Similarly, Montesquieu's classification of sociopolitical systems and

¹⁷ See John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Zammito argues there was a "calving" of anthropology from philosophy in the German *Aufklärung* occurred in the disciplinary break between Kant and Herder. Zammito examines how the insights of Montesquieu and Rousseau were "systematized" in the works of the Scottish Enlightenment, which were in turn engaged with by both Kant and Herder. On the eighteenth-century origins of anthropology in Scotland, also see, George W. Stocking, "Scotland as the Model of Mankind: Lord Kames' Philosophical View of Civilization," in *Towards a Science of Man: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, ed. Timothy H. H. Thoresen (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 69-85.

¹⁸ Alexander Broadie, *Agreeable Connexions: Scottish Enlightenment Links With France* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013).

¹⁹ Christopher J. Berry, *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 4.

Voltaire's *histoire raisonnée* were clearly precedents of stadial theory of history. I argue, however, that the thought of the late Scottish Enlightenment is best understood within the intellectual context of natural philosophy and life sciences arising around midcentury that challenged the earlier mechanist paradigms of understanding in the physical sciences.

The dialogue between the natural and social sciences and its importance for the development of European Enlightenment is increasingly being recognized by historians of the human sciences.²⁰ In the case of Scotland, this dialogue has often been elided by a somewhat narrow focus upon moral philosophy or social theory. Yet, as early as the 1940s, Gladys Bryson in her pioneering work defined the philosophical inquires of the "Scottish School" as a "natural history of man in society."²¹ More recently, Paul Wood has characterized much of the Scottish science of man as a form of natural history.²² Indeed, much of the late Enlightenment received stimulus from the new natural sciences through the multivolume *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1749-88) of the French naturalist, Buffon. Indeed, from the middle of the century, Buffon spearheaded the revival of vitalist

²⁰ For a general overview, see Peter H. Reill, "The Legacy of the 'Scientific Revolution': Science and the Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-43. In the case of Scotland, see, for example, Peter Jones, ed. *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988); Jones, *The "Science of Man" in The Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and Their Contemporaries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989); and, Paul B. Wood, "Science in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94-135.

²¹ Gladys Bryson, *Man and Society: The Scottish Enquiry of the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945).

²² Paul B. Wood, "The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Science* 27 (1989): 80-123.

conceptions of life and of alternative epistemologies that challenged the mechanistic understanding of matter dominant earlier in the century.²³ This engagement with ideas of Buffon and his followers informed the course not only the natural, but also the human, sciences to such a degree that much of eighteenth-century thought might be considered part of what Phillip Sloan termed the "Buffonian Revolution."²⁴ Though the reception of Buffon and allied thinkers in the life sciences among Scottish thinkers was often covert, contested, or ambivalent, the presence of vitalist ideas must be recognized as significant to the "revolution" of moral and social thought in late eighteenth-century Scotland.²⁵

One of the important insights of Buffon for the Scottish moral theorists was the idea that nature, including human nature, had a history. This notion of historicity informed the core of Rousseau's critique of modernity in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), which was in part a product of an early, seminal engagement with the *Histoire naturelle* and other

²³ Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁴ Philip P. Sloan, "Natural History," *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 903-932; Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History," *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 112-151.

²⁵ On Buffon and the Scottish Enlightenment, see Paul B. Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 169-90; Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 7-8, 11, 15, 20-21, 66-71, 73-74, 91-93; and, Ann Thomson, "From l'*Histoire naturelle de l'homme* to the Natural History of Mankind," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 9 (1986): 73-80. On vitalist ideas and their application in Scottish human sciences, see Catherine Packham, "The Physiology of Political Economy: Vitalism and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2003): 465-481; Packham, "Forms of Enlightenment: Embodied Beings in Eighteenth-Century," in Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 25-51.

works of French natural philosophy. Rousseau has long been seen as a crucial interlocutor for Adam Smith and other Scottish intellectuals.²⁶ Buffon, I argue, must similarly be recognized as important an interlocutor for the Scots as Bacon, Locke, or Newton. It was perhaps the challenge of eighteenth-century French theory that was most decisive in the anthropological turn of Scottish social thought towards naturalistic and historical understandings of *Man*. Yet, for all the scholarly attention upon the sociological aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment, as Christopher Berry has argued, the universalist and progressivist character of its social and historical thought was grounded in *human nature*.²⁷ The embrace of vitalist conceptions of spontaneous order in the Scottish Enlightenment opened up the possibility of a broad revision of human moral nature and the history of society.

In the first chapter I examine Adam Smith's early reading of the work of Buffon and Rousseau and his subsequent reworking of moral philosophy through an engagement with key ideas from the new natural sciences. Smith subsequently worked out a stadial theory of history as part of his early revisionism of natural jurisprudence. His moral thought was predicated on a cultural perspectivism that developed from his anthropological investigations and elaborated in his *Theory of*

²⁶ E. G. West, "Adam Smith and Rousseau's Discourse on Inequality: Inspiration or Provocation," *Journal of Economic Issues* 2 (1971): 56-70. For more recent considerations on the relationship between the two thinkers, see Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Adam Smith and Rousseau: Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, eds. Christopher J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Craig Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54-76; and, Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

²⁷ Christopher J. Berry, *Human Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 61-71.

Moral Sentiment.²⁸ This chapter reconsiders what is often regarded as the central contribution of the Scottish Enlightenment, the stadial or four-stage model of historical interpretation wherein all human societies advanced through a successive and comparable series of holistic stages: hunting, herding, agriculture, and commerce. This theory of history has variously been associated with determinist and materialist interpretations, civic-humanism, or the natural law tradition.²⁹ Our understanding of the Scottish Enlightenment's theory of "spontaneous order," which epitomized the eighteenth-century belief in a self-organizing principle that operated across multiple domains of knowledge, is deepened by reinterpreting Smith's stadial theory of historical progress in the context of his early work with vitalist theories of epigenesis and natural design in the work of Buffon and his followers.³⁰

This chapter serves as a springboard to the second in which I examine Smith's conception of human nature, which he ultimately

²⁸ On the notion of cultural perspectivism, see Larry Wolff, "Discovering Cultural Perspective: The Intellectual History of Anthropological Thought in the Age of Enlightenment," *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, 3-32.

²⁹ Ronald L. Meek, "Smith, Turgot, and the 'Four stages' Theory," in *Smith, Marx, and After: Ten Essays in the Development of Economic Thought* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1977), 18-32; as rejoinder, see Andrew Skinner, "A Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology?," in *Classical and Marxian Political Economy*, ed. Ian Bradley and Michael Howard (London: Macmillan, 1982), 79-114; *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Roy H. Campbell and Andrew Skinner (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982); *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³⁰ Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). Hamowy examines the various iterations of "spontaneous order" by Scots philosophers, though without offering an explanation for its epistemological or ontological underpinning. For a recent cultural and intellectual examination of the idea across various eighteenth-century fields, see Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

understood as the engine of historical progress. I also argue that Although he found Buffon's theory of generation to be "almost entirely hypothetical," Smith nevertheless found it suggestive for his theoretical innovations to natural jurisprudence and moral thought. In the attempt to provide a theory of progress that was universally valid, Smith drew upon accounts of varied societies around the world. I further argue that Smith, cognizant of the globalizing, if not global, economic and imperial engagement of Britain with the world, was an early theorist of globalization.³¹ Smith developed a cultural and historical perspectivism through the study of non-European peoples. Significantly, he incorporated these into his theory of globalization and moral sentiments. Smith understood the creation of sympathies between individuals necessary to civil society as a product of the human imagination. The increasing contact between Europeans and the rest of the world made the creation of sympathy or universal benevolence a moral imperative. Towards this end, the Scottish Enlightenment made the creation of a global anthropological imagination a fundamental aspect of its moral philosophy.

Chapter three examines the conception of human nature in the work of Adam Ferguson. Ferguson was thoroughly acquainted the work of Buffon and the natural sciences, which he taught for a number of years at Edinburgh University before taking the chair in moral philosophy. Although differing in many philosophical points with Smith, Ferguson also assumed the "design" of human society to be a product of human

³¹ Fonna Forman-Barzilai, "Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist," *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 4 (2000): 391-419; Sankar Muthu, "Adam Smith's Critique of International Trading Companies: Theorizing "Globalization" in the Age of Enlightenment," *Political Theory* (2008): 185-212.

nature, and cast his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* as a natural history of the human species. He attempted to access the original characteristics of the human species through an investigation of the cultural practices and social forms of contemporary and ancient tribal societies. Ferguson's juxtaposition of a sympathetic representation of tribal peoples and warnings about imperial expansion, I argue, reveals a twin concern with the threat to human liberties at home and aboard posed by the creation of unbounded British or European empire during the 1760s.

Chapter four explores the intersection of anthropology and social thought in the work of Smith, Ferguson, and John Millar. Here I will single out only the work of Millar, a professor of law at Glasgow. In his *Origin of Ranks*, Millar investigated the historical formation of "rank" or social and political subordination. In his focus on marginal or disempowered groups, Millar made perhaps the most explicit use of a comparative anthropology to argue for social and political change in Britain. What a comparative anthropology of contemporary and ancient societies revealed was that the subordination of women, children, and people of color was to be regarded as a cultural construct rather than a product of natural laws. For Millar the historical and anthropological evidence undermined the legitimacy of political paternalism, which had historically subordinated groups and denied them the full extension of human rights to them. Millar brought home the global sympathies cultivated in philosophical anthropology to provincial Britain. With the historicization of subordination, he attempted to revise contemporary understanding of human rights,

especially regarding the emancipation of women and the abolition of slavery.

The liberal and egalitarian sentiments of Millar, however, were not shared by all of Scottish philosophical anthropologists. In the fifth chapter, I turn to an alternative strand of thought developed by Scotland's most prominent philosophical jurists, Lord Kames and Lord Monboddo. I argue that their work prefigured nineteenth-century *physical* anthropology in its emphasis upon physiognomic differentiation among human beings as a signifier of essential, often biological, differences. Though antagonistic towards the intellectual system of the other, each was antipathetic to the egalitarian and humanitarian ethos expressed in the work of Smith, Ferguson, and Millar. Rejecting a belief in a common human nature and civilization trajectory, Kames and Monboddo constructed, though from different perspectives, systems in which the key to human understanding was the category of race. Kames was perhaps singular among the literati in embracing polygenism, the belief that the world's peoples were of separate species, and argued that inequalities in civilizational progress were largely the result of genetic inheritance. Monboddo, though a monogenist, similarly reinforced a racialist hierarchical order through an eccentric syncretism of ancient philosophy, Christian theology, and natural history. Framed as natural history, their racialist, if not racist, theories, reinforced prejudice, and served as precursors to the scientific racism that characterized much of what became the discipline of anthropology in the nineteenth century.³²

³² Colin Kidd, "Race, the Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture," in *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79-120; George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

In the final chapter, I argue that James Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* (1780) represents the culmination of Scottish Enlightenment global anthropological thought. Though interest in universal history continued in Scotland through the end of the century and beyond, Dunbar's was perhaps the last great work of moral philosophy as a "natural history of man in society." Against polygenic and monogenic theories that assumed the existence of inequities among different peoples, Dunbar asserted the unity of the species. In his view it was not racial difference among peoples that explained the existence of civilizational disparities, but rather unequal processes of globalization, which, as the motor of historical change, had both made and unmade empires and civilizations. Dunbar offered one of the most pointed critiques of European imperial and trade policy. He nonetheless found that the seeds for the future unification of the human species were contained within the inevitable processes of globalization, and he thus made one of the most forceful cases for universal human dignity and equality. Dunbar's work thus perhaps represents a culmination of the liberal and egalitarian sentiments towards "savages" evident in earlier iterations of the Scottish science of man, as well as its end.

The concluding epilogue briefly examines the fate the Scottish anthropological imagination in the 1790s and early 1800s as Britain turned from North America to the Indian subcontinent, as well as its relevance in the context of twenty-first century globalization.

Chapter 1

Vitalizing the Science of Man: Adam Smith and the "Anthropological Turn" of the Scottish Enlightenment

In March 1756 Adam Smith made one of his first forays into print as a philosopher with "A LETTER to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*." It was an anonymously published contribution to the second, and what would be the final, volume of the intellectually ambitious, but short-lived journal founded and edited by members of the Edinburgh Select Society.³³ The "Letter," likely commissioned by the editors, who included Alexander Wedderburn, Smith's friend and the future Lord Chancellor, was to survey the current state of modern European thought and encourage a dialogue between it and the *Review's* Scottish readership. Smith urged the *Review's* Scots editors and readers alike to be attentive not simply British, but also Continental European, intellectual currents. He encouraged both cosmopolitanism and patriotism among provincial Scots intellectuals through an engagement with and an emulation of the leading figures in both natural and moral philosophy.³⁴

The *Edinburgh Review* letter is significant in that it signaled the thirty-two year old Smith's own early engagement with important philosophical currents developing in France that would inform his own thinking, as well as that of the Scottish and European Enlightenments

³³ "A LETTER to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*," *The Edinburgh Review, From July 1755 to January 1756* (Edinburgh, 1756), 63-79. Citations from Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982).

³⁴ See J.C. Bryce, introduction to Smith, "Letter," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 230. For an extended discussion of this work, see Jeffrey Lomonaco, "Adam Smith's 'Letter' to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 63. No 4 (October 2002): 659-676.

more generally. Indeed, it would be the latest ideas drawn from the vanguard of French natural philosophy at midcentury that would inform some of the most important philosophical developments of the late Enlightenment. The extension of the principles of natural philosophy to field of moral philosophy had been called for earlier in the century, and those subsequent efforts largely attempted to explain human behavior through an understanding of mechanist principles similar to those of the physical sciences. Increasingly, however, after midcentury the moral or human sciences were to draw their methods and principles for the not from the physical, but from the biological or life sciences. The result was to produce a major reorientation in Scotland of the very theoretical underpinnings that informed the late Enlightenment moral or human sciences.³⁵

In the attempt to create a moral philosophy as truly a *science* of man, eighteenth-century Scots thinkers had quickly taken up Newton's suggestion in Query 31 of the *Opticks* (1704) that, if, through use of his method natural philosophy might be perfected, then similarly, the "bounds of Moral Philosophy will be also enlarged."³⁶ By the late 1730s and early 1740s, David Hume and George Turnbull had both introduced Newtonian "experimental reasoning into moral subjects."³⁷ Scholarship in recent decades has emphasized the importance of science to the

³⁵ See Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005) and his forthcoming work examining vitalist thought in the human sciences.

³⁶ Issac Newton, *Newton's Philosophy of Nature*, ed. H. Thayer (New York: Hafner, 1953), 159.

³⁷ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and George Turnbull, *The Principles of Moral Philosophy*, vol. 1 *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005).

Scottish Enlightenment as a whole.³⁸ What has received far less attention, however, has been how particular branches of natural science served to provide moral philosophers with both new objects and methods of study. Smith is known to have held a lifelong interest in natural philosophy. However, the degree to which the natural sciences informed his thought has been understudied.³⁹ What makes the "A LETTER to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*" of importance is the early evidence it gives of Smith's awareness of contemporary biological or life sciences, and alerts us to their presence within his thought. In recommending the most significant innovations in natural philosophy, Smith suggested new sources to the Scots literati in the reconceptualization of moral philosophy.

In this chapter I would like to examine Smith's pivotal encounter with natural philosophy in the mid-1750s and its role in what I argue

³⁸ There is large and growing body of literature on science and the Scottish Enlightenment. For some of the most important scholarship rethinking this relationship, see, Roger L. Emerson, "Science and the Origins and Concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Science* 26, (1988): 333-66; Peter Jones, ed., *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: John McDonald, 1988); Paul B. Wood, ed. *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation* (University of Rochester Press, 2000); "The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Science*, 18 (1990): 89-123; "Science in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94-116. For a different view of the primary concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment, see John Robertson, "The Scottish Contribution to the Enlightenment," in *The Scottish Enlightenment: Essays in Reinterpretation*, 37-62.

³⁹ For example, even in recent revisionism going on in Smith studies, natural history is entirely absent. For example, see, Christopher J. Berry, "Smith and Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 112-35. For a notable exceptions that suggests Smith's knowledge of contemporary work in biology may have influenced his historical outlook, see Andrew S. Skinner, "Adam Smith: Science and the Role of the Imagination," in *Hume and the Enlightenment*, ed. W. B. Todd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974), 181-82. For a recent exploration of Smith and vitalism, see Catherine Packham, "The Physiology of Political Economy: Vitalism and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63.3 (2002): 465-481.

may be characterized as an "anthropological turn" in his moral thought and subsequently in the science of man in Scotland. While the attempt to create a science of man in Scotland was from its beginnings in the 1730s inherently anthropological in the sense that it made human nature central to that project, Adam Smith's thought, I will argue, was seminal in the turn toward non-European cultures to understand both human nature and the nature of society in the Scottish Enlightenment. Smith's role in the development of early anthropological thought has been largely unexamined, as has the anthropological basis of his economic thought.⁴⁰ His reasoning with the "savages" of primal societies was one of the most extensive attempts among Enlightenment thinkers to make empirical use of ethnographic information to re-imagine modern moral sciences in global terms.⁴¹ That the anthropological turn was taken by so many members of the Scottish literati in their philosophical work represented a prescient recognition of an increasingly global world that they were coming to inhabit as members of the British Empire in the last half of the eighteenth century.⁴²

Although much scholarship has perhaps overemphasized the intellectual and cultural orientation of the Scottish Enlightenment toward England following the Union of 1707, Scots intellectuals

⁴⁰ This is perhaps beginning to change. See Christian Marouby, "Adam Smith and the Anthropology of the Enlightenment: The 'Ethnographic' Sources of Economic Progress," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, ed. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 85-102.

⁴¹ See Aaron Garrett, "Anthropology: The 'Original' of Human Nature," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 79-89.

⁴² For a collection of illuminating essays on various aspects of the globalizing process, see, Felicity A. Nussbaum, ed., *The Global Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

participated in discourse that was pan-European. During the first third of the century Scotland had closer intellectual connections with the Continent than England. In the early part of the eighteenth century access of Scots to Paris or Leiden by sea was easier and quicker than to London. Large numbers of Scots pursued study in the fields of divinity, medicine and law in universities on the Continent. By the 1740s, after curricular reforms in the preceding two decades, Scots universities were greater able to provide comparable courses of study at home. At mid-century any one of the five Scottish universities provided a modern education in the arts and sciences superior to that offered at Oxford or Cambridge. While they generally admired and sought to emulate the affluent and polite society of the English, Scots were often treated by the England as second-class citizens within the Empire. Thus, the intellectual production of the Scots literati was part of a struggle to assert their parity with "South Britons," while also maintaining a cultural, if not political, independence.⁴³

Adam Smith and those of his generation were largely supporters of the Union and the political changes that followed the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Scottish intellectual orientation nonetheless remained cosmopolitan. Smith advised the editors of the *Edinburgh Review* not only to "take notice, with the same humanity and candour, of every Scotch production that is tolerably decent," but also that they "observe with regard to Europe in general the same plan which you followed with regard to England...You will thus be able to give all

⁴³ Roger L. Emerson, "The World in which the Scottish Enlightenment Took Shape," in *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment: Industry, Knowledge and Humanity* (Surrey UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 1-19.

proper encouragement to such efforts as this country is likely to make towards acquiring a reputation in the learned world."⁴⁴ While recognizing the earlier English contributions to modern thought, Smith found that these contributions had been taken up and developed most extensively by the French. The "learned world," Smith declared to the readers of the *Edinburgh Review*, would be more highly instructed if Scots thinkers had more "rivals and more judges" in their own country.⁴⁵ For enlightened literati of North Britain asserting their intellectual parity with the South required the emulation with the most *au courant* thinking, which Smith viewed as taking place on the Continent. To produce this intellectual parity Smith called for his fellow Scots to take up the challenge posed by the latest developments in moral and natural philosophy presently emanating from France, not least of which was the new system of natural philosophy.

In his survey of the state of modern thought Smith acknowledged that the "original and inventive genius of the English" had discovered itself not only in "natural philosophy, but in morals metaphysics, and part of the abstract sciences." Of the most original contributors to English moral philosophy, Smith cited virtually the same list as that of his friend David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature*: Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Butler, Clarke, and Hutcheson (Smith added Hobbes and Clarke). All of them, he noted, had "according to their different and inconsistent systems, endeavoured at least to be, in some measure, original; and to add something to that stock of observations with which the world had been furnished." With the

⁴⁴ Smith, "Letter," 242-3.

⁴⁵ Smith, "Letter," 246.

exception of Descartes, Smith found nothing in French philosophy that exhibited originality in the subjects of their English contemporaries. The philosophical writings of Pierre-Sylvain Régis (1632-1707) and Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) were "but refinements upon the Meditations of Des Cartes." Smith nonetheless noted, that, at present, the "branch of the English [moral] philosophy now seems to be intirely neglected by the English themselves, [and] has of late been transported into France." Thus, in 1756 the only traces of an earlier English moral philosophy, Smith asserted, were to be found in the *Encyclopédie*, the Shaftesburian work of Lévesque de Pouilly, and "above all, in the late Discourse upon the origin and foundation of the inequality amongst mankind by Mr. Rousseau of Geneva."⁴⁶

Smith seemed to attribute the recent resurgence of French philosophy to its having being "pretty generally disengaged from the enchantment of that illusive philosophy," that is, the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes. Cartesian philosophy was now "almost universally exploded," Smith explained, having been superseded by the "simplicity, precision and perspicuity" of the "principles and conclusions" of Newtonian philosophy.⁴⁷ The recognition by Smith of the implications of an "exploded" Cartesian mechanical philosophy will be examined further below. Here I would only note that reference to Newtonian principles should not obscure the degree to which the Scots were open to more recent advances in the sciences. This openness to contemporary currents is reflected in the changes in Scottish university curricula in the early modern period. The teaching of

⁴⁶ Smith, "Letter," 250.

⁴⁷ Smith, "Letter," 244.

Descartes had largely replaced that of Aristotle during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. Newton in turn superseded Descartes by the end of first decade of the eighteenth.⁴⁸ Newton certainly continued to held in high regard throughout the eighteenth century, and is rightfully viewed as part of a triumvirate that included Locke and Bacon in enlightened Scottish thought.⁴⁹ Important as this group of English thinkers was in the founding of methodological principles that might be applied to both the natural and human sciences, they should not obscure how Scots increasingly in the 1750s began to reframe Scottish moral philosophy through an engagement with the ideas emanating from new fields of natural philosophy.

As with moral philosophy, Smith similarly found that the English had largely abandoned the production of the most important work in natural philosophy. Natural philosophy was the "science which in modern times has been most happily cultivated," he noted, and claimed that, "almost all the great discoveries...have been made in England."⁵⁰ However, the English seem to have "employed themselves entirely in inventing, and to have disdained the more inglorious but not less useful labour of arranging and methodizing their discoveries." Thus,

⁴⁸ See Christine Shepherd, "Newtonianism in Scottish Universities in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. R. Campbell and Andrew Skinner (Edinburgh: John McDonald Publishing, 1982), 65-85.

⁴⁹ On Newton's continuing importance in eighteenth-century Scottish natural philosophy, see David B. Wilson, *Seeking Nature's Logic: Natural Philosophy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009). For a succinct analysis of the foundational role of Newton, Locke, and Bacon in Scottish Enlightenment thought, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 52-60; 91-115.

⁵⁰ Smith, "Letter," 244.

at present, Smith found "no tolerable system of natural philosophy in the English language" nor "any tolerable system of natural philosophy in any part of it." He suggested that, "posterity and foreign nations are more likely to be made acquainted with the English philosophy by the writings of others, than by those of the English themselves," for it seemed the "peculiar talent of the French nation, to arrange every subject in that natural and simple order which carries the attention, without any effort, along with it."⁵¹

Currently, none of the sciences, Smith wrote, "seem to be cultivated in France with more eagerness than natural history."⁵² As evidence of the French genius for systematizing natural knowledge, Smith approvingly cited the manner in which the ideas of Newton, Boyle, and Bacon had been explained and disseminated by Diderot and d'Alembert in their *Encyclopédie*. The "Preliminary Discourse" to this project in which d'Alembert gave "an account of the connection of the different arts and sciences, their genealogy and filiation as he calls it...a few alterations and corrections excepted, is nearly the same with that of my Lord Bacon."⁵³ This intellectual genealogy descended from England to France and would, if taken up by Scots Smith suggested, extend to Scotland.

"Scarce any thing seems to be omitted," Smith observed of the French *Encyclopédie* in which

Not only mathematics, natural philosophy and natural history...are compleatly treated of; but all the mechanical arts are fully described, with the several machines which they make use of. Theology, morals, metaphysics, the art of

⁵¹ Smith, "Letter," 245.

⁵² Smith, "Letter," 248.

⁵³ Smith, "Letter," 246.

criticism, the history of the *belles lettres*, philosophy, the literary history of sects, opinions and systems of all kinds, the chief doctrines of antient and modern jurisprudence, nay all the nicest subtleties of grammar, are explained...There are few men so learned in the science which they have peculiarly cultivated, as not to find in this work something even with regard to it which will both instruct and entertain them.⁵⁴

In short, the French encyclopedia promised, Smith wrote, "to be the most compleat of the kind which has ever been published or attempted in any language." The articles in this collective project were not a "dry abstract of what is commonly known by the most superficial student of any science, but a compleat, reasoned and even critical examination of each subject."⁵⁵ The value of the project of Diderot and d'Alembert for someone of Smith's systematic turn of mind resided in its power as a model of critical, systematized knowledge. It perhaps offered a model to spur emulation to produce a "tolerable" system in the English language. As Quaestor of the university library at Glasgow Smith would spend one-third of his budget between 1758 and 1760 to acquire the first seven volumes of the *Encyclopédie*.⁵⁶

However, important as the *Encyclopédie* may have been for Smith, it was not the "only great collection of science and literature at present carrying on in that country, to merit the attention of foreign nations." While Smith's *Edinburgh Review* letter has been notable for bringing Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* to the early attention of Scots readers, less attention has been devoted to its importance in signaling the

⁵⁴ Smith, "Letter," 246-47.

⁵⁵ Smith, "Letter," 246.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 131.

great importance of another seminal French intellectual production to the Scottish Enlightenment, namely that of the *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* by Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon. Buffon was the powerful *Intendant* of the Jardin du Roi in Paris and its natural history collection after 1739. The first five volumes of the work, which was to total thirty-six during Buffon's lifetime, had been published at the time Smith wrote in 1756. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was one of the most ubiquitous and seminal Enlightenment works in eighteenth-century literate culture.

Rousseau and Buffon: The Challenge of French Theory

The *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* was begun, Smith noted, by the command of the French minister Maurepas "whom France has long desired to see restored to the direction of the marine, and all Europe to that of the sciences." Although only a small part had of the work had been published, it was "executed by two Gentlemen of most universally acknowledged merit, Mr. Buffon and Mr. Daubenton." He found the "neatness, distinctiveness and propriety" of Daubenton's descriptions, seemed "to leave no room for criticism upon his part, which, tho' the least pompous, is by far the most important of the work." As for the remainder of the *Histoire naturelle*, Smith found that the

reasoning and philosophical part concerning the formation of plants, the generation of animals, the formation of the foetus, the development of the senses etc. is by Mr. Buffon. The system of this Gentleman, it may be thought, is almost entirely hypothetical; and with regard to the causes of generation such, that it is scarce possible to form any very determinate idea of it. It must be acknowledged, however, that it is explained in an agreeable, copious, and

natural eloquence, and that he has supported or connected it with many singular and curious observations and experiments of his own.⁵⁷

Given Smith's assessment of the hypothetical nature of Buffon's work, his thought is generally dismissed or marginalized in the development of Smith's philosophy. It is, however, significant that the "reasoning and philosophical part" of the *Histoire* Smith noted "may be thought" to be "almost entirely hypothetical." Indeed, it was, I argue, precisely the theoretical apparatus of Buffon's work that Smith worthy of recommend to a literate readership. For Smith observed that Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* promised to "comprehend a compleat system of natural history...almost equally extensive" as that of the French encyclopedia.⁵⁸ The focus of historical scholarship on the importance of Rousseau for Smith's intellectual biography has perhaps overshadowed this critical engagement with Buffon and French natural philosophy in the critical development of Smith's philosophical oeuvre, particularly the anthropological thrust of the Scottish moral philosophy in the latter half of the eighteenth century.⁵⁹

Increasingly by the late 1750s Smith viewed French natural and moral philosophy as posing a challenge to Scots thinkers, as well as offering the promise of the means to promoting enlightenment, of

⁵⁷ Smith, "Letter," 248.

⁵⁸ Smith, "Letter," 248. My emphasis.

⁵⁹ Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Adam Smith and Rousseau: Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, eds. Christopher J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Craig Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54-76; Rasmussen, "Rousseau's 'Philosophical Chemistry' and the Foundations of Adam Smith's Thought," *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 4 (2006): 620-641; Peter France, "Primitivism and Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Scots," *The Yearbook of English Studies* XV (1985): 64-9; and, Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, eds., Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

producing more rivals and more judges in Scotland's corner of the learned world. The dialogical engagement with Continental discourses offered the literati models to emulate, and to perhaps in turn surpass, in their own endeavor to achieve intellectual parity and "add something to that stock of observations with which the world had been furnished" by English philosophy. The preeminent French "rivals" Smith identified in the *Edinburgh Review* were Buffon and Rousseau. Both thinkers offered natural historical approaches to an understanding the human species and its development. Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* is not to be underestimated in the creation of eighteenth-century Enlightenment anthropology. The treatment of the human species in Buffon's natural history stimulated thought throughout Europe and beyond, provoking others to produce their own emulations, translations, and contestations.

The implications and application of Buffon's innovations in natural history to moral philosophy were perhaps first seized upon by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Drawing upon Buffon's work as a point of departure for his moral philosophy, Rousseau raised questions about what was natural to human beings and what was acquired and lost by being long ensconced in sophisticated and complex societies, questions that would vex the eighteenth century in the wake of increased awareness of previously unknown peoples around the world.

Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements d'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) was one of the first significant attempts to translate a Buffonian natural history to moral philosophy. Although Smith found in Rousseau's *Discours* traces of the earlier English moral philosophy represented in the second volume of Mandeville's *Fable of*

the Bees, those principles had been, according to him, "softened, improved, and embellished, stript of all that tendency to corruption and licentiousness which has disgraced them in their original author."⁶⁰ These improvements for Smith perhaps stemmed in part from placing those ideas upon a natural historical foundation. Smith was unlikely to have been oblivious to the high degree to which Rousseau had selectively drawn upon Buffon in his argument about man in the state of nature and in society. In framing his work Rousseau disingenuously suggested that he and his reader should "begin by setting aside all the facts, for they do not affect the question. The research that can be pursued on this subject should not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings better suited to clarify the nature of things than to show their real origin."⁶¹ This framing of his work as pure conjecture was undoubtedly made to diffuse the threat of censorship or its repercussions. Nonetheless, it is striking in perusing the Notes to note how heavily Rousseau drew upon the information about humans and animal species contained in the natural history of Buffon and others.

Besides offering a system of natural history, there were also many suggestive moral observations offered by Buffon throughout his work purportedly derived from his natural investigations that were echoed in Rousseau. Buffon's survey of the world's peoples in the section "Varieties of the Human Species" of the third volume of the *Histoire* was crucially suggestive for Rousseau's critique of modern society and the historical changes he viewed it as having wrought by

⁶⁰ Smith, "Letter," 250.

⁶¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements d'inégalité parmi les hommes* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Ray, 1755), 6.

it upon human nature. Commenting on the "savage," such as the celebrated eighteenth-century cases of feral children as the boy brought up by the bear, the young man found in the forest of Hanover, or the girl discovered in the woods of France, Buffon noted "would be a curious object to a philosopher, by the contemplation of which he might estimate the force of natural appetites. Here he would see the mind perfectly naked; he might distinguish all its movements; he might, perhaps, discover in it more sweetness and tranquility than in his own; he might, perhaps, clearly perceive, that virtue is more natural to the savage than to the civilized, and that vice has its origin in society alone."⁶² Clearly this self-reflexive comment by Buffon, among others in his work, strongly resonated with Rousseau and was greatly elaborated upon by him as the basis of his critique in the Second Discourse. Recourse to the "savage" would allow access to "mind perfectly naked" unveiled of the accumulated layers of civilization. The insights and applicability of natural philosophy to moral subjects in French thought was to require a decidedly historical turn in natural philosophy, and, by extension, moral philosophy. Indeed, Rousseau can also be considered as a "natural historian," for the Discourse was intended, as Mark Hulling has suggested, to be "read as a contribution to Buffon's ongoing and exceptionally popular" *Histoire naturelle*.⁶³

Although most enlightened Scots would reject much of Rousseau's attack on modernity presented in his Discourse, many of them

⁶² George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, "Variétés dans l'espèce humaine," in *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749), 492-3.

⁶³ See Mark Hulling, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 172-79.

nonetheless recognized both the challenge of its ideas to moral philosophy and the possibilities inherent in writing the human sciences as natural history. The challenge to constructing a modern philosophical system presented by the Discourse initiated a dialogue between Rousseau and Smith. It was the casting of moral philosophy as natural history à la Buffon, at least as Jean-Jacques conceived it, that served as one of the most provocative challenges to articulate moral philosophy adequate to the demands of modern society.

One of the central questions opened up by Rousseau's natural history was that of the essential nature of human beings. In his brief review of the Second Discourse Smith observed that, the "life of a savage, when we take a distant view of it, seems to be a life either of profound indolence, or of great and astonishing adventures; and both these qualities serve to render the description of it agreeable to the imagination." Here he stated a truism of eighteenth-century European fascination with other cultures, and acknowledged that this curiosity was largely piqued by popular representations of the two opposed natures of primitive peoples. "In the descriptions of the manners of savages, we expect to meet with both these: and no author ever proposed to treat of this subject who did not excite the public curiosity."⁶⁴ Smith was not immune to the same excitation of curiosity.

The significance of Rousseau was his powerful representation of human nature supported by evidence drawn from both the natural history and travel accounts. Rousseau had reached the opposite conclusion regarding man's original nature as that of thinkers such as Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, and Mandeville. Smith was presented with

⁶⁴ Smith, "Letter," 251.

conflicting images of man and the society of his earliest existence that had grown out of the theory of the natural law tradition.⁶⁵ Coming out of the context of the religious, social, and political upheavals of the seventeenth century, natural law had largely rejected the natural sociability and benevolence of human beings. Contrary to earlier natural jurists, such as Grotius, Pufendorf, and Hobbes, Rousseau had represented savage life, that is, of man in an earlier primitive state of nature, as indolent and the most happy. It was precisely Rousseau's critique of the natural law tradition and the attendant problems of human diversity and the question of human nature raised by Rousseau that perhaps initially excited the imagination of Adam Smith, along with numerous other enlightened thinkers, during the 1750s and 1760s.

Part of the challenge Smith perceived in Rousseau consisted in the his softening, improvement, and embellishment of the second part of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1728). Smith observed that the two thinkers held opposed positions regarding the condition of mankind in its most primitive state. Mandeville viewed it, as Smith put it, as the "most wretched and miserable that can be imagined; Mr. Rousseau, on the contrary, paints it as the happiest and most suitable to his nature." Yet both had supposed in man no "powerful instinct which necessarily determines him to seek society for its own sake" and both described the progress of human society pretty much in the same manner, that is, the same "slow progress and gradual development of all the talents, habits, and art which fit men to live together in

⁶⁵ The challenge of the "Buffonian Revolution" and of natural history generally to natural law theory is examined in Chapter 3.

society."⁶⁶ Both Mandeville and Rousseau shared the view that the laws of justice were to be explained as originally the inventions of the "cunning and the powerful, in order to maintain or to acquire an unnatural and unjust superiority over the rest of their fellow-creatures." Rousseau's natural historical approach to moral philosophy was suggestive. Yet Smith saw that Rousseau "criticises upon Dr. Mandeville," observing that pity was natural to man and capable of producing all those virtues that Mandeville denied. Smith noted that Rousseau seemed to "think, that this principle is in itself no virtue, but that it is possessed by the most profligate of the vulgar, in a greater degree of perfection than by those of the most polished and cultivated manners."⁶⁷ While reaching opposite conclusions about the original nature of mankind, both thinkers questioned the *naturalness* of human sociability and drew attention to historical contingency in the development of both human nature and society. Rousseau's researches in natural history confirmed for him the limited range of human nature in primitive conditions. The reversal of modern expectations about the presence or absence of virtue in rude and cultivated societies inspired in Rousseau by Buffon instigated much of the investigation into human sociability that would mark late Enlightenment human sciences.

The review of the Second Discourse in the *Edinburgh Review* reflected both Smith's ambivalence about the work as well as its profound affect upon him. Though Smith cannot have been unaware of Rousseau's reliance upon the natural sciences. Rousseau's Notes betray

⁶⁶ Smith, "Letter," 250.

⁶⁷ Smith, "Letter," 251.

the extensive use made of natural histories and travel accounts. Besides Buffon, Rousseau also drew upon a range of works to support his ideas such as Gautier's *Observations sur l'histoire naturelle* (1752), as well as travel accounts contained in Prévost's *Histoire générale des voyages* (1746-79), and individual travel narratives by Jean Chardin, Peter Kolben, Engelbert Kaempfer, La Condamine, Jerome Merolla, Andrew Battel, among others. Smith had already referred his readers to the *Histoire naturelle* and the *Encyclopédie*, but he clearly recognized the import of the applying Buffonian natural philosophy as Rousseau had done to moral philosophy. Rousseau's style was at once "laboured and studiously elegant" contributing to a work that Smith thought was "every where sufficiently nervous, and sometimes even sublime and pathetic." Smith further suggested that it is with the "help of this style, together with a little philosophical chemistry, that the principles and ideas of the profligate Mandeville seem in him to have all the purity and sublimity of the morals of Plato." The Discourse was "only the true spirit of a republican carried a little too far." Smith concluded that, as Rousseau's work was "almost entirely of rhetoric and description," it would "be to no purpose to give an analysis," and thus presented his readers with several translated passages as a "specimen of his eloquence."⁶⁸

The three passages of the Discourse that Smith chose to translate were not only exemplars of Rousseau's eloquence, but also what Smith considered the greatest provocations to modern philosophers. In the first passage Smith highlighted Rousseau's contention that it had been the ever-increasing division of labor that had introduced dependence,

⁶⁸ Smith, "Letter," 251.

inequality, property, and slavery. The second passage dealt with the effects of property: the rise of *perfectibilité*, the development of human faculties in interaction with society, the rise of luxury and the production of new "needs," and the artificiality of the human personality in modern society. The final translated passage highlighted Rousseau's assertion of the essential difference between the happiness and liberty of man in his savage state and his corruption and enslavement in civilized society. The wide reception of the *Discours sur l'inégalité* was never indifferent. After all, the narrative trajectory of the text began in the denial of original sin and culminated in revolution. Rousseau's powerful critique of modernity confronted many broadly shared assumptions held by enlightened thinkers at midcentury. The passages Smith selected concisely highlighted what would become many of the central problems animating Smith and others in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Rousseau's Discourse exerted a profound affect upon him and other enlightened thinkers engaged in the construction of a modern moral philosophy, for Rousseau's critique challenged not only the historical understanding of human nature and society in the past, but also carried implications for the understanding of them in the present. Most suggestive perhaps was that an understanding of pressing contemporary questions was to be achieved through the historical study of the parallel stages of changes in human nature and social context. However, the theoretical ideas in Buffon's natural philosophy perhaps animated a more generalized, if not explicit, underpinning for Smith in his approach to existing philosophical problems that confronted him in constructing a science of man.

As Paul Wood has shown in the reception of Buffon in Aberdeen, Scots thinkers tended to draw upon the information in the *Histoire naturelle* and even to structure courses on it, but suspected him and his work of atheism and materialism.⁶⁹ Smith, who likely shared the religious skepticism of his friend David Hume, does not appear to have been initially concerned with these potential objections to Buffon. Ever intent upon avoiding religious controversy, however, Smith appears not to have written explicitly about Buffon after recommending him in the 1756 *Edinburgh Review*.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, Smith saw in the *Histoire* not only a subject matter, but also a theoretical model, for furthering the Humean project of a science of man. Smith above all the attempt to articulate a *natural system*, whether in human behavior or in political economy, to which Buffon perhaps gave new impetus. Much of the "almost entirely hypothetical" system of Buffon was laid out in the "Premier Discours: De la manière d'étudier et de traiter l'Histoire Naturelle." Although the "Premiere Discours" was excluded from each of the four English translations or republications of the work during the period, Scots such as Smith who were aware of Francophone intellectual developments

⁶⁹ Paul B. Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: the Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 160-90.

⁷⁰ On Smith's religious views, see Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 58, 132, 244, and 281.

were well acquainted with Buffon's theoretical discourse in the French edition.⁷¹

The French naturalist laid out the explicit theoretical apparatus of the multi-volume work in reaction to the dominant system of the time, that of the Swedish physician and naturalist Carl von Linné (Linnaeus) (1707-78). During the 1730s and 1740s, Linnaeus began to provide the rational basis of natural and artificial plant classification. With his *Systema naturæ* (1735), Linnaeus helped usher in a European enthusiasm in natural philosophy as a grand taxonomic system at a time when there had been no comparable connection of plants, animals, and minerals into a comprehensive system, one that claimed to offer a key to the order of created nature. The classificatory system of Linnaeus also had revolutionary implications for subsequent anthropological thought by including human beings as animals, alongside apes and sloths.⁷² Buffon also included man as an animal, but if anything, he made natural philosophy more "anthropological" by placing man at the center of relations to the natural world.

The system into which Buffon set mankind was constructed in contradistinction to the Linnaean natural history, and was

⁷¹ On the exclusion of the theoretical apparatus of Buffon from English-language translations, see John Lyon, "The 'Initial Discourse' to Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*: The First Complete Translation," *Journal of the History of Biology* (Spring 1976): 134. Lyon suggests that the enthusiasm for the Linnaean system prejudiced translators against including the "Premier discours" in English editions of the *Histoire*. Smith likely read Buffon in the original French, but appears to have owned a copy of the 1781 English translation by fellow Scot, William Smellie. See Hiroshi Mizuta, *Adam Smith's Library: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷² Phillip R. Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History," in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth Century Domains*, eds. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wolker (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 1-10.

characterized as a causal, secular, and historical science of nature.⁷³ As Philip Sloan has observed, Buffon was the "foremost architect" of a new "natural history" in the eighteenth century that revived "historical cosmology and theories of the world, subsuming this under a broadened and altered conception of natural history that eventually resulted in a synthesis of cosmological, geological, historical, and biological questions."⁷⁴ Both seventeenth-century and Linnaean natural philosophy suffered, in Buffon's view, from being abstract. Mathematics provided only abstract truth established on the relation of ideas rather than on the succession of relations of real things. Buffon thus suggested that knowledge acquired through natural history was superior to that of mathematical abstractions. It was the rejection of abstraction in favor of empirical knowledge that formed the basis of his critique of Linnaeus and the variant systems of his disciples. It is unclear whether Buffon was aware of David Hume's writings at this time. However, drawing upon common intellectual resources and addressing similar problems, the two thinkers shared a

⁷³ Phillip R. Sloan, "Natural History," in *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* Vol. 2, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 911.

⁷⁴ Sloan, "Natural History," 913.

similar critique of mathematical abstraction in favor of "experimental" or experiential reasoning.⁷⁵

Still, as Sloan has argued, Buffon's thought also departed in important ways from the Newton-Locke-empiricist philosophical axis. Out of a complex of natural philosophies of Newton, Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Cambridge Platonists, Buffon reestablished the concept of nature as a substantive, causal agency. Unlike Linnaeus's creationist, classification system of natural history, Buffon's made no attempt to synthesize natural history with biblical accounts. Rather, as Buffon later defined it, nature was "an immense, living force, which embraces all thing, which animates all."⁷⁶ Sloan views Buffon's thought as a revival of Aristotelianism and a complex synthesis of Cartesian and Leibnizian natural philosophies, which Newton's hegemony had served to check. In short, this complex of ideas contributed to the formation of Buffon's relational epistemology that critiqued the Newtonian independence of time and space. This relationality applied to Buffon's important redefinition of what constituted a species. Whereas a species had traditionally been defined as a logical class of similar individuals, Buffon introduced the conception of species as the

⁷⁵ Hume had advocated experimental or experiential method in conducting a science of man at the end of the 1730s in *A Treatise of Human Nature* and reiterated it in 1748 in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. On Hume's early interest in natural philosophy, see Michael Barfoot, "Hume and the Culture of Science in the Early Eighteenth Century," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M.A. Stewart, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 151-190. Despite Hume's interest in natural philosophy, there exists no evidence that Hume read Buffon before they met in the Parisian salons during the 1760s. However, the subsequent gift to Hume by Buffon of a personal copy of several volumes of the *Histoire naturelle* suggests that scientific issues had been a topic of conversation between the natural and social theorists. See E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 480.

⁷⁶ Buffon, "De la nature: première vue," *Histoire naturelle* 12 in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, 31, quoted in Sloan, "Natural History," 920, 64n.

"constant succession and uninterrupted renewal of the individuals constituting it."⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Buffon gave special place to man in a radically reworked notion of the Great Chain of Being. By placing humans at the "head of all created beings," Buffon found that, "man will see with astonishment that it is possible to descend by almost imperceptible degrees from the most perfect of creatures to the most formless matter, from the most perfectly formed animal to the most amorphous mineral." These "imperceptible nuances" were the great work of nature in the "changes, productions, and successions of the whole species."⁷⁸

In Buffon's epistemology it was not only man that was to be classified according to his relations to other animals, but also time and space that were to be viewed as purely *relational* with neither being conceived apart from the relations to material substances. In Buffon's thought temporal and spatial categories were intrinsic to the structure of all existent things. Buffonian natural history thus became a science concerned with the successional unfolding of phenomena over time through an inner system of dynamic forces and relations inherent in matter. For Buffon truth was to be found in the

⁷⁷ Buffon, 'L'Asne', *Histoire naturelle* 4 (1753) in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Jean Piveteau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 353-8 at 355, quoted in Phillip R. Sloan, "Natural History," 921, 65n. On Buffon's concept of species, see Sloan "From Logical Universals to Historical Individuals: Buffon's Conception of Biological Species," in *Histoire du concept d'espèce dans les sciences de la vie*, ed. J. Roger and J.-L. Fischer (Paris: Fondation Singer-Polignac, 1987), 101-40; and Paul L. Farber, "Buffon's Concept of Species," *Journal of the History of Biology* 5 (1972): 259-84. For the standard intellectual biography, see Jacques Roger, *Buffon, A Life in Natural History*, ed. L. Pearce Williams, trans. Sarah Lucille Bonnefoi (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁷⁸ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 12-13.

physical world as consequence of understanding natural objects and phenomena by the relations of interconnection and temporal succession.

While Buffon regarded the natural world as being in a slow decay, many of his late eighteenth-century interpreters came to view the systems of the natural world as progressive. This change may be due largely to the revival of vitalistic conceptions of life, conceptions that increasingly came to challenge mechanistic philosophies of nature in the eighteenth century. The idea of an organism given form by its own dynamic, internal forces grew in part out of midcentury medical discourse. Vitalist conceptions of nature operating on self-organizing principles promised new approaches to medical treatments, and was reenforced in the universities and medical schools. Halle, Montpellier, Göttingen, and Edinburgh became major centers of various vitalistic medical theory over the course of the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ Living beings, and by extension, natural systems, were re-conceived as governed by forces inherent within matter. Living organisms were understood to be governed by internal forces or principles that explained their natural function. Vitalist conceptions of matter were widely disseminated in the medical articles of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and D'Alembert, and other writings of enlightened thinkers versed in medicine and other biological sciences. While vitalist discourse circulated widely during the period, as one of the most owned works of the eighteenth century, Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was

⁷⁹ Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing the Enlightenment*, 121-34; Theodore Brown, "From Mechanism to Vitalism in Eighteenth-Century Physiology," *Journal of the History of Biology* 7 (1974): 179-216. On the medical thought more generally during period, see Andrew Cunningham and Roger French, eds. *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

perhaps singular in disseminating vitalist thought as part of what, Adam Smith thought, would be a "compleat system" of natural history.⁸⁰

The promise of a "compleat system" for Smith perhaps lay in its methodological attempt to harmonize seeming binary oppositions in the natural world and in the human mind. In the "Premiere Discours" Buffon identified a problem confronting researchers, that of how to deal with the "innumerable multitude" of nature's productions that were increasingly brought to European awareness by global expansion, not only travelers' reports, but also the specimens that began filling the zoological and botanical collections of the Jardin du Roi in Paris and the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew.⁸¹ Buffon proposed that the "love of the study of nature supposes two qualities of mind which are apparently in opposition to each other: the grand view of the ardent genius who takes in everything at a glance, and the detailed attention of an instinct which concentrates laboriously on a single minute detail."⁸² Buffon acknowledged both bewilderment mixed with admiration as response to the multiplicity of natural objects.

Buffon, like Hume, had recognized the degree to which the human imagination informs what is perceived as natural. The human mind

⁸⁰ See the collected essays in Jean Gayon, ed. *Buffon 88: Actes du Colloque International Paris-Montbard-Dijon* (Paris: Vrin, 1992).

⁸¹ On the Jardin du Roi, see E. C. Spary, *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2000). On the relationship between empire and botany, see John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Philip Miller and Peter H. Reill, eds. *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and, Londa L. Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds. *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁸² Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 5.

imagines order and uniformity in nature, and to the cursory examination, nature will appear to have always worked upon the same plan. Yet this created false connections between the things that nature produced. The different organization and operation of plants, animals, and vegetables, in Buffon's view, had been falsely reduced to the same form by prior systems of natural history. Buffon concluded that, the "common matrix of these things so unlike each other lies less in the nature than in the narrow mind of those who have poorly conceived her, and who know as little about appraising the strength of a fact as they do about the proper limits of comparative analogy."⁸³ For Buffon, the more the naturalist "augments the number of divisions of the productions of nature, the more one approaches the truth." In nature only species or "individuals exist, while genera, orders, and classes only exist in our imagination."⁸⁴

Still, the comparative approach was central to Buffon's work as the "first causes of things" would "remain ever hidden from us, the general results of these causes will remain as difficult for us to know as the causes themselves." All that one can do is "to perceive certain particular effects, to compare these with each other, to combine them, and finally, to recognized therein more of an order appropriate to *our* own nature than one pertaining to the existence of the things which we are considering." Buffon conceded that, "seeing that this is the only route open to us, and since we have no other means of arriving at a knowledge of the things of nature, it is

⁸³ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 10.

⁸⁴ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 38.

necessary to follow that route as far as it can lead us."⁸⁵ That route involved collecting, comparing, studying and then extracting from objects the totality of their connections the insights they might provide in arriving at a knowledge of things.

Buffon concluded that it was clearly impossible to establish one general system or perfect method for the whole of natural history or even of its individual branches. Still, the search for a general system served as a kind of quest for the "philosopher's stone" needed to sustain the work of naturalists. Though his critique was aimed specifically at the Linnaean system of classification, its methodological thrust was applicable to the sciences more generally. Buffon warned of the "metaphysical error" of disregarding the progressive nuance of nature and attempting to judge the whole by a single part. Natural history as system of enquiry required a mediation between oppositions, a movement back and forth between the general and the particular.

Buffon asserted that the study of natural history suffered from occupying one of two equally dangerous positions, that of having no system of all or converting everything to a "restricted system." The first resulted in a randomness that offered confusion rather than knowledge, while the second resulted in a burdensomeness that prevented the possibility of actual knowledge. At best, one could regard these methods as systems of "artificial signs which are agreed upon for the purposes of mutual understanding." In Buffon's view things in themselves had no existence. Things came into existence for us "when we became acquainted with their relations to each other and

⁸⁵ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 11-12. Emphasis in the original.

their properties."⁸⁶ The history of an object Buffon "ought to follow the description, and it ought to treat only relations which the things of nature have among themselves and with us."⁸⁷ Buffon thus created a web of relations that radically reformed the Great Chain of Being. The study of man required set him within a larger network of relations of nature. A Buffonian system must thus be comparative and relational, empirically examining the nuances between species of things.

Buffon concluded that in the study of natural history one "must try to raise ourselves to something greater and still more worthy of our efforts, namely: the combination of observations, the generalization of facts, linking them together by the power of analogies, and the effort to arrive at a high degree of knowledge."⁸⁸ The true method in natural historical research involved "recourse to observations, to gather these together, and from them to make new observations in sufficient number to assure the truth of the principal facts...Above all, it is necessary to try to generalize these facts and to distinguish well those which are essential from those which are only accessories to the subject under consideration. It is then necessary to tie such facts together by analogies, confirm or destroy certain equivocal points by means of experiment, form one's plan of explication on the basis of the combination of all these connections, and present them in the most natural order" (178). Buffon suggested that a natural system might be formed either by ascending from particular effects to more general ones, or descending from the

⁸⁶ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 24-25.

⁸⁷ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 30.

⁸⁸ Buffon, "Premiere Discours," 51.

general to the particular. The choice depended, in Buffon's view, more on the disposition of the researcher than the nature of things. What was essential was the mediation between the general and the particular.

Ultimately, Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was instrumental in the development during the last half of the eighteenth century of what historian Peter Reill has termed "Enlightenment Vitalism." Underlying Buffon's systematic method was an epistemology or metaphysics that emphasized the "primacy of living over inanimate matter, asserted the existence of inner, active forces as central agents in nature." Buffon "called for new forms of natural philosophic explanation in which the mind-body duality was blurred and based it on principles of comparison, resemblance, affinity, [and] analogical reasoning...But above all, Buffon proclaimed an order of things that elevated dynamic relations and qualitative change over time."⁸⁹ Three areas in which Buffon's impact was especially evident, Reill observes, were his "concept of scientific system, his ideas about change over time, and his general epistemological and methodological principles."⁹⁰

Henceforth, what Philip Sloan has called, the "Buffonian revolution" reverberated among late eighteenth century natural and moral sciences. Both Buffon's epistemological framework in the *Histoire* and the anthropological methodology of "Varieties of the Human Species" were suggestive as a natural history of the human

⁸⁹ Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 69.

⁹⁰ Reill, "Buffon and Historical Thought in Germany and Great Britain," *Buffon 88*, 688. See also, Reill, "Analogy, Comparison, and Active Living Forces: Late Enlightenment Responses to the Skeptical Critique of Causal Analysis," in *The Skeptical Tradition Around 1500: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society*, eds. Johan van der Zande and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer), 203-11.

species. The figure of the "savage" had served as a rhetorical counterpoint to aspects of contemporary European culture at least since Montaigne. However, in the late eighteenth century "savages" or "rude" nations would increasingly become a subject of *empirical*, albeit vicarious, investigation.⁹¹ Although man in a state of nature certainly served Rousseau in the *Discours* as a rhetorical counterpoint to what he viewed as the corrupt nature of man in society, the use of ethnographic and natural historical information in that work is striking. Moreover, Rousseau was one of the first to point the way toward moral philosophy as a natural history of the human species. However there were aspects of the works of both Buffon and Rousseau that made their wholesale acceptance among many enlightened thinkers problematic. Nonetheless, the power that the *Histoire naturelle* exerted upon contemporaries was undeniable, being almost immediately taken up outside France where it was discussed and debated, including the philosophical clubs and societies in Scotland.

Vitalizing the Scottish Science of Man and the Anthropological Turn

Buffon attempted to create a science that went beyond the simple description of things, one that discovered the "great operations" of nature.⁹² Similarly, Adam Smith, and later many other Scots philosophers, attempted to construct a science of man that translated principles of current French natural to moral philosophy to construct

⁹¹ On the importance of travel writing for European Enlightenment, see Hazard, Paul, *The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715*, trans. J. Lewis May (1935; New York: New York Review of Books, 2013). For the British case, see P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁹² Jacques Roger, *Buffon*, 90-1.

the great operations of human nature and of society. Earlier in the century David Hume had argued that the study of all the sciences had to be founded directly upon that of the study of human nature itself. What the vitalism of the new natural sciences would do was provide an analogue for the processes studied in the human sciences. A vitalist science of man might allow the understanding of the great operations of human society as natural. The centrality of understanding human nature through the comparative study of the world's peoples explicitly or implicitly provoked by a natural historical approach served to spur to Smith and others into following an anthropological turn in moral philosophy.

This turn was made more pressing by the representation of the astonishing varieties of travelers' accounts highlighting the diversity of the peoples of the world and the seemingly vast divergence between the nature of primitive and civilized man. While both Buffon and Rousseau were monogenists who viewed the variety of the human species deriving from a common descent, their works both implicitly provoked the problem of accounting for physical and cultural difference between peoples.⁹³ The uniformity of human nature had been an operating assumption of the early Enlightenment generally. Indeed, it had been a necessary grounding assumption of Hume's science of man.

Hume in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* of 1748 continued to assert that there existed a "great uniformity among the actions of man in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains

⁹³ For the development of monogenism and polygenism in context of race and Protestant theology during the eighteenth century, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79-120.

still the same, in its principles and operations." Hume asked, "Would you know the sentiments, inclination, and course of life of the Greeks and Romans? Study well the temper of the French and English: You cannot be much mistaken in transferring to the former most of the observations which you have made with regard to the latter. Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular."⁹⁴ As Roger Emerson has noted, Hume was fascinated by a few accounts of other peoples, but not those of "savages" in the Americas or Africa. Hume seems to have been "immune to the fascination with American travel literature shown by most of his Scottish friends. His non-European peoples tended to be civilized Persians, Chinese and Turks and his barbarians Goths, Saxons, Russians, Tartars, or Moroccans."⁹⁵

Smith had first encountered David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* during his time at Oxford between 1740 and 1746, and had become acquainted with Hume sometime around 1749-50.⁹⁶ By this time Hume had abandoned the abstract, systematic style of the *Treatise* in favor of a more accessible expression of earlier ideas in his essays and the histories that were to make him famous and wealthy. Smith, at the beginning of his career, chose to take up Hume's mantle and develop systematically many of the insights that his friend had casually laced throughout these writings. However, it was precisely the exotic and unfamiliar rendering of the world's peoples in the travel accounts and

⁹⁴ Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 83.

⁹⁵ See Roger L. Emerson, "Hume's Intellectual Development: Part II," in *Essays on David Hume, Medical Men and the Scottish Enlightenment*, 115.

⁹⁶ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 65.

the natural histories of the species that appeared to undermine the position that the human nature was uniform at all times and in all places.

After all, Rousseau's recent work made a forceful case against against uniformity across time. Thus, before creating his own science of man, Smith would have to confront the problem of mediating between the uniformity and the diversity of human nature. Smith continued to employ Hume's concepts of sympathy and self-organization of society, but after midcentury these were informed by a vitalist epistemology. With the circulation of vitalism in the natural sciences in the mid-1750s came a reconsideration of the history of human nature and society by Smith in large part on a global, historical, and comparative analysis of primitive and civilized societies. It was this approach articulated in Smith's lectures, papers delivered in the Edinburgh and Glasgow clubs, and published work that contributed to the pronounced turn of his fellow Scots to the development of the Enlightenment global anthropological imagination.

Indeed, the faculty of the imagination was central to the Scottish Enlightenment, but is often overshadowed by scholarly focus on its empiricism. In an early work likely written in the 1740s, but revisited and reworked throughout his life, "The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquires; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," Smith demonstrated the foundational role of the imagination in the construction of both philosophy and science. Smith saw it as "evident that the mind takes pleasure in observing the resemblances that are discoverable betwixt different objects." Nature, he wrote, "after the largest experience that common observation can

acquire, seems to abound with events which appear solitary and incoherent...which therefore disturb the easy movement of the imagination."⁹⁷ He noted what is essentially an aesthetic pleasure of the imagination involved in making sense of the world.⁹⁸

Smith followed Hume's notion of the association of ideas outlined in the *Treatise* in which two objects that have often been observed to follow one another become connected in the imagination. Thus, when

two objects, however unlike, have often been observed to follow each other, and have constantly presented themselves to the senses in that order, they come to be so connected together in the fancy, that the idea of the one seems, of its own accord, to call up and introduce that of the other...When objects succeed each other in the same train in which the ideas of the imagination have thus been accustomed to move, and in which though not conducted by that chain of events presented to the senses, they have acquired a tendency to go on of their own accord, such objects appear all closely connected with one another, and the thought glides easily along them, without effort and without interruption...There is no break, no stop, no gap, no interval.⁹⁹

However, when something new and singular is presented to the mind, its inability to classify it within a chain of association produces a sense of *wonder*. Science and philosophy are the work of

⁹⁷ Smith, "The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquires; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, eds. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1982), 37; 45. Hereafter referred to as "History of Astronomy."

⁹⁸ One could also argue that Smith regarded an aesthetic impulse as an essential aspect of human nature, one that contributed not only to the development of human relations, but also of social progress. See, Neil De Marchi, "Smith on Ingenuity, Pleasure, and the Imitative Arts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 158-88 and Peter Jones, "The Aesthetics of Adam Smith," in *Adam Smith Reviewed*, eds. P. Jones and A. S. Skinner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 56-78. The importance of Smith's aesthetic theory, however, remains a largely ignored aspect of his thought. Smith's final project was apparently a major treatise on aesthetics, the unfinished manuscripts of which were destroyed shortly before his death.

⁹⁹ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 40-1.

"connecting the principles of nature" by "representing the invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, [as the mind] endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to ally this tumult of the imagination."¹⁰⁰ Smith set the imagination and its productions within a framework of increasing historical complexity. The demands of the imagination to unusual phenomena in nature in early societies were met with invisible forces being explained by religious systems of thought. As societies grew more complex the imagination sought to ally its tumult by connecting *natural* principles into systems of science and philosophy.

Thus, the workings of the imagination illuminated the process by which one scientific system was succeeded by another. In the essay Smith traced out the history and theory of philosophy from its "first origin, up to that summit of perfection to which it is at present supposed to have arrived, and to which, indeed it has equally been supposed to have arrived in almost all former times." Here Smith recognized the essential nature of modernity, as well as the tentative, constructed nature of scientific and philosophical systems. In considering their successive adoption by the "learned and ingenious," Smith was interested less in "regarding their absurdity or probability, their agreement or inconsistency with truth and reality," than in "how far each of them was fitted to sooth the imagination, and to render the theatre of nature a more coherent spectacle." Success or failure of a system of thought depended upon the degree to which the connecting principles were familiar to the "generality of mankind" and

¹⁰⁰ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 45-6.

capable of "smoothing the passage of the imagination betwixt any two seemingly disjointed objects."¹⁰¹

The anthropological turn in Smith's thinking may itself may in part be seen as a product of the sense of wonder provoked in his own imagination and that of literate Europeans. Increased awareness and knowledge of the manifold "varieties" of the human species produced by popular accounts of other peoples had produced gaps or intervals that disturbed the smooth movement of the imagination and required the search for systems or paradigms with which to understand human differences. Recent French natural philosophy that reopened debate about the uniformity and diversity of human nature no longer allowed the mind an easy passage along a chain of associations established in earlier systems, religious or philosophical. With this recognition, Smith set about elaborating new connecting principles inspired by vitalism that eased the imagination and rendered the seemingly diverse manifestations of human nature as part of a coherent and natural system.

In the midst of the Buffonian revolution Smith likely began developing his anthropological thought with his early series of public lectures in Edinburgh (1748-51 and his jurisprudence lectures at Glasgow (1751-63). As we saw, by 1756 Smith was promoting the *Histoire naturelle* and the *Encyclopédie*, both of which contained vitalist modes of thought, to a generation of literate Scots. Smith's reasoning with "savages" would inform the basis of his social thought and inflected his lectures on rhetoric, jurisprudence, natural theology, ethics, and police (political economy). The anthropological turn of Smith, worked

¹⁰¹ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 46-7.

out in course of the 1750s was the point of departure for much of his thought and work, including his *Wealth of Nations*. It is significant that Smith's anthropological theory made its first published appearance in a work devoted to working out Hume's idea of human sympathy into a fully developed theory. With the publication of his first great work the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759 Smith had succinctly distilled and articulated a vitalist anthropology into a part of a comprehensive system of human nature, which was a constituent part of larger project of a science of man.

This distillation of anthropological thought is explicit in Part V of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "Of the Influence of Custom and Fashion upon the Sentiments of Moral Approbation and Disapprobation." This part contains two chapters, the first dealing with the influence of custom and fashion upon ideas of beauty, and the second on their influence upon the moral sentiments. This section articulated a cultural perspectivism that offered insight into the relation between moral sentiment and social structure in both savage or primitive and civilized societies.¹⁰² Given the wide, but cautious, reception of Buffon among the Scots, vitalist thought is not explicitly evoked in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. It nonetheless framed Smith's sophisticated, analogical and comparative analysis in Part V, most notably in the figure of mediation and the analogical understanding of the relation between aesthetic and moral judgments.

¹⁰² On the view that cultural perspectivism was to the Enlightenment what artistic perspectivism was to the Renaissance, see Larry Wolff, "Discovering Cultural Perspective: The Intellectual History of Anthropological Thought in the Age of Enlightenment," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, eds. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 3-34.

Buffon suggested to Smith, Rousseau, and others not only with subject matter, but also methodological orientation for mediating the seeming differences in the nature of mankind. The positions derived from Buffon and his followers were constructed upon the interpretative figures of mediation. Summarizing the epistemology of Enlightenment Vitalism, Peter Reill finds that it offered a theory of understanding founded upon

similarity[,] and conjunction rather than upon identity and separation. It proposed a methodology of investigation and a procedure of explanation in which analogical reasoning and comparative analysis were considered as primary. Understanding was made possible through sympathy and 'intuition,' procedures that were sanctioned by assuming a correspondence between observer and observed; that is, by collapsing the strict distinction made in mechanistic science between mind and body, subject and object.¹⁰³

While the concepts of sympathy and cultural perspectivism were not originally derived from Enlightenment Vitalism, from the late 1750s it provided a *natural* grounding assumption or explanatory model of understanding that Smith would apply to the organizational operations of both human psychology and social structures.

Smith's anthropology in Part V is established on the interpretive mediation exemplified in the methodology formulated by Buffon throughout the *Histoire naturelle*. He applies analogical reasoning between aesthetics and morals, and a comparative analysis of primitive and complex forms of human society. A comparative anthropological perspectivism that attempted to understand the similarities within the differences in human manners or moral sentiments. His work not only attempted to understand the operations of human sympathy, but also

¹⁰³ Reill, "Buffon and Historical Thought," 674.

attempted to exercise his own sympathy towards others, both savage and civilized. Sympathy for Smith was ultimately achieved through use of the faculty of imagination.

Aesthetic judgment also depended upon the imagination. The problem of judgment resided in its restriction by the power of custom and habit of the individual's cultural and historical context.

Few men have an opportunity of seeing in their own times the fashion in the arts change very considerably...Few men have so much experience and acquaintance with the different modes which have obtained in remote ages and nations, as to be thoroughly reconciled to them, or to judge with impartiality between them, and what takes place in their own age and country.¹⁰⁴

Therefore he concluded that very few men were willing to admit that custom or fashion had much influence upon their judgments of aesthetic productions. Rather, they "imagine, that all the rules, which they think ought to be observed in each of them [the arts] are founded upon reason and nature, not on habit or prejudice."¹⁰⁵ Recognition of this required destabilizing this prejudice through the re-imagining the relations of time and space to achieve an anthropological perspective.

Smith observed a vitalistic, self-organizing principle in operation in nature that may be discerned by a mediate form. In the human form, he noted, the "beauty of each feature lies in a certain middle, equally removed from a variety of other forms that are ugly." This middle form was a product not of cultural, but of natural principles. Aesthetic beauty, Smith observed, was "the form which Nature seems to have aimed at in them, which however, she deviates

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), V.I.4. Hereafter referred to as *TMS*.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.4.

from in a great variety of ways, and very seldom hits exactly; but to which all those deviations still bear a strong resemblance." For his theory of aesthetic judgment Smith cited the "learned Jesuit," Claude Buffier, who, in his *Traité des première vérités et de la source de nos jugements* (1724) found that, "every object consists in that form and colour, which is most usual among things of that particular sort to which it belongs." However, he might equally have cited Buffon and the vitalist harmonic mediation between competing oppositions. "The nicest judgment concerning the beauty of the human species, will not help us to judge of that of flowers, or horses, or any other species of things...The beauty of a Moorish is not exactly the same with that of an English horse."¹⁰⁶ For the middle in Smith's formulation was determined by nature, and aesthetic judgment required recognizing what constituted the middle form in every species of things.

"What different ideas are formed in different nations," Smith asked, "concerning the beauty of the human shape and countenance?" He set various practices of aesthetic beauty in a larger cultural perspective, noting that,

A fair complexion is a shocking deformity upon the coasts of Guinea. Thick lips and a flat nose are a beauty. In some nations long ears that hang down upon the shoulders are the objects of universal admiration. In China if a lady's foot is so large as to be fit to walk upon, she is regarded as a monster of ugliness. Some of the savage nations in North-America tie four boards round the heads of their children, and thus squeeze them, while the bone are tender and gristly, into a form that is almost perfectly square. Europeans are astonished at the absurd barbarity of this practice, to which some missionaries have imputed the

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.8.

singular stupidity of those nations among whom it prevails.¹⁰⁷

Smith then reversed comparative perspective. Analogy between differing forms of bodily modification brought them into similarity and conjunction, forcing his readers to recognize how their own habit and prejudice.

But when they condemn those savages, they do not reflect that the ladies in Europe had, till within these very few years, been endeavouring, for near a century past, to squeeze the beautiful of their natural shape into a square form of the same kind. And that, notwithstanding the many distortions and diseases which this practice was known to occasion, custom had rendered it agreeable among some of the most civilized nations which, perhaps, the world ever beheld.¹⁰⁸

Yet, for Smith aesthetic judgments were at once semi-normative and relativistic. The binding of heads, feet and torsos were all practices of "absurd barbarity" and none was better or worse for the particular cultural or national context in which it occurs. Hence, a "certain practice and experience in contemplating each species of objects is requisite, before we can judge of its beauty, or know wherein the middle and most usual form consists." Smith concluded that, "It is for the same reason that in different climates, and where different customs and ways of living take place, as the generality of

¹⁰⁷ Smith, *TMS*, V.i.8. Smith perhaps makes a veiled criticism against those motivated by religious enthusiasm to pass judgment on non-Europeans and impose ways of being that were inappropriate to their circumstances. After all, it was precisely Jesuit missionaries such as Lafitau and Charlevoix who had first suggested viewing the conditions of contemporary Native Americans and ancient Europeans analogically.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *TMS*, V.i.8.

any species receives a different conformation from those circumstances, so different ideas of its beauty prevail."¹⁰⁹

Much of Smith's language of species and aesthetics perhaps had its origins in natural philosophy. Smith clearly drew upon Buffon's ideas in negotiating the oppositions of human similarity and difference. For example, a feature of Buffon's epigenetic concept of generation of species was the relation of both synchronic and diachronic. Buffon argued for the continuity of the *moule intérieure* of a species. The oxymoronic term itself was vitalist mediation of oppositions, and became the physical symbol of the "extended middle," a formulation designed to transcend binary thinking.¹¹⁰ Buffon had argued that the contingencies of geography and climate acting upon the *molécules organiques* of a species could act synchronically as external causes in modifying the species.¹¹¹ In his "Varieties of the Human Species," Buffon attributed the affect of these contingencies to human physical difference. These physical differences from what he considered the original form of humans were what he termed "degeneration." While he thought that the original "interior mold" of humans to have been white, Buffon's use of the word degeneration generally implied variation from European ideal, not necessarily inferiority. While his chapter provided an exotic canvassing of the variety "different conformations" among the peoples of Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas as having a common origin, Buffon's survey also illustrated the

¹⁰⁹ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.8.

¹¹⁰ Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 47.

¹¹¹ Sloan, "Gaze of Natural History," 133.

"imperceptible nuances" of skin color that existed between the peoples of the world.

Where hierarchy existed in Buffon it was in standards of aesthetic beauty. Buffon clearly viewed Europeans as the standard by which to judge the physical appearance of others. Buffon frequently offered critical moral judgments in the *Histoire naturelle*, but his harshest judgments were reserved for those he ranked lowest on the hierarchy of physical beauty. Though his "observations" were largely based upon secondhand sources, he noted cases of such ugliness that the men and women of a particular group of people were indistinguishable. Nor was it a simple racism based upon the nuances of skin color, for the extreme distaste of Buffon for the Hottentots was matched by his admiration of what he considered the ebony beauty of the Senegalese. Buffon's judgments concerning the beautiful were founded on cultural habit and prejudice. It was precisely this sort of thinking that Smith sought to expose. It was not a question of ranking for Smith, but of understanding the most usual form of every species in its particular circumstances. In this regard, Smith perhaps more faithfully applied Buffonian theory than was often the case with Buffon.

While recognizing the importance of climate in human development, upon which Buffon laid great emphasis, Smith emphasized Buffon's insight that the "different customs and ways of living" (what Buffon referred to as dispositions) contributed to different "conformations" among the human species. The vitalism of Buffon's natural philosophy provided a means of working through the gaps or ruptures introduced into the anthropological imagination by the foreignness of human

physical and cultural diversities. Buffon's methodology promoted a systematic comparison of qualitative change over time and an epistemology that assumed an interaction and modification between natural principles and the specific conditions in which they operated. Smith thus saw in human social history a "symbiosis between active principles and given conditions in which each modified and acted upon the other."¹¹²

Rousseau's work had similarly been suggestive to Smith in its use of the idea of stages of human history in which the principles of human nature and social conditions were interrelated. Rather than explore imperceptible nuances, Smith was to develop a theory of four general stages of human society that established the nature of the symbiosis between active principles and given conditions. Given the social, political, and economic conditions were much different in Great Britain than France, Smith reached different conclusions about the modern or commercial stage of society than Rousseau. Yet even Rousseau admitted that there was no return to a state of nature for modern man. However, he did seem to hold out the possibility of a return to a simpler form of social existence, one perhaps not so different from that of contemporary primitives peoples such as the Caribs who so fascinated him in the *Discours*. Rousseau considered this sort of society the happiest for humankind, and one occupying a middle position equidistant from both instinct and reason.

Whereas the stages of development occurred from accidental causes for Rousseau, Smith came to regard them as analogous to the

¹¹² Peter H. Reill, "Vitalism and the Construction of the Human Sciences in the Late Enlightenment: Johann Gottfried Herder and Adam Smith," (unpublished 2010 Presidential Address to the American Society of Eighteenth-Century Studies), 17. I thank the author for sharing this paper with me.

development of natural organisms. Smith thus turned to the contemplation of the middle or most usual form found to prevail in these various stages of human progress. Not unlike Buffon's conception of epigenesis where period or stages of growth were accompanied by breaks or leaps between the stages, the four-stages of historical progress followed a similar pattern. Stadial historical patterns of change were assumed universal because founded on human passions and drives. Under-appreciated, however, was that human character was given meaning when placed within a particular context. Recognizing the vitalistic epistemology of interaction and modification between humans and their contexts in the stadial conception of progress of Smith and other Scots precludes its reduction to static, deterministic, or materialist models.¹¹³

The symbiosis of principles and circumstances required ascertaining the middle form of the various stages of human social development. While agreeing that the two were interconnected, Smith and Rousseau reached different conclusions from their respective translations of Buffonian methodology to the human sciences. Smith recognized that in the

different situations of different ages and countries are apt, in the same manner, to give different characters to the generality of those who live in them, and their sentiments concerning the particular degree of each

¹¹³ See Chapter 4 for a closer examination of Smith's use of a natural or biological model for the development of society. On early stadial conceptions of history in the natural law tradition, see and Istvan Hont, "The Language of Sociability and Commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the Theoretical Foundations of the 'Four-Stages' Theory," in *Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 253-276. On Smith and the development of the four-stage theory of history, and one that operates within a materialist interpretation of it, see Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

quality...according to that degree which is usual in their own country, and in their own times.¹¹⁴

While the vast difference in the manners or morals of savage and civilized may have initially provoked a sense of wonder, Smith concluded that the

manners of different nations require different degrees of the *same* quality, in the character which they think worthy of esteem, yet the worst that can be said to happen even here, is that the duties of one virtue are sometimes extended so as to encroach a little upon the precincts of some other.¹¹⁵

Hence the custom and manners of peoples living in the various stages of society throughout the world may "commonly upon the whole be said to be that which is most suitable to its situation."¹¹⁶ Significantly, Smith asserted that manners differ in degree of the *same* quality. In locating the harmonic middle of society in vastly different circumstances, the difference of the savage nonetheless occupied a space upon a spectrum of recognizably human behavior. In a work devoted to the operations of sympathy among the human species, Smith mediated between rude and cultivated cultures, past and present, suggesting how to think anthropologically about an array of seemingly aberrant and incomprehensible customs among people who were coming increasingly into contact with and consciousness of Europeans.

Part V of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was only the most highly distilled essence of an extensive reasoning with savages that engaged his early philosophical construction of a Humean science of man.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.7.

¹¹⁵ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.13. My emphasis.

¹¹⁶ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.13.

During the late 1750s Adam Smith was at the forefront in promoting to fellow Scots the use of Buffonian natural philosophy to rethink the human sciences. As we will see this when we turn in the next two chapters to the ideas reported in his jurisprudence lectures, a global anthropological framework was central to the formation of Smith's thought, and would underpin both the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. This framework was elaborated not only in university lectures, but also in the intellectual exchanges of the day that circulated among the literati in the numerous Scottish clubs and societies that flourished in the late eighteenth century.

Perhaps nowhere was a natural history of the human species more embraced than among the members of the Scottish Enlightenment. Indeed, through the model of a natural history of the species, the anthropological imagination would become a central aspect of the Scottish Enlightenment from the 1760s onward in the major works of Adam Ferguson, Lord Kames, John Millar, Lord Monboddo, William Robertson, and James Dunbar. As a central aspect of the science of man, the engagement with broader intellectual currents from Europe would serve to promote more rivals and more judges, and contribute to greater parity of Scotland within Britain as a source of enlightened thought. Their anthropological turn of Scottish moral or social philosophy would in turn extend beyond Scotland and Great Britain to the Continent and the Americas. This thought would be instrumental in the eighteenth century of the recognition that the behavior of "primitive" peoples might elucidate not only the early history of civilization, but also of human nature itself, and the empirical investigations of these societies in particular formed the same

field.¹¹⁷ Perhaps nowhere else among eighteenth-century intellectuals than the Scots social theorists were "savages" or "rude" peoples reasoned *with* as part of an attempt to reformulate a general theory of the human species in its historical social and moral dimensions. Society was, as Smith put it, a mirror in which one caught sight of oneself, morally speaking. The growing recognition of Europe's interconnection with the rest of the world, and the challenge presented by the necessary incorporation of non-European peoples into a universal science of man. Many of the leading members of the Enlightenment in Scotland would extensively explore over the next two decades what one caught sight of morally speaking when that society was not one's own.

¹¹⁷ Wokler, "Anthropology and Conjectural History," 31.

Chapter 2

Vitalizing Human Nature I: Moral and Social Order in Adam Smith's Science of Man

There was perhaps no period of European intellectual history more fascinated with ideas of human nature, both in its physical and spiritual attributes, its biological and moral dimensions, than the Enlightenment. During this period the dual aspects, the study of mind and culture, on the one hand, and of the bodily form and structure, on the other, were believed to stand in need of comprehensive and systematic explanation. Toward this end, as Robert Wokler has argued, the study of *la pensée sauvage*, in its various iterations, was judged to be a central part, though perhaps only a part, of a general theory of human nature capable of embracing the history of civilization and grasping mankind's place among the other animals.¹¹⁸ The efforts to discern the original character of the "savage mind" as the basis of a general theory of human nature was perhaps nowhere more extensively pursued than within the moral philosophy of Enlightenment Scotland.

The increased accumulation and circulation in eighteenth-century Europe of knowledge concerning the natural world and the inhabitants of far-flung societies, served as the impetus for enlightened thinkers to take new directions in the construction of a science of man.¹¹⁹ Beginning in the middle 1750s, Scottish social theorists made

¹¹⁸ Robert Wokler, "Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment" in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, eds., Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 32.

¹¹⁹ P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 50-60.

pioneering attempts to re-envision the moral or human sciences upon the model of the new natural sciences, thereby laying the foundations of early anthropological thought. Seminal to the development of an anthropological approach to the human sciences in late eighteenth-century intellectual history was Buffon's multivolume *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1749-1804). In both its theoretical apparatus and the implications of its findings, the *Histoire* proving fertile ground for the particular developments of Enlightenment natural, as well as human, sciences. The widespread reception of and engagement with the ideas contained in this work by the learned reading public at once reflected and spurred the growing interest of the age in the natural history of the world, including man's place within it. Indeed, the distinctiveness of much late Scottish, as well as European, Enlightenment thought, I will argue, came from its critical engagement with the epistemology of the new natural sciences and an effort to remake the science of man in the context of what Phillip Sloan has called "the Buffonian Revolution."¹²⁰

Since the end of the seventeenth century moral philosophy in Scotland and elsewhere had attempted to reconcile itself with mechanist paradigm of the universe set forth in Cartesian physics or with that of Newton. Scottish thinkers were highly attuned to intellectual developments on the Continent, and the attentiveness to the challenge and promise of the "Buffonian Revolution" was signaled by Smith in the mid-1750s. Against the dominant mechanist understanding of the physical universe, Buffon spearheaded the

¹²⁰ Phillip R. Sloan, "The Gaze of Natural History," in *Inventing Human Science*, 126-7.

development of, what for lack of a better term Peter Reill has called Enlightenment vitalism, The eighteenth-century revival and reinterpretation of earlier vitalist ideas by thinkers such as Buffon theorized the world as filled not with dead, inert matter externally acted upon, but rather endowed with a life force that was spontaneously self-organizing. A principle of vitality animated every organism and unified it as part of a larger, system of living nature. Buffon and his followers employed analogy and comparison as essential means of understanding the relationships among organisms in the natural world.¹²¹ Perhaps the most provocative and productive aspect of the new natural philosophy was its vitalist understanding of the organization of matter and its social or moral implications.

Buffon's treatment of causality in nature, for instance, which paralleled arguments independently made by Hume regarding cause and effect, was significant for approaching the philosophical problem of "design," or the attribution of causality, not only in the natural world, but also in the moral or social world. While the literati of Scotland embraced the new natural sciences of Buffon, as well as the wealth of information in the *Histoire*, many rejected the vitalist theory informing it because of what they perceived as its materialist and atheist implications.¹²² Adam Smith, however, had early recognized, the usefulness of the new natural sciences for moral sciences was its form, its method and epistemology, as much as its ethnographic content and taxonomies. Although Smith noted that much of Buffon's thought was

¹²¹ Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006).

¹²² See Paul Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 171-84; and "The Natural History of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment," *History of Science* 28 (1990): 89-123.

"almost entirely hypothetical," he nonetheless suggested that its great promise was precisely in providing a "complete system." Both his later moral philosophy and political economy bear the signs of vitalist thought in conceiving human nature and society as the product of "design" spontaneous, self directed, and inherent forces. This reconceptualization in the late eighteenth-century natural and human sciences contributed to what Peter Reill has formulated as a remoralization of nature and a naturalization of morals.¹²³

The revision of the human sciences predicated on an understanding of a moralized nature and its implied naturalization of morals was pioneered by two of the most prominent Scottish university professors of moral philosophy, Adam Smith at Glasgow (1751-1763) and Adam Ferguson at Edinburgh (1759-1785). This chapter and the one following examine two major attempts in Scottish Enlightenment to revise the understanding of human nature, and hence by extension the nature of human society. Smith and Ferguson, though opposed on many social and political positions, both theorized the history of civil society as progressing through historical stages arising from within human nature itself, and sought to establish the seeming "design" of human moral and social structures as natural processes. Their anthropological theories were seminal in the attempt to reestablish moral philosophy on natural historical foundations. Significantly, by the mid-1770s all but two of the moral philosophy teachers in Scotland are known to have had an interest and extensive training in both natural and moral

¹²³ Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*, 52.

philosophy.¹²⁴ Indeed, although vitalist ideas met with resistance among orthodox thinkers, I argue it was precisely its epistemology that Smith regarded as so promising for a revised understanding of human nature, which David Hume proposed earlier in the century as the ultimate foundation of any science of man.

Naturalizing the Moral Sciences

Since the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Scottish intellectuals were well acquainted with the latest European works of moral and natural philosophy, including Hobbes, Newton, Locke, Mandeville, Grotius, Heineccius, and Pufendorf. One of the most important works of the European Enlightenment for the development of late eighteenth-century Scottish thought was Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748). The reception of this work in Scotland occurred earlier than in the rest of Europe, as David Hume had brought a copy with him to Edinburgh on his return from France in 1748. Hume, like Montesquieu, was convinced that there was a pattern of predictability underlying human actions similar to those causal structures explaining the phenomena of nature. In his work, Montesquieu identified the two influences shaping the behavior of men in society, *causes morales* and *causes physiques*, with the former ultimately being more important. The key point of his whole discussion for his science of society, however,

¹²⁴ On the relation between the two, see Roger Emerson, "Science and Moral Philosophy," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment* ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990) and Paul Wood, "Science in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 74-116. This chapter aims to contribute to the reinterpretation of the role of science in the Scottish Enlightenment, and understand its theory of philosophical history as operating in a theoretical constellation beyond the usual triumvirate of Bacon, Locke, and Newton.

was the belief that when people acted in groups as social and political beings, their actions resulted from the combined influences to which they were exposed.¹²⁵

As Montesquieu argued in *De l'esprit des loix*, "Many things govern men: climate, religion, laws, the maxims of the government, examples of past things, mores, and manners; a general spirit is formed as a result."¹²⁶ Significantly, "spirit" was given a natural, rather than metaphysical connotation. Over the course of the eighteenth century, enlightenment thinkers increasingly conceived the study of humanity as a "convergence of both conceptual poles, nature and (human) history, toward a synthetic middle ground." One of the main bases of this view was that human beings were always to be conceived as situated in and a part of nature. The importance of "'environment,' of milieu and climate in the reconstruction of human experience," was, as historian John Zammito observed, "inaugurated by Montesquieu, developed by Buffon, and systematized by the Scottish Enlightenment."¹²⁷

Yet, for all their admiration of this work, many Scots literati were critical of aspects of Montesquieu's thought. While acknowledging that he had dealt in his great work with the effects stemming from government, climate, and so on, some objected that he had neglected the most important. Henry Home, Lord Kames, thus charged that Montesquieu "did not develop the effects that derive from human nature

¹²⁵ David Carrithers, "The Enlightenment Science of Society," in *Inventing Human Science*, 243.

¹²⁶ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, eds., A. Cohler, B. Miller and H. Stone (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989), 310.

¹²⁷ John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 228.

itself, from our passions and from the natural spring of our actions." Human nature, Kames objected, had a "much greater influence on the establishment of law and manners than all the other causes which Montesquieu lists."¹²⁸ David Hume similarly questioned what he saw as the importance given by Montesquieu to physical over moral causation in the forming of the "spirit" of a system of laws, particularly climate. A variety of laws, customs, and manners could, and did, exist within the same geographical and climatic area. This was notably evident, for example, in Scotland itself with the marked social, religious, economic, and political differences evident between the Highlands and Lowlands.

Hume, in particular, was also critical of Montesquieu's definition of law and epistemological assumptions. Montesquieu had written that laws were the "necessary relations arising from the nature of things. In this sense all beings have their laws: the Deity has his laws, the beasts have their laws, and man has his laws."¹²⁹ This was viewed by Hume, as Nicholas Phillipson argues, as resting on quasi-theological premises, and was therefore "unphilosophical." Montesquieu had thus failed to define what precisely the *nature* of the spirit forming a people. This was a shortcoming that Adam Smith would seek to rectify in his own reconstruction of a science of man.¹³⁰

Smith returned to Scotland in 1748 from six years of study at Oxford University as a Snell Exhibitioner, a scholarship established to train promising Glasgow students for the ministry. At Oxford, where

¹²⁸ B. Kaposy, cited in Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 104.

¹²⁹ *Spirit of the Laws*, 3.

¹³⁰ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 104

his reading was largely self directed, Smith focused on French literature and philosophy, and it was here that he also became acquainted with David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). Upon his return to Scotland, Smith set about establishing himself as a professional philosopher. He initially offered a public course on rhetoric in Edinburgh meant to attract the attention of the city's numerous students of divinity and law. Smith delivered a series of lectures in Edinburgh between 1748 and 1751 in which he undertook the revision of rhetoric and jurisprudence conceived upon a naturalistic, historical understanding of human nature.

It was on the strength of these lectures and the patronage of the Duke of Argyll that Smith was appointed Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Glasgow in 1751. The following year, he was elected to the chair in Moral Philosophy following the death of Thomas Craigie, who, like Smith, had been a pupil of Francis Hutcheson, and whose moral philosophy course seems to have been Hutchesonian in character.¹³¹ While Glasgow could not provide the legal or medical education of Edinburgh, its moral philosophy curriculum was unrivaled in Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century, due in large part to the continuing reputation of Hutcheson. From 1752 until his resignation in 1763, Smith greatly extended the reputation of the moral philosophy curriculum at Glasgow, attracting students not only from Britain but also as far away on the Continent as Catherine the Great's Russia. However, the foundations of his theory and history of human nature departed radically from current teaching of moral philosophy in Scotland and in Europe.

¹³¹ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 121.

While Francis Hutcheson had viewed the study of human nature and the natural world as the only certain foundation upon which theological knowledge could be established, he taught that moral behavior in human beings was regulated by a divinely implanted internal faculty that he called the *moral sense*. Smith, however, appears never to have believed in the reality of such a moral sense. Though he clearly respected the "never-to-be-forgotten Dr. Hutcheson" and was inspired by his incorporation of ethics and economics into jurisprudence, Smith nonetheless appears, like Hume, to have viewed the theological foundations of the work of Hutcheson and Montesquieu as unphilosophical and in need of revision. Significantly, Smith's teaching at Glasgow was perhaps unique among that offered in any European university during the eighteenth century for being grounded not in theological assumptions, but rather in those of contemporary natural philosophy. In his efforts to re-imagine the human sciences upon natural foundations, Smith drew upon vitalist ideas to produce the philosophical concept perhaps most closely associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, that of the stadial, or four-stages, theory of human historical progress.

Stadial History, Human Nature, and the "Sense of Wonder"

Although not the first in print with a four-stage model of history in which human societies moved through hunting, shepherding, agricultural, and commercial stages, Adam Smith had likely begun setting forth its structure in the public lectures and the philosophical societies in Edinburgh during the late 1740s and in his

university courses on jurisprudence at Glasgow during the 1750s.¹³² Historian Roger Emerson has argued that by 1750 most of the materials, problems and ideas of central importance in the conjectural histories had been touched upon or suggested in the histories of Scots professors earlier in the century.¹³³ Emerson defines conjectural history as denoting "any rational or naturalistic account of the origins and development of institutions, beliefs or practices not based on documents or copies of documents or other artifacts contemporary (or thought to be contemporary) with the subjects studied," and counted its primary sources as the Bible and its commentaries, the classics, modern works of philosophy, and travel accounts.¹³⁴ These components "lay at hand ready to be reworked by men whose education and outlook allowed them to rethink and reorganize these materials in way already adumbrated by numerous thinkers as old as Lucretius or as contemporary as Montesquieu." The Scots literati of

¹³² On the history of the stadial conception of history, see Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Much recent scholarship has called into question the view of eighteenth-century Scottish ideas of progress as materialist or proto-marxist, such as that of Meek, dominant in the 1970s. For efforts to situate the Scottish Enlightenment in its historical specificity, see Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Historians"; Christopher J. Berry, *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 185-97; and, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds. *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986). Also on the roles of Monboddo and Kames in the agenda of the Edinburgh Select Society and the practical application of natural philosophical principles, see Frederik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 16-28.

¹³³ On earlier university historians at Aberdeen Thomas Blackwell, Jr., and George Fordyce who attempted to set the works of the Greeks and Romans within their larger contexts, and to study the manners, arts, politics, religion and language" as "all linked together, and necessarily influenced one another," see Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers," *Historical Papers/Communications historiques*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1984): 76-81.

¹³⁴ Roger L. Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers," 65.

the last half of the eighteenth century simply gave, as he put it, a "more sophisticated, detailed and elaborate expression to ideas which were already in the air."¹³⁵

Although the materials for a conjectural or stadial theory of history may have been "in the air," as Emerson suggests, I would argue that the elaboration and general acceptance of a conjectural model of historical progress in Enlightenment Scotland was a response to particular moment in eighteenth-century social, intellectual, and political context. The anthropological turn marking much of Scottish moral philosophy from midcentury directly responded to the challenge of new information about the natural world and its diverse inhabitants synthesized in the work of natural historians such as Buffon and Linnaeus. The representation of foreign societies both in learned works and popular accounts challenged conventional understandings of what constituted the essential character of the species and historical progress. The existence of diverse societal forms and cultural practices societies across the globe thus became a central object of investigation among the intellectuals of the Scottish Enlightenment in the effort to establish unassailable foundations for a science of man, which critically reevaluated how religion, law and politics, social and gender structures, were the products of *human nature* itself.

Understanding human nature as it *was* rather than simply how it *ought* to be was a central aim of British moral philosophy at least since Mandeville early in the century. In the late 1730s Hume had introduced into Scottish thought the notion that an understanding of

¹³⁵ Emerson, "Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers," 81-2.

human nature was the prerequisite of any science of man, for he argued that,

There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security. And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observations.¹³⁶

Hume proposed an inductive method that was not to be restricted to the philosophy of nature, but introduced into the study of cause in human activity.¹³⁷ Moreover, a science of man was to be made less an independent science as it became in the nineteenth century than as the foundation of all other sciences.¹³⁸ Indeed, Hume asserted that,

'Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even *Mathematics*, *Natural Philosophy*, and *Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judg'd of by their powers and faculties.¹³⁹

Hume's provocative insight that our understanding of religious belief, the natural world, and even of mathematics is, in some degree,

¹³⁶ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 4.

¹³⁷ Christopher Fox, "How to Prepare a Noble Savage: The Spectacle of Human Science," in *Inventing Human Science*, 2.

¹³⁸ However, it was perhaps not until the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* of 1748 that Hume offered explicit directions on the methods of a science of man, shortly thereafter turning from philosophical to historical writing for the remainder of career.

¹³⁹ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 4.

a construct of human nature was perhaps engaged with most insightfully by Adam Smith. Smith embraced the Humean insights regarding sympathy and imagination and developed them into the theoretical mechanisms upon which not only his theory of moral sentiments turned, but also his stadial theory of history.

Following Hume, Smith recognized that any science of man must be founded upon *observation and experiment*, that is, experience. At the same time, as one of the eighteenth-century's more self-reflexive practitioners in the human sciences, he was also aware that empirical evidence was simultaneously interpreted and constructed through the human imagination. Smith provocatively applied Hume's insight that the ultimate source of all the arts and sciences was located in the human imagination. Smith's linking of the imagination and empirical evidence carries implications for the success of his own four-stages theory of historical progress in eighteenth-century thought.

This linkage in Smith's thought was recognized by Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), a student of both Adam Ferguson and Thomas Reid who would occupy the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh from 1785. Stewart, often regarded as a popularizer of his predecessors' work, coined the term "conjectural history" in his posthumous biographical sketch of Smith first presented to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1793. The value of the conjectural approach, as Stewart observed, was "in examining the history of mankind, as well as in examining the phenomena of the material world, when we cannot trace the process by which an event *has been* produced, it is often of importance to be able to show how it *may have been* produced by natural causes." This "species of philosophical investigation," which he titled "Theoretical

or Conjectural History," was, Stewart noted, an "expression which coincides pretty nearly in its meaning with that of Natural History, as employed by Mr Hume."¹⁴⁰ Stewart thus highlighted the relationship between philosophical history and natural history, as well as empirical evidence and imagination.

Smith himself made the implication of the relationship between systems of thought and the imagination most explicit in his posthumously published essay, "History of Astronomy."¹⁴¹ Smith may have conceived the thesis of this essay as the basis for an introduction to a projected, but never completed, history of the arts and sciences.¹⁴² The significance of this essay is not with the actual history of astronomy in the West, which is perhaps factually flawed, but rather with the role played by the human imagination in the historical construction of systems of thought. In the first three parts of the "History of Astronomy," Smith argued that Western philosophical and scientific systems or paradigms were a product of human psychology as much as new discoveries or understandings of natural phenomena. The main thrust of his argument was that the dominance of particular religious, philosophical, and scientific systems at various periods of history was to be explained by their ability to "render the whole

¹⁴⁰ Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D." in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 293.

¹⁴¹ Smith, "The Principles which lead and direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, eds. J.C. Bryce and W.P.D. Wightman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104-5.

¹⁴² On the history of this essay, see W.P.D. Wightman, "Introduction" to Smith's *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 5-32. The plan of this work was also indicated in the introduction to *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* by Smith's friends and the executors of his estate, Joseph Black and James Hutton. Whatever other materials that may have existed as part of this project were certainly among the draft manuscripts that they consigned to destruction on Smith's orders shortly before his death in 1790.

course of the universe consistent and of a piece."¹⁴³ New questions or knowledge about seemingly long settled understanding of phenomena that called into question the validity of the prevailing system of thought. Smith argued that lacunae discovered in dominating paradigm produced deep disturbances in the imagination. Smith developed Hume's insight that the sciences and other systems of thought emanated largely from within human nature, and explicitly asserted that religious, philosophical, and scientific systems were products of a natural human psychological response to the inexplicable, to a *sense of wonder*.

As he had shown in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith was an acute observer of human, or certainly at least of his own, psychological operations. In the "History of Astronomy," he extended the idea that anomalies perceived produced a sense of wonder or anxiety from the physical to the social world. To alleviate the anxiety created in the imagination by these anomalies, which threatened its sense of stability regarding the world, human beings set about constructing systems of thought that were better able to accommodate new information and provide a coherent and unified understanding of phenomena. In his view, philosophy was the "science of connecting principles."¹⁴⁴ Philosophy or science, he used the terms interchangeably, in their ability to represent the "invisible chain" connecting the "disjointed objects" in the natural, and presumably the moral, world could introduce order to the "discordant appearances, to ally this tumult of the imagination."¹⁴⁵ New intellectual systems were

¹⁴³ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 50-1.

¹⁴⁴ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 66.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 45-6.

products of the imagination in its attempt to integrate new information into a "chain" of reasoning adequate to assuage the anxiety it otherwise created in the imagination.

Smith illustrated this dialogical operation of the imagination at play in the creation and succession of intellectual systems with the example of the Cartesian and Newtonian systems. Smith found that the superiority of the latter system was that its parts were "more strictly connected together, than those of any other philosophical hypothesis." Newton's system had prevailed over French opposition and, in Smith's view, "advanced to the acquisition of the most universal empire" because it had a "degree of firmness and solidity that we should in vain look for in any other system. The most sceptical cannot avoid feeling this." So precise and particular were the principles of the Newtonian system that the imagination, Smith asserted, could not "find any difficulty in going along with" it.¹⁴⁶

Smith recognized that the general acceptance of any system of thought resulted from its ability to link in the mind disparate empirical phenomena in a manner consistent with their appearance in nature. He seemed to go so far as to view "all philosophical systems as mere inventions of the imagination." Nevertheless, it was "as if they were the real chains which Nature makes use of to bind together her several operations." Yet, for Smith, the success of any "system" was precisely in it being an invention to "connect together in the fancy those different movements and effects which are in reality already preformed."¹⁴⁷ Newton's system was the "greatest discovery that

¹⁴⁶ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 104-5.

¹⁴⁷ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 66.

ever was made by man," precisely because of its "discovery of an immense chain of the most important and sublime truths, all closely connected together, by one capital fact, of the reality of which we have daily experience."¹⁴⁸ Smith thus sought the chains, a few self-evident principles, with which to recreate the natural order of things in his own philosophical system.

Smith's understanding of the relationship between intellectual systems and the imagination illuminates his 1755 recommendation to Scottish intellectuals of Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*. As noted earlier, Smith wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* that Buffon's ideas were "almost entirely hypothetical." Nevertheless, he recommended the *Histoire* on grounds that it promised to offer a "compleat system." Significantly, Smith singled out the "reasoning and philosophical part" of Buffon's work "concerning the formation of plants, the generation of animals, the formation of the foetus" as hypothetical because it was "scarce possible to form any very determinate idea" of the causes of generation.¹⁴⁹ Yet, I would argue that what Smith found promising or suggestive for the moral sciences was precisely Buffon's theory of generation. Contrary to the dominant preformationist theory of reproduction, Buffon, along with a small number of other important figures in the natural and medical sciences, elaborated an epigenetic theory positing the passage of all living organisms through a series

¹⁴⁸ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 104-5. My emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, "Letter to the Edinburgh Review," *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, 248.

of discrete but related stages of development.¹⁵⁰ Significantly, most proponents of epigenesis were also vitalists. In their view, the autonomous operations of a life force in an organism animated its generation and directed its development through a set of increasingly complex phases. It was, I argue, precisely Buffon's "compleat system" of epigenetic development that served as an impetus for or analogue of Smith's own natural system of societal development, of his stadial theory of historical progress.

Although it is not certain when Smith first became aware of Buffon's work, given his attention to contemporary French philosophical and literary currents, it is likely he read the first volumes of the *Histoire naturelle* shortly after their publication, as he had Rousseau's 1755 *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, which he recommended to thinking Scots in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1756. Though Smith made no explicit reference to Buffon or his theory of epigenesis in his subsequent published works, vitalist ideas circulating widely in contemporary natural philosophy and medical science were, as Roger Emerson noted, "in the air." Besides his acquaintance with Scottish vitalists William Cullen and Joseph Black, Smith appears to have been possessed other French works informed by vitalist undercurrents such as the anonymously published *Pensée sur l'interprétation de la Nature* (1754) and *Système Social ou principes naturels de la Morale et la Politique*

¹⁵⁰ Although there were variant forms, preformation theorized that each organism existed fully formed from the beginning of time and developed only in size. The act of procreation merely stimulated the growth and birth of this preexisting individual. Each succeeding generations of an organism had been created and passed on from the original of each species as animalcules. Though not without its own variants, epigenesis proposed that the embryo or organism was gradually produced through a series of stages during which time it developed new parts.

avec un examen de l'influence du Gouvernement sur les Mœurs (1773), ascribed to Diderot and d'Holbach, respectively.¹⁵¹ In any event, Smith selectively synthesized and systematized various aspects of contemporary thought into his science of man.¹⁵²

The model of epigenetic generation and growth of the organism was suggestive for an understanding that of human societies. The forms of human development, for instance, moved from the relatively simple animalcule to embryo to infant to the adult human being. Though these forms were vastly different from one another, they were nonetheless contiguous stages of a single organism. The history of human society could be understood as an analogous process. Smith assumed that human beings had always lived in society. Though the political structures and moral forms of hunting, shepherding, agriculture, and commerce societies differed vastly from one another, each of these stages developed organically as it were from the one proceeding it. Such an understanding of the stadial development of organisms offered insights

¹⁵¹ In the eighteenth century, the medical school at Edinburgh was a major center of vitalist discourse. Smith and other literati were likely to have encountered vitalist ideas through personal acquaintance medical men (Smith and William Cullen, for example, became colleagues and friends at Glasgow University in the 1750s) and through papers presented in the various clubs and societies, such as Edinburgh's Philosophical Society, by Cullen, Robert Whytt, Joseph Black, among others. See Roger L. Emerson, "The Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1748-1768," *The British Journal of the History of Science* Vol. 14, No. 2 (July 1981): 133-76. On Smith's familiarity with the biological sciences, see Andrew S. Skinner, "Adam Smith: Science and the Role of the Imagination," in *Hume and the Enlightenment*, ed. W.B. Todd (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974), 181-82.

¹⁵² Works by Diderot and d'Holbach appear to have been among the volumes in Smith's Library. The most authoritative edition is that edited by Hiroshi Mizuta, *Adam Smith's Library: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Library, 2000). However, the notion of his "library" is perhaps problematic as it is not always clear that all these volumes were originally part of it. In any event, Smith clearly had a lifelong interest in natural history, and evidence suggests that he was variously engaged with Buffon's work specifically and with vitalist discourse generally from at least the mid-1750s.

into the relationship of continuity and change in the development of human societies.

Smith thinking was seminal in its extension of an essentially vitalist epistemology from the natural to the moral, world. Indeed, the notion of *spontaneous order* was a hallmark of Scottish Enlightenment moral thought.¹⁵³ The spontaneous origin and structural development of society like that of any natural organism grew through a set series of increasingly complex forms impelled by the natural workings of vital forces. The spontaneous generation of the life of the *social* organism and its formation of general order could thus be understood as an expression of an inherent, natural design. Smith grounded Mandeville's paradox of public virtue emerging out of private vice in the operation of natural principles. These principles, of vital life forces, were constitutive of the order of things in the natural world, and thus by extension, of the human social or moral world. If, however, the social and moral order was the outgrowth of a common human character, it begged the question of how to explain the seemingly "discordant appearances" of its societal formations and cultural practices. The knowledge of the vast physical, social, and cultural diversity of humanity, which increasingly circulated in both popular and learned forms during the period, provoked as it were a "sense of wonder" in the eighteenth-century European imagination. Adam Smith's contribution to the science of man was to underpin it with an "epigenetic" model of historical development. He viewed human social and historical development, like that of living organisms, as

¹⁵³ For a general account of the design that does not specifically consider vitalist epistemology, see Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Journal of the History of Philosophy Monographs) (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).

progressing through a series of discrete stages, which nonetheless formed a common arc of development of increasing complexity. The epigenesis of these holistic stages of social life was in the spontaneous and instinctual activities characteristic to the human animal. Each new stage emerged from an ongoing dialogical relationship between human nature and its collective social structures. Not unlike the revolution in scientific or philosophical paradigms, as a society became increasingly complex, new stages of social organization emerged that better met the needs of its inhabitants. Social order was the product of inherent and self-directing processes, rather than that of rational design. Smith's four-stages of historical progress acquired foundational status in the Scottish Enlightenment precisely because it operated "as if they were the real chains which Nature" binding "together several operations" of human nature and society. Smith's stadial theory was clearly predicated upon, though only obliquely referenced, vitalist principles as the engine of historical development. Though the operation of vital life forces in forming human nature was largely assumed in his major philosophical works, Smith attempted in some of his earlier writings to work out the "epigenesis" of its operations in the *pensée sauvage*.

The Savage Mind: An Epigenesis of Human Consciousness

In his early essay on the "History of Astronomy," Smith set about working out principles of a system of the human sciences that worked "as if" they existed in nature. Here he sketched out a natural history of human consciousness that informed the later understanding of human morality and society in the mature *oeuvre* of his *Theory of*

Moral Sentiments and Wealth of Nations. Though an innate characteristic of the human species, Smith suggested that intellectual curiosity, the breath and scope of its investigations, was largely structured through its interaction with and modification by "circumstances" or "situations." Human consciousness thus developed in tandem with its social structures in a series of stages from simplicity to complexity. Consciousness and society reciprocally shaped, but did not determine, the other. The anthropological character of the essay on the history of astronomy came from Smith's concern not only with tracing the earliest progress of the arts and sciences, but also with extrapolating from, as it were, the psychological mechanisms of the Enlightenment *philosophe* to those of the *sauvage* to create a *natural* history of human consciousness in society.

"Mankind, in the first ages of society, before the establishment of law, order, and security," Smith wrote, "have little curiosity to find out those hidden chains of events which bind together the seemingly disjointed appearances of nature." For he imagined that the savage "whose subsistence is precarious, whose life is every day exposed to the rudest dangers," would have "no inclination to amuse himself with searching out what, when discovered, seems to serve no other purpose than to render the theatre of nature a more connected spectacle to his imagination." Rather, "magnificent irregularities" in the natural world "call forth his amazement. Comets, eclipses, thunder, lightening, and other meteors, by their greatness, naturally overawe him, and he views them with a reverence that approaches to

fear."¹⁵⁴ These natural events, both terrible and agreeable, "whose operations are not perfectly regular," Smith argued were supposed by early peoples "to act by the direction of some invisible and designing power." Just as humans acted upon physical objects, so other "intelligent beings, whom they imagined, but knew not, were naturally supposed to act in the same manner."¹⁵⁵

Drawing the analogy to a child's reaction to the "agreeable fruit and the stone that hurts it," Smith asserted that the "notions of a savage are not very different." The savage mind was inspired with feeling of "reverence and gratitude, and therefore proceed from some intelligent beings, who take pleasure in the expressions of those sentiments."¹⁵⁶ The infantilization of the peoples in tribal societies has been a long-standing trope in Western culture, and has often been deployed by modern European powers as justification for an ostensibly paternalistic, but nevertheless hegemonic, imperial policy. However, the reduction of tribal peoples to the level of children does not appear to be Smith's aim. For him the "savage mind" was not the childlike essentially or perennially. Smith thus did not use the term "savage" in a pejorative manner, but rather in a technical sense to denote those societies where there was little property or it was held communally. For Smith this childlike quality of mind was not specifically attributable to non-European peoples, but to any people living in the "earliest" stage of societal development. Indeed, he

¹⁵⁴ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 48.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 50.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 49.

applied the same term to the ancient Athenians who exhibited similar characteristics.

Smith traced the development of human consciousness from these intimations of supernatural beings into early forms of religious thought. He located the creation of organized religions in the second of the four stages of historical progress, the pastoral stage, wherein individual property existed but there were few laws to regulate it. In "all Polytheistic religions, among savages, as well as in the early ages of Heathen antiquity," he asserted, "it is the irregular events of nature only that are ascribed to the agency and power of their gods."¹⁵⁷ In what was perhaps the earliest use in his writings of the metaphor of an "invisible hand," Smith observed that, "Fire burns, and water refreshes; heavy bodies descend, and lighter substances fly upwards, by the *necessity of their own nature*; nor was the invisible hand of Jupiter ever apprehended to be employed in those matters."¹⁵⁸ The regular course of nature provoked no sense of wonder. Operations of the natural world resulted from the necessity of their *inherent* natures. It was only the *irregular* events of nature that were ascribed to the agency of the gods. Smith wryly noted here that sentiments "not unlike these, may sometimes upon such occasions, begin to be felt even in the breasts of the most civilized, but are presently checked by

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 49.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 49. My emphasis.

reflection, that the things are not their proper objects."¹⁵⁹ Here, Smith naturalized religious sentiments as a function of human psychology, however, his aim was to show how with the change in circumstance and experience came a change in the human consciousness.

During the agricultural and commercial stages, with a decline in the precariousness of life's subsistence and a concomitant establishment of order and security, he argued that, "the greater leisure of more members of a society "renders them more attentive to the appearances of nature...and more desirous to know what is the chain which links them [the smallest irregularities] all together." A consciousness of strength and security among the inhabitants of complex societies "renders them less disposed to employ, for this connecting chain, those invisible beings whom the fear and ignorance of their rude forefathers had engendered." Smith suggested that, those of liberal fortunes, who were "occupied either with business or with pleasure, can fill up the void of their imagination...by attending to that train of events which passes around them."¹⁶⁰ In short, an increasing division of labor accompanying a secure and prosperous social order allowed a class of intellectual laborers to devote themselves to a deeper search for the principles underlying the world's operations.

¹⁵⁹ The two other appearances of an "invisible hand" occur in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Wealth of Nations*. Smith was evidently fond of the essay on astronomy, and it was one of the few early works that he did not direct his executors, Joseph Black and James Hutton, to consign to the fire upon his death, leaving it to their discretion whether to publish it posthumously. Smith apparently reworked this essay periodically throughout his life, so determining whether this is indeed the earliest use of the terms or a later addition remains uncertain. In any event, Smith makes explicit the role of the imagination in the history of thought that was largely circumscribed in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to the development of sympathy.

¹⁶⁰ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 50.

Smith regarded the anxieties generated by the experience of irregular and anomalous events in the world as the ultimate source of the sciences and arts. Disturbances in the uniform course of nature produced, as he put it, "gaps" in the imagination that excited a "sense of wonder" in the imagination. The human mind seemed to "require some chain of intermediate events, which...may thus render the whole course of the universe consistent and of a piece." The faculty of imagination thus responded to anxiety by producing the "first principle which prompts mankind to the study of Philosophy, of that science which pretends to lay open the concealed connections that unite the various appearances of nature."¹⁶¹ As he contended in the essay, the acceptance and persistence of philosophical or scientific systems was attributable to their ability to alleviate the anxious imagination by reestablishing a plausible and satisfying linkage between the disparate or anomalous appearances of the universe. In Smith's estimation, intellectual systems were not necessarily representations of absolute truth. This psychological insight informed Smith's reading of the philosophical canon, as well as his own revisionism of modern philosophy. The importance Smith placed in his letter to the *Edinburgh Review* upon "hypothetical" theories in Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* is suggestive of their impetus in his own construction of an "epigenetic" model of historical development capable of imagining the linkages of the "discordant appearances" of the varied societal forms and moral or cultural practices of global humanity.

¹⁶¹ Smith, "History of Astronomy," 51.

Naturalizing Moral Sentiments

The "Buffonian Revolution" in eighteenth-century thought, as historian Philip Sloan has argued, combined a "radical historicizing and naturalizing of the human species" that would analyze human beings in "connection with a gradually developing schema of a naturalized account of cosmological and geological history." Buffon was instrumental in repositioning the human species within his taxonomy of the natural world. The theoretical or methodological thrust of his work exhibited, what Sloan calls, an "anthropocentric epistemology" in which the "human being was the center rather than a link in a ladder of being." Such a reorientation offered enlightened theorists an opportunity to reform the science of man with "natural history as the epistemological starting point for a new kind of natural understanding."¹⁶² Central to the new natural history was the reconceptualization of the relationship of the human species as a whole to time and space, which, as Sloan suggests, was the most fundamental development in the Enlightenment human sciences separating it from both the seventeenth-century *science de l'homme* and nineteenth-century anthropology.¹⁶³

The significance of Buffon's anthropological epistemology for European moral thought was perhaps first recognized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Inspired by his reading of the *Histoire naturelle*, as well as other works of natural philosophy, Rousseau extended several of Buffon's insights from the natural world and explored their moral implications in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de*

¹⁶² Sloan, "Gaze of Natural History," 127; 129-30.

¹⁶³ Sloan, "Gaze of Natural History," 113.

l'inégalité parmi les hommes (1755). This work was seminal in making the study of *la pensée sauvage* central to attempts in the eighteenth-century human and moral sciences to establish a general theory of human nature.¹⁶⁴ His engagement with the natural sciences and reorientation of moral philosophy produced anthropological conclusions and anti-modernist critique of progress that challenged many assumptions of the Enlightenment. Yet, the challenge and provocation of Rousseau's thought for enlightened moral philosophy was its reopening of the question of the essential character of human nature by arguing that, like Buffon's nature, it was not static, but had a history.

Rousseau's fascination with "primitive" societies was apparently quite genuine, however, his anthropological comparison served as evidence for the contention that the nature of "natural" man differed markedly from his "civilized" counterpart and critique that the ills suffered by Europeans were the product of modern society. His *Discours sur l'inégalité* could thus be read as a in natural historical reinterpretation of the Christian "fall" of humanity from an original state of grace. In his history of decline and fall, Rousseau outlined the several stages through which human nature had devolved as humans had abandoned the felicity of a solitary state in nature to suffer the discontents of modern society. These stages, however, were the result neither of supernatural direction, nor of natural design. Rather, in Rousseau's narrative, the fall human beings into society and the subsequent decline of the human nature in society had largely been the

¹⁶⁴ Robert Wokler, "Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment," *Inventing Human Science*, 32.

result of a series of natural disasters or historical accidents. In his *Edinburgh Review* letter, Adam Smith, though finding Rousseau's work a refinement of Mandeville's philosophy, singled out the *Discours* along with Buffon's *Histoire* as having great intellectual import for enlightened Scots. Indeed, while Smith disagreed with many of the conclusions Rousseau reached in his natural history, it was both challenging and suggestive in its historical sketch of the reciprocal change between human nature and societal forms, and its moralization of nature, an insight inspired by Rousseau's reading of Buffon.

The challenge of Rousseau and Buffon for moral philosophy is evident throughout Smith's philosophical career as he attempted to work out the science of man as a *natural* system, not only of political, but also of moral, economy. What Buffon's work did was to provide him with an epistemological apparatus to reinterpret Rousseau's historical accidents as the natural order of things. The reciprocity between human moral sentiments and societal forms were rather spontaneously generated and inherently organized from within nature itself. The *apparent* design in the configuration of individual organisms and complex systems of nature was explained in the new natural sciences by the operation of vital forces suggested an analogous model for the human sciences. The notion of living matter could be, and often was, interpreted as atheist or materialist. Smith, however, ever careful to avoid the religious controversy that plagued the career of his friend Hume. Though reference to a vital principle or life force was absent in his writings, the idea is certainly evident in his notion of the inherent human impulse to progressively improve one's condition, which in its collective, aggregated

operations was constitutive of the historical progress of societies. Indeed, during the last half of the century, vitalist ideas were perhaps becoming so widely disseminated in the Scottish medical sciences, as well as in natural philosophy, that it was perhaps unnecessary for Smith to specifically recommend Buffon after 1756. In any event, Smith's natural system of moral and economic thought is certainly consistent with a vitalist interpretation.¹⁶⁵

The idea of the human capacity for progressive self-development was given a naturalistic explanation by Rousseau in his concept of *perfectibilité*. Though, he argued that, without some outside stimulus, this capacity remained latent. For Smith, however, this principle was originally active in human beings. While explicitly framed in economic terms, and given its clearest expression in *Wealth of Nations*, Smith declared that, the "desire of bettering our condition...comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go into the grave."¹⁶⁶ For Smith the principle of vitality appeared to be responsible for, if not nearly synonymous with, the human characteristic of perfectibility. The operation of active principles was thus to be understood as hardwired in the human character and the source of progressive *self-development*. Not only were social and economic structures, but also those of the human personality, the products of *natural* design.

What might appear as evidence of order or design in the moral world Smith attributed to the active exertions of life force, including the formation of human moral sentiments. Significantly, a

¹⁶⁵ On the proliferation of vitalist ideas in the period generally, see Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

¹⁶⁶ *Wealth of Nations*, eds., R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), II.iii.28.

wider social felicity was here attributed to the active exertions of human beings to improve their external conditions, which was itself grounded in the principle of *motion*. For it appeared to Smith that man was "made for action, and to promote by the exertion of his faculties such changes in the external circumstances both of himself and others, as may seem most favourable to the happiness of all."¹⁶⁷ Understanding how social order and happiness were produced required understanding the mechanisms that produced a harmonious coincidence or concordance of "principles" might result from their operating, often at cross purposes, within a society.¹⁶⁸

The "oeconomy of nature," that is, the moral economy of humans, Smith understood as comprised of contradictory appetites or desires, passions and instincts, the private vices from which public virtue nevertheless emerged. Human nature was at once the end and the means toward that end. For Smith argued that,

as the favourite ends of nature, she has constantly in this manner not only endowed mankind with a appetite for the end which she proposes, but likewise with an appetite for the means by which alone this end can be brought about, for their own sakes, and independent of their tendency to produce it...Nature has directed us to the greater part of these by original and immediate instincts. Hunger, thirst, the passion which unite the two sexes, the love of pleasure, and the dread of pain, prompt us to apply those means for their own sakes, and without any consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends with the great Director of nature intended to produce by them.¹⁶⁹

Despite the obligatory references to the "Author" and "the great Director of nature" necessary for a work of eighteenth-century moral

¹⁶⁷ *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), II.iii.3. Hereafter *TMS*.

¹⁶⁸ *Wealth of Nations*, V.i.25.

¹⁶⁹ Smith, *TMS*, II.i.v.

philosophy, Smith located the source of social and moral happiness in the animal nature of the human species. In the "naturally endowed" desire of man for the welfare and preservation of society, the "Author of nature" has not entrusted it to his reason, but had "endowed him with an immediate and instinctive approbation of that very application which is most proper to attain it." This was clearly not Francis Hutcheson's faculty of the moral sense. Though moral approval and disapproval were directed through sympathy, the *design* of "beneficent ends" was an unintended consequence of bodily appetites and drives. Smith reframed Mandeville's moral economy of private vice and public virtue as a system in which moral sentiments were naturalized as they had their source in the operations of nature itself.

Smith's "system of natural liberty" for understanding the larger moral and social economy was predicated upon the play of vital forces among individuals, who were at once subject to and constitutive of that economy. Hence, he was critical of political and philosophical "projectors" who sought to establish what he considered as *unnatural* systems or regimes. These projects were doomed precisely because they failed to take human nature into account. That is, they failed to regard society as an extension of the interplay of those forces informing the activities of human beings. The problem for Smith was that these "projectors" imagined that they could "arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board." In this "great chess-board of human society," he argued "every single piece has a *principle of motion of its own*, altogether different from that which

the legislature might chuse to impress upon it.”¹⁷⁰ The notion prominent in much eighteenth-century Scottish philosophy of unintended consequences was, then, an effect of the inability manage, or indeed to recognize, society as a complex system composed of members operating according to their own internal principle of motion.

While Smith's 1750-51 lectures on natural law given in Edinburgh are now missing, the set of notes taken by two of his students at Glasgow in 1762-63 provide a reasonably accurate representation of his earliest efforts to revise jurisprudence upon a vitalized notion of human nature.

We may observe that these principles of the human mind which are most beneficial to society are by no means marked by nature as honourable. Hunger, thirst, and the passion for sex are the great supports of the human species. Yet almost every expression of these excite contempt. In the same manner, that principle in the mind which prompts to truck, barter, and exchange, tho' it is the great foundation of arts, commerce, and the division of labour, yet it is not marked with any thing amiable...The plain reason for this is that these principles are so strongly implanted by nature that they have no occasion for that additional force which the weaker principles need.¹⁷¹

The principles inherent in the animal nature of the species, and which given free reign were responsible for private vice, counterintuitively produced the very means to and the end of public virtue, and indeed formed the ultimate source of all civilizational progress.

¹⁷⁰ Smith, *TMS*, VI.II.17. My emphasis.

¹⁷¹ *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds., R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 527. The sets of student notes most likely dating from 1762-63 and 1763-64 are respectively designated *LJ(A)* and *LJ(B)*.

Yet, contrary to conventional interpretations of Scottish Enlightenment thought, utility was not a particularly prominent aspect of human character. Fo Smith reportedly observed that,

Such is the delicacy of man alone, that no object is produced to his liking. He finds that in every thing there is need of improvement...The whole industry of human life is employed not in procuring the supply of our three humble necessities, food, cloaths, and lodging, but in procuring the conveniences of it according to the nicety and delicacy of our taste. To improve and multiply the materials which are the principal objects of our necessities, gives occasion to all the variety of the art.¹⁷²

While the needs and weaknesses of the species, compared with other animals, prompted the inclination towards material improvement, this in itself did not lead to self-improvement. Rather, it was the attempt to improve conditions according to our *taste* that distinguished humans from other animals. Thus, the aesthetic imagination ultimately linked all forms of human activity, including social, scientific, and economic improvement.¹⁷³

In another of his jurisprudence lectures, Smith recognized that the aesthetic impulse was coeval with that of perfectibility in humans, even those living in the most primitive societal forms.

The same temper and inclinations which prompted him [savage man] to make these improvements push him to still greater refinements. This way of life appears rude and slovenly and can no longer satisfy him; he seeks after more elegant niceties and refinement.--Man alone of all animals on this globe is the only one who regards the differences of things which no way affect real substance or give them no superior advantage in supplying the wants of nature. Even colour,

¹⁷² Smith, *LJ(B)*, 488.

¹⁷³ See Charles L. Griswold, Jr., "Imagination: Morals, Science, and Arts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), especially 44-6.

the most flimsy and superficial of all distinctions, becomes an object of his regard.¹⁷⁴

The principle of perfectibility as aesthetic imagination was an essential trait of human nature, regardless of the stage of historical development. Recognizing the dual nature of human beings, Smith sought to mediate between polar oppositions in which it was sometime cast by contemporary philosophy. The interaction and exchange of what might be viewed as polar oppositions suggests an attempt to mediate between them. Smith's juxtaposition exemplified a hallmark of vitalist epistemological procedure of bringing oppositions into a "harmonic mediation" or interaction within an "extended middle."¹⁷⁵ Mediating a middle ground between oppositions, Smith suggested that the systematic arrangement of things was not only useful, but also aesthetically beautiful.¹⁷⁶ The principle of motion, of vital life forces, within individuals spurred the exertion of a set of common capacities upon the world and those around them to fulfill basic physical needs, but

¹⁷⁴ Smith, *LJ(A)*, 335.

¹⁷⁵ Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment*, 47.

¹⁷⁶ "That utility is one of the principal sources of beauty has been observed by every body, who has considered with any attention what constitutes the nature of beauty." Smith undercut the opposition of beauty and utility, and offered the following illustration of the "extended middle" between the two: "When a person comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room...and rather than see them continue in that disorder, perhaps takes the trouble himself to set them all in their places with their backs to the wall. The whole propriety of this new situation arises from its superior conveniency in leaving the floor free and disengaged. To attain this conveniency he voluntarily puts himself to more trouble than all he could have suffered from the want of it; since nothing was more easy, than to have set himself down upon one of them, which is probably what he does when his labour is over. What he wanted therefore, it seems, was not so much this conveniency, as that arrangement of things which promotes it. Yet it is this conveniency which ultimately recommends that arrangement, and bestows upon it the whole of its propriety and beauty." *TMS*, IV.I.i.; IV.I.iv.

these interactions were always mediated through the aesthetic imagination.

Smith's refinement of Hume's science of man was the *enchaînement* of the various facets of human social and moral behavior as proceeding from the natural principles hardwired, as it were, into human nature. For Smith the faculty of imagination played a disproportionate role in the ways human beings made sense of the world and their place in it, yet he always set it within its particular social milieu. Rousseau's work had pointed out to him how social anxieties shaped social behaviors. Smith's theories of intellectual change, as well as of sympathy, were predicated upon human psychological responses to unsettling natural and social phenomena. As he reportedly observed to the students of his jurisprudence course at Glasgow, "Man is an anxious animal."¹⁷⁷ The sympathetic imagination was the mechanism for alleviating that anxiety.

As Smith wrote, in our exchanges with others, as we can have no immediate experience of what they feel, it was only through the imagination that we can form any conception of their sentiments.¹⁷⁸ Economic exchange required an appeal to the self-interest of the butcher, baker, or brewer.¹⁷⁹ Yet, for Smith, all forms of exchange were ultimately rooted in the human personality and its desire for concord with others. "If we should enquire into the principle in the human mind on which this disposition of trucking is founded," Smith observed, "it is clearly the naturall inclination every one has to

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *LJ(B)*, 497.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, *TMS*, I.i.i.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, I.ii.2: 26-7.

persuade."¹⁸⁰ Thus, in his early work Smith was, as Nicholas Phillipson has put it, "preparing the ground for a much more wide-reaching theory of human nature, which held that all our sentiments - moral, political, intellectual and aesthetic - were acquired, developed and refined in the process of learning to communicate with others."¹⁸¹

In modern society, Smith suggested, it was the practice of rhetoric, that was the principal means of bringing others into harmony with oneself. No other animal possessed the faculty of speech and the "desire to lead and direct...its fellows." Speech was the "great instrument" for achieving "ambition, the desire of real superiority, of leading and directing the judgments and conduct of other people."¹⁸²

Men always endeavour to persuade others to be of their opinion even when the matter is of no consequence to them. If one advance any thing concerning China or *the more distant moon* which contradicts what you imagine to be true, you immediately try to persuade him to alter his opinion. And in this manner every one is prating oratory on others thro the whole of his life. -- You are uneasy whenever one differs from you, and you endeavour to persuade [him] to be of your mind.¹⁸³

Difference of opinion, even in the most trivial matters, was a source of anxiety to the imagination. The practice of oratory aimed to persuade others of one's opinions was motivated by the need to set the mind at ease, and in the process produced private and public sympathy. Smith found that the disposition towards barter or economic exchange was founded in the same "principle to persuade which so much prevails

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *LJ(A)*, 352.

¹⁸¹ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 101.

¹⁸² Smith, *TMS*, VII.iv:25.

¹⁸³ Smith, *LJ(A)*, 352.

in human nature." When any arguments are "offered to persuade, it is always expected that they should have their proper effect. If a person asserts any thing about the moon, tho' it should not be true, he will feel a kind of uneasiness in being contradicted, and would be very glad that the person he is endeavouring to persuade should be of the same way of thinking with himself." Smith told his jurisprudence students that, "We ought then mainly to cultivate the power of persuasion, and indeed we do so without intending it. Since a whole life is spent in the exercise of it."¹⁸⁴ Language was therefore central to Smith in the study of how the human personality was formed and operated, and had everything to do with the cultivation of sympathy in society and in a science of man.¹⁸⁵

In his "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages," Smith's two most significant interlocutors were Condillac and Rousseau. His library appears to have contained copies of Condillac's *Essai* and his *Traité des sensations* (1754). In the essay Smith cited Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines* (1746), which in turn referred to Rousseau's *Discours* and Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparée aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724). Lafitau, along with Charlevoix, were instrumental in providing Smith, as well as a generation of eighteenth-century European thinkers, with first-hand "ethnographic" information about Amerindians that allowed re-imagining of prehistoric human societies, including the origin of language in *la pensée sauvage*.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, *LJ(B)*, 493-4.

¹⁸⁵ Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 93.

Smith asked his readers to exercise their anthropological imagination and to suppose that, "Two savages, who had never been taught to speak, but had been bred up remote from the societies of men." They would, he argued, "naturally begin to form that language by which they would endeavour to make their mutual wants intelligible to each other, by uttering certain sounds, whenever they meant to denote certain objects."¹⁸⁶ He again employed the trope of the child to represent the process of linguistic maturation from simple origins to increasing complexity. "A child that is just learning to speak," he observed, "calls every person who comes to the house its papa or its mama; and thus bestows upon the whole species those names which it had been taught to apply to two individuals."¹⁸⁷ The "more enlarged the experience of these savages," however, the more enlarged their significations.¹⁸⁸

Smith's dialogical unfolding of consciousness and language in organic stages circumvented the problem posed by Rousseau in the *Discours*: if generalization was possible only if we have the words, how would these words be possible without the power to generalize? Smith proposed that the development of language moved from the concrete to the abstract, from proper to common names. "It is this application of the name of an individual to a great multitude of objects, whose resemblance naturally recalls the idea of that individual, and of the name which expresses it...which, in the

¹⁸⁶ "Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages," in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J.C. Bryce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 203. My emphasis.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, "Considerations," 204.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, "Considerations," 203.

schools, are called genera and species, and of which the ingenious and eloquent M. Rousseau of Geneva finds himself so much at a loss to account for the origin." Smith suggested, however, that what "constitutes a species is merely a number of objects, bearing a certain degree of resemblance to one another, and on that account denominated by a single appellation, which may be applied to express any one of them."¹⁸⁹ The general rules of language would, he suggested, establish themselves "insensibly, and by slow degrees, in consequence of that love of analogy and similarity of sound" that was characteristic of human nature.¹⁹⁰ Again, Smith asserted an aesthetic component to the initially utilitarian function of language.

Over time, Smith suggested, "in consequence of the really infinite variety of events,

men found themselves partly compelled by necessity, and partly conducted by nature, to divide every event into what may be called its metaphysical elements, and to institute words, which should denote not so much the events, as the elements of which they were composed. The expression of every particular event, became in this manner more intricate and complex, but the whole system of the language became more coherent.¹⁹¹

In theorizing a new understanding of language, and also of society and human consciousness, Smith suggested that, "design" was the result of ongoing natural processes involving the interplay of external necessity and innate nature, producing "systems" at once of ever greater complexity and coherency. Moreover, he proposed that language be understood as a human *invention* whose source was located

¹⁸⁹ Smith, "Considerations," 205.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, "Considerations," 211.

¹⁹¹ Smith, "Considerations," 218.

not in divine creation or historical accident, but in the innate disposition of human beings to interaction and exchange. The positing of this reciprocal process of exchange between nature and culture was Smith's attempt to mediate between binary oppositions that remained problematic in Rousseau's own anthropology.

What is perhaps most remarkable in Smith's work was its covert naturalization of the passions and drives of human nature as the true source of systems of morality whose changes were enchained through the stadial framework, which gave human society and its cultural institutions the appearance of having been designed by an "invisible hand." Yet what had been the invisible hand of Jupiter in the earlier stage of the human consciousness was perhaps to be imagined in the eighteenth century as the invisible hand of nature itself. The supernatural, and religious belief generally, was implicitly naturalized by Smith as a function of the human personality, a product of the sense of wonder. What the ancient religious imagination had attributed to the agency of invisible gods, the modern philosophical imagination attributed to natural, vitalistic forces operating spontaneously and independently within things themselves. It followed from the moralization of nature in the new vitalist natural sciences that the principles of morality were those of nature. Moral systems were thus to be understood neither as Hutcheson's *moral sense* implanted by the Creator, nor as divine revelation. Rather, they were the product of natural forces within human beings in a complex interplay with the necessity conditions of particular contexts that they inhabited. In short, human nature itself was the source of moral sentiments.

The temporal and spatial perspectivism of Smith's moral philosophy theory expressed in the fifth part of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* grew out of the anthropological theory that informed the basis of his revision of natural jurisprudence undertaken soon after his return to Scotland after studying at Oxford. His innovation of a stadial framework was both cause and effect of his revision of natural jurisprudence. In it the "savage" was no longer a static, but rational figure, but was part of a dynamic, "epigenetic" history. The upshot of his comparative analysis of the "situations" of savage and civilized nations was the naturalization of "virtues." Moral judgment, as he put it, involved assessing the different situations of different ages and countries that gave "different characters to the generality of those who live in them, and their sentiments concerning the particular degree of each quality, that is either blamable or praise-worthy, [which] vary according to that degree which is usual in their own country, and in their own times."¹⁹²

While Smith's moral philosophy implied a semi-normativity *within* a particular society, his anthropological perspectivism historicized normativity *between* societies.¹⁹³ Condemnation of those inhabiting earlier historical stages for failing to meet European moral norms was problematic. For, in general, he found that, "the style of manners which takes place in any nation, may commonly upon the whole be said

¹⁹² Smith, *TMS*, V.II.7.

¹⁹³ For a discussion of moral "normativity" in Smith's thought, which rejects the notion of him as a "virtue theorist," see Knud Haakonssen, "Introduction" to the Cambridge edition of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, xvi-xxi. Here Smith was concerned more with the operations involved in the construction of moral sentiments, rather than any positive enumeration of them.

to be that which is most suitable to its situation."¹⁹⁴ Each stage of historical development constituted a coherent whole, a normative range beyond which human or sentiments rarely transgressed. As such, he wrote, "we cannot complain that the moral sentiments of men are very grossly perverted."¹⁹⁵ Indeed, he argued that, the "worst that can be said...is that the duties of one virtue are sometimes extended so as to encroach a little upon the precincts of some other."¹⁹⁶ As he often pointed out, if nature was the cause of humanity's most pressing moral problems, it also provided the remedies for them.

Smith's defense of the manners, morals, and culture of "primitive" or tribal peoples against European charges of degeneracy is striking. He attempted to *understand* human morals and manners in essentially anthropological, that is, in natural historical, terms. Moral sentiments were both inherently instinctual and historically contingent. The moral practices of primitive, non-European societies were neither to be dismissed as "perverted" by the absence of "civilization" or, what was often viewed synonymously, Christianity, nor were they to be viewed through the lens of exoticism or primitivism.¹⁹⁷ It was precisely because of the natural origin and social development of morality that Smith viewed hunter-gatherer and

¹⁹⁴ Smith, *TMS*, V.II.13.

¹⁹⁵ Smith, *TMS*, V.II.13.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *TMS*, V.II.13.

¹⁹⁷ Significantly, Smith observed that, "False notions of religion are almost the only causes which can occasion any very gross perversion of our natural sentiments...That to obey the will of the Deity, is the first rule of duty, all men are agreed. But concerning the particular commandments which that will may impose upon us, they differ widely from one another. In this, therefore, the greatest mutual forbearance and toleration is due." *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, III. VI. 12. Enthusiasm and fanaticism of religious faction were thus the greatest threats to natural human moral feeling.

pastoral societies as existing within the range of the normative moral behavior, that is, exhibiting "manners" appropriate to their given stage or context of historical development. These peoples were not to be seen as having a defective *moral sense* or in need of European "correction" or instruction.

Aside from the occasional aberration of a customary practice that had outlived its appropriate context, Smith argued that, the morals sentiments of savage or civilized were to be understood as appropriate to their circumstances. Anthropological judgment, like its aesthetic counterpart, involved determining "wherein the middle and most usual form consists."¹⁹⁸ This articulation a "mediated middle" was a hallmark of vitalistic thought. Similarly, the vitalist idea of forces inherent within matter that directed the formation of natural organisms provided Smith an analogy with moral sentiments. "Mediocrity" was the word Smith used to denote judgment of the propriety of different passions, of moderating them to a higher or lower pitch to the corresponding sympathies of our immediate society.¹⁹⁹ In his articulation of his stadial theory of history, Smith aimed at creating a model for moral, and anthropological, judgment of the "most usual form" of human mind and society appropriate to the four stages.

Conclusion: The "universal empire" of Stadial Theory

The elaboration of an anthropological perspective among enlightened Scots as part of their moral and social philosophy during the 1760s and 1770s grew out of the challenges French natural and

¹⁹⁸ Smith, *TMS*, V.I.8.

¹⁹⁹ Smith, *TMS*, I.II.i.1-2.

moral philosophy posed to conventional assumptions regarding the human species and its history. Adam Smith was among the first in Scotland to recognize the implications of new conceptions of life and its promise for revolutionizing the human sciences. Contextualizing the Scottish Enlightenment within the vogue of natural philosophy allows for the reintroduction of vitalist epistemology that helps explain the ubiquity of ideas of self-generation, self-regulation, and spontaneous order present as foundational assumptions within much of the Scottish science of man after midcentury. In 1756 Smith signaled to his countrymen the paradigmatic shift within the human sciences possible in the wake of the "Buffonian Revolution." While it may be arguable that Smith could be strictly considered a follower of Buffon, vitalist ideas among others, were, as Roger Emerson put it, "in the air." In any case, Smith's stadialist theory of human and social historical progress was certainly consistent with Buffon's epigenetic theory of reproduction. Buffon's theory of generation provided a model in which vastly different stages characterized the "normal" developmental trajectory of an organism.

The universality of human moral and social development was further suggested in the theories of vitalized matter being generated within the natural and medical sciences that grounded spontaneous generation and inherent order or design. Apparent deviations from a unity were to be understood as the effect of local particularities. A stadial model understood human historical progress as a dynamic interaction of individual human drives with their collective actions, which produced social forms that progressed naturally across time and space. Affinities among social and cultural forms existing throughout

the disparate societies of the human species suggested to Smith was that moral sentiments were a product of the natural order of things. His "natural system of liberty" aimed to reveal the moral or social order. Neither divine providence nor mechanical laws were adequate to understanding the order of things. Rather, moral sentiments were generated spontaneously from within the human frame and comprised within the natural economy of society. Though differences regarding the interpretation of empirical evidence existed among Scotland's most prominent social theorists, their subsequent iterations of a science of man made were often built upon a founding assumption of the eighteenth century, that of a belief in spontaneous order, of self-organization, in both the natural and moral worlds.²⁰⁰

Rousseau had extrapolated a moral philosophical interpretation from Buffon's observations that reopened the debate about the original character of the human species. From Smith's early reading of the *Discours*, as well as the *Histoire naturelle*, he recognized that an investigation of what were regarded as "savage" and "barbarian" societies, particularly those of North America for which there was an extensive literature, was necessary to achieve a proper understanding of human nature, which he accepted, following Hume, to be the ultimate foundation of all the human sciences. Whereas Rousseau regarded the history of human nature as undergoing a fundamental break in the passage from "savage" to "civilized," Smith maintained their continuity as part of a natural "epigenetic" process of development. In contrast to Rousseau, Smith viewed human society and consciousness

²⁰⁰ For perhaps the most comprehensive study of the idea in European thought, see Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

as progressing in a dialogical relationship, wherein neither fully determined the other, but were mutually constitutive. Vitalizing the Scottish Enlightenment serves to correct its elision in the historical scholarship that has favored the socioeconomic or materialist aspects of its social theory.

While Scottish literati as a whole tended to be fairly conservative politically, many of the implications of their philosophical work were nevertheless often quite radical. This was certainly the case with the underlying premises of Smith's naturalization of morals and manners as emergent from human nature. What has often been identified as Smith's seeming "Providentialism" may be better explained by the teleological or epigenetic model of generation suggested by Buffon.²⁰¹ Though Smith was highly circumspect regarding religion in his writing and teaching, few Scots were in any doubt about where his religious sympathies lay.²⁰² Smith's radical and far-reaching revision to the human sciences as an understanding of moral and social systems grounded in the operations of human nature. The dialogical nature of the relationship between individual and society had implications for Smith's theory of the self.²⁰³

At the center of Smith's moral philosophy was, as Knud Haakonssen has observed, a social theory of the self in which consciousness of

²⁰¹ For a representative of the recent revisionist trend to assert the presence of the theological into the teleological aspects of Smith's thought, see Lisa Hill, "The Hidden Theology of Adam Smith," *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2001): 1-29; see also the essays collected on this subject in *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁰² Phillipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 281.

²⁰³ On theories of the self in the case of eighteenth-century Scotland, see Thomas Ahnert and Susan Manning, *Character, Self, and Sociability in the Scottish Enlightenment* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

one's identity as "a continuous self, separate from but standing in various relationships to other persons, is a function of neither a divinely implanted soul nor a specific natural power such as reason or a moral sense. The self is formed in our interaction with other people."²⁰⁴ Similarly, Smith's theory of sympathy set about providing an empirical, socio-psychological explanatory model in which the figure of the impartial spectator was internalized. In Haakonssen's words, the "covenant of God was replaced by the inner dialogue of the moral character, divine jurisprudence by the theory of moral sentiments."²⁰⁵ Indeed, Smith's psychological internalization of the impartial spectator came perilously close to suggesting that conscience, indeed the divine, was a product of the imagination and implied as much in his "History of Astronomy."

Imagining the movement of vital life forces in the spontaneous and self-organizing dialogical formation of human consciousness and society informed Smith's anthropological revision of the science of man. Though the work of Buffon and other vitalists was eagerly engaged with in Scotland, many orthodox thinkers viewed the animation of matter as having atheistic and materialist connotations.²⁰⁶ This perhaps explains the absence of explicit references to Buffon in the moral philosophical of Smith and other literati. Yet so ubiquitous was the circulation of vitalist ideas among the literate class through the *Histoire naturelle* and other works of the natural and medical sciences

²⁰⁴ Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 131.

²⁰⁵ Haakonssen, *Natural Law*, 145.

²⁰⁶ Paul B. Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 160-90.

that direct citation was perhaps unnecessary. His mature philosophical work thus emphasized the effort to understand systems of moral and economic activity as *natural* systems. Divested of any explicit vitalist or epigenetic referents, Smith's four-stage model of historical progress acquired a virtual foundational status in late eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment thought. Even among those moral thinkers hostile to the naturalization of human moral sentiments, including those of "primitive" non-European pagan peoples, found in Smith's stadial framework a useful taxonomy of the socioeconomic organizational forms of the nations of the world.

Indeed, the near "universal empire" of Smith's stadial theory of anthropological progress acquired in Scottish Enlightenment thought resided in its ability to connect in the imagination the "various appearances" of global human moral and social forms through a few linking principles. The stadial model of history, or at least the societal typology it provided, would achieve a prominence in the eighteenth-century human sciences not unlike Newton's in the physical sciences.²⁰⁷ Smith recognized in Buffon's "almost entirely hypothetical" theories of reproduction the basis of a "complete system" that reconfigured human sciences upon an epigenetic analogue. The linkage it provided Smith's stadial theory allowed for a recognition of unity within diversity of humanity that rendered its diverse moral practices and social forms "consistent and of a piece" in the European anthropological imagination.

²⁰⁷ Indeed, John Millar, a student of Smith's at Glasgow, noted that in the study of the history of civil society, "The great Montesquieu had pointed out the road. He was the Lord Bacon in this branch of philosophy. Dr. Smith is the Newton." *An Historical View of the English Government* (London, 1787), 528.

Chapter 3

Vitalizing Human Nature II: Adam Ferguson and Moral Philosophy as the Natural History of the Species

One of the first Scots literati to follow Adam Smith in adopting an anthropological or natural historical approach to the human sciences was Adam Ferguson. Embracing many of the ideas current in contemporary natural sciences as model for his own work, Ferguson explicitly set about recasting the field of moral philosophy as a natural history of the human species over the course of nearly two decades of teaching at Edinburgh University. He has often been seen largely as an interpreter of Montesquieu in laying the foundations of sociology in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). However, the emphasis in the historical scholarship upon the sociological has tended to obscure the centrality of anthropological theory to that work. Though perhaps inspired less by the specific content of Smith's work than sharing many of its epistemological assumptions, Ferguson articulated a view that the vast apparent design of civil and historical development might be understood as the outgrowth of the characteristics common to the human species.

After eight years as military chaplain in the Black Watch Ferguson resigned from his commission in both the army and the church in 1754. Following a stint as a traveling tutor on the Continent, he returned to Edinburgh where he began a search for a position suited to his interests and ambitions.²⁰⁸ In 1758 Ferguson took up an interim position as Keeper of the Advocates' Library, a position formerly held

²⁰⁸ See the biographical sketch by Jane Fagg Bush in *Correspondence of Adam Ferguson, Vol. I: 1745-1780*, ed. Vincenzo Morolle (London: Pickering, 1995).

by David Hume. Following the death of John Stewart in 1759, Ferguson, through the intervention of friends and patrons, was appointed professor of natural philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. It was not until 1764, after five years teaching the sciences, that he transferred to the chair in pneumatics (or philosophy of the mind) and moral philosophy. It was this immersion in the natural sciences during his early years of teaching at the University that contributed to the distinctive character of Ferguson's innovations in the moral philosophy that exerted significant influence upon the human sciences in the last half of the eighteenth century.

During the summer of 1759, Ferguson had been, as he noted in a letter to a friend, "buried in Solids & fluids & Ratios." On his professorship in the natural sciences Ferguson confessed that, "I like my Situation very well, & begin to admire S^r Isaac Newton as I did Homer & Montesquieu, but it is on Condition that he will let me go as soon as I become a tolerable Professor of Natural Philosophy."²⁰⁹ It is unclear whether Ferguson became acquainted with the work of Buffon and with vitalist ideas more generally before or after assuming his natural philosophy teaching duties. He could certainly have been exposed to this thought through his acquaintance with Smith and William Cullen, or perhaps as a traveling tutor with his Scottish charge in several university towns on the Continent. However, the primary focus of his early years of university teaching, like those teachers of natural philosophy elsewhere in Scotland, appears to have been on the physical sciences. The biological or life sciences, where

²⁰⁹ Adam Ferguson to Gilbert Elliot, September 14, 1759, in *Correspondence of Adam Ferguson*, 38.

Buffon's work and vitalist ideas were perhaps more directly pertinent, tended to be the purview of those teaching in chemistry and medicine. What is perhaps more striking was that Ferguson would make explicit use of the ideas and information of the French naturalist and his followers in his moral philosophy teaching at Edinburgh until his retirement in 1785.

The profound effect of ideas from the contemporary natural sciences upon Ferguson's thinking has been understudied, but is perhaps most evident in the moralization of nature suggested in the anthropological aspects of the work of both Smith and Rousseau.²¹⁰ During the 1750s Ferguson was working on an "Essay on Refinement," which David Hume had found quite promising. Hume, however, was disappointed by what the work had become when published in 1767 as *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. The reasons for his disappointment with its subsequent evolution were not entirely clear. Though Hume appears to have been a latecomer to the work of Buffon, his thought paralleled that of the French naturalist in many respects, and Ferguson's attempt to rework moral philosophy as natural history would likely have been unobjectionable. Rather Hume's reservations likely were less epistemological underpinnings than its somewhat antagonistic criticisms of contemporary political and social conditions in Britain. Further, Ferguson's assessment of the virtues of tribal societies that compared favorably with those of commercial societies would not have been shared Hume. In any event, the evolution of Ferguson's thought and work was significantly bound up in an

²¹⁰ Vitalist ideas in Ferguson's thought have been sketched in Peter H. Reill, "Narration and Structure in Late Eighteenth-Century Historical Thought," *History and Theory* Vol. 25 (1986): 286-98.

engagement with the new natural philosophy epitomized by Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, which served as a conduit for a revived vitalist epistemology to late eighteenth-century intellectual culture, inspiring the very different moral or social philosophies of Rousseau in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and Smith in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

The anthropological emphasis of Ferguson's *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, with the aim of recasting philosophy as a natural history of the human species, reveals the extent of his engagement with the methods and theories of the natural sciences. His methodological approach to the human sciences echoed Buffon's critique of Linnaeus for establishing his taxonomic system based upon singular aspects of a species, such as its sexual organs. He thus objected to approach of those moral theorists who laid the foundation of their system on the selection of "one or a few particulars on which to establish a theory." In this regard, Ferguson was equally critical of Hobbes and Rousseau for "framing our account of what man was in some imaginary state of nature," and in so doing "we overlook what he has always appeared within the reach of our own observation, and in the records of history."²¹¹ Rather, he argued that the moral philosopher should operate as

the natural historian [who] 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

²¹¹ *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), 8.

collection of facts, or at most, in general tenets derived from particular observations and experiments.²¹²

Ferguson claimed that the imperative of the moral sciences was to "know the condition which we ourselves should aspire, than that which our ancestors may be supposed to have left."²¹³ Nevertheless, he was fascinated by tribal societies and regarded them as an important subject of investigation. Indeed, he would argue that, "Whatever proofs we may have of the social disposition of man in familiar and contiguous scenes, it is possibly of importance, to draw our observations from the examples of men who live in the simplest condition, and who have not learned to affect what they do not actually feel."²¹⁴ The anthropological imagination was to be employed in producing a satisfying explanation of fact rather than in creating fictions beyond what was supported by historical and contemporary evidence. While he shared with Rousseau the belief that human nature had a history and that study of its earliest forms offered crucial insights into its present, Ferguson rejected the notion that humans had ever lived outside society.

The question of the original nature of human beings reopened by the challenge of Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine et fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), along with the continued prominence in Scotland of the natural law tradition with its own

²¹² *History of Civil Society*, 8. In many ways, Ferguson echoes David Hume's "anthropological" approach to a science of man as set out in *A Treatise of Human Nature* in 1749 involving observations or experiments made upon human nature. However, Ferguson's work is set off from Hume's by his focus upon primal peoples and an epistemological conception of moral and social formed upon explicitly biological principles.

²¹³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 16.

²¹⁴ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 23.

conception of a "state of nature," remained a significant philosophical problem for enlightened moral theorists in the last half of the eighteenth century. The fundamental question remained how to determine what was *natural* to human beings, to define the general characteristics of the species outside cultural specificities. Ferguson was no anti-modernist or primitivist in the manner of Rousseau, but rather acknowledged the mixed nature of modernity that entailed both gains and losses for humanity. Employing observation and experiment recommended by Hume, Ferguson turned to defining and understanding the characteristics of human nature through a holistic, indeed, a global, study of the human species based on the model of the natural sciences. For Ferguson access to the essential characteristics of the species was possible through observations and experiments made upon those peoples living in what were considered as in the "earliest and latest accounts collected from every quarter of the earth."²¹⁵

Though he largely accepted Adam Smith's typology of four stages of social progress, Ferguson seems to have conceived relationships existent in the social and political world as modeled upon Buffon's conception of a web of relationships between the species. That is, imperceptible "gradations" existed between organizational forms of society as between organisms in nature.²¹⁶ A history of civil society therefore required an examination of the degrees of difference in

²¹⁵ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 8-9. Travel accounts and the ethnographic information they contained continued to be a source of interest for Ferguson that continued beyond the composition of his *Essay*. For a partial list of sources for his anthropological thought, see Jane Fagg Bush, "Ferguson's Use of the University of Edinburgh Library: 1764-1806," in *Adam Ferguson: History, Progress and Human Nature*, ed. Eugene Heath and Vincenzo Merolle (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 39-64.

²¹⁶ On Smith and the epigenetic theory of reproduction in his stadial theory of history, see Chapter 2.

human societies, ranging from the "rude nations" to that of modern, commercial nations.²¹⁷

Ferguson extended Buffon's observation that, "Natural productions are generally formed by degrees," to the productions of the social and political worlds.²¹⁸ It was, he wrote, not only the individual that advanced "from infancy to manhood, but the species itself from rudeness to civilization."²¹⁹ Though he conceded that the natural talent of human beings had probably always been the same, and each "has the same race to run" from infancy to adulthood, he observed that, man "enters on his career with advantages peculiar to his age." The "use and application" of human talents perhaps changed over time, but "men continue their works in progression through many ages together: They build on foundations laid by their ancestors; and...tend to a perfection in the application of their faculties, to which...many generations must have combined their endeavours."²²⁰ As Scottish stadial theory of historical progress increasingly became conventional wisdom during the late eighteenth century, it would be reductively interpreted as an environmental explanation of morality.

²¹⁷ That Ferguson drew upon Buffonian language in the *History of Civil Society* is evident in his analysis of the relations or gradations between form of government (72). Compare his social analogue with the natural one made by Buffon in the *Premiere discours*: "Mais la Nature marche par des gradations inconnues, & par conséquent elle ne peut pas se prêter totalement à ces divisions, puisqu'elle passe d'une espèce à une autre espèce, & souvent d'un genre à un autre genre, par des nuances imperceptibles; de sorte qu'il se trouve un grand nombre d'espèces moyennes & d'objets mi-partis qu'on ne sçait où placer, & qui dérangent nécessairement le projet du système général: cette vérité est trop importante pour que je ne l'appuie pas de tout ce qui peut la rendre claire & évidente." *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749-89), I (1749), 13.

²¹⁸ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10.

²¹⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 7.

²²⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10-11.

This line of thought would eventually dominant in nineteenth-century anthropology.²²¹ In any event, for the Scottish Enlightenment anthropological theory was informed by vitalist thought, and the progress of the individual and the species resulted from the aggregation of synchronic and diachronic actions and structural conditions.

Human Nature and the Naturalization of Sociability

The emphasis on sociability and anti-individualism that marked the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment may in part be traced to the new emphasis of the natural sciences.²²² Buffon, in laying out the foundations of his natural philosophy in the *Premier Discours* of the *Histoire naturelle*, asserted that, "The history of an animal ought not be the history of an individual but of the entire species of these animals."²²³ From the historical record Ferguson concluded, contra Rousseau, that, "Mankind are to be taken in groupes, as they have always subsisted." Echoing Buffon, Ferguson argued that, "The history of the individual was but a detail of the sentiments and thoughts he has entertained in the view of his species: and every experiment

²²¹ See Knud Haakonssen and Donald Winch, "The Legacy of Adam Smith," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 366-94.

²²² On the anti-individualism of enlightened Scottish social thought, though not attributed to engagement with the natural sciences, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Social Thought of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), Chapter 2. On these debates earlier in the century, see Daniel Carey, "Method, Moral Sense, and the Problem of Diversity: Francis Hutcheson and the Scottish Enlightenment," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 5 (1997): 275-96.

²²³ Compare with Buffon's methodological prescription: "L'histoire doit suivre la description, & doit uniquement rouler sur les rapports que les choses naturelles ont entre elles & avec nous: l'histoire d'un animal doit être non pas l'histoire de l'individu, mais celle de l'espèce entière de ces animaux." *Histoire naturelle*, 30.

relative to this subject should be made with entire societies, not with single men."²²⁴ For Ferguson what the accounts of primitive societies showed was

mankind as assembled in troops and companies; and the individual always joined by affection to one party, while he is possibly opposed to another; employed in the exercise of recollection and foresight; inclined to communicate his own sentiments, and to be made acquainted with those of others; these facts must be admitted as the foundation of all our reasoning relative to man.²²⁵

The essential characteristics of the species, Ferguson concluded, then, were both sociability and antagonism, intellection concerning both the past and future, self-expression and the mutual exchange of sentiments.

Ferguson rejected Rousseau's belief in a radically different personality of man in a "state of nature." He rejected the possible existence of human nature outside some form of society and dismissed the idea that something could be learned from the mind of man left to itself. Although "experiments which have been found so useful in establishing the principles of other sciences, could probably, on this subject [history of the human species], teach us nothing important, or new."²²⁶ He therefore dismissed what could be learned about human nature from the recent accounts of various feral or wild children that enjoyed such a vogue in eighteenth-century.²²⁷ Ferguson argued that the

²²⁴ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10.

²²⁵ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 9.

²²⁶ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 9.

²²⁷ See Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

moral sciences were to "take the history of every active being from his conduct in the situation to which he is formed, not from his appearance in any forced or uncommon condition; a wild man therefore, caught in the woods, where he had always lived apart from his species, is a singular instance, not a specimen of any general character."²²⁸

There was virtually no such thing as pre-social humankind in the social thought of most members of the Scottish Enlightenment. Sociability was considered a fundamental characteristic of the human species. There was "a propensity common to man and other animals, to mix with the herd, and, without reflection, to follow the croud of his species." When men became "accustomed to company, its enjoyments and disappointments" were, Ferguson argued, to be "reckoned among the principal pleasures or pains of human life."²²⁹ The experience of society brought about a "variety and a force of emotion, which can only have place in the company of our fellow-creatures." In society man was further freed from the awareness of weakness, cares of subsistence and safety. "Vehement passions of animosity or attachment are the first exertions of vigour in his breast; under their influence, every consideration, but that of his object, is forgotten; dangers and difficulties only excited him the more."²³⁰

Society was not only the natural state of human beings; without society, Ferguson asserted, human nature would be deprived of the very thing that allowed the full exercise of its reason and passions.

²²⁸ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 9.

²²⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 21.

²³⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 23.

Society was the source of the "very existence of his happiest emotions; not only the better part, but almost the whole of his rational character." In opposition to Rousseau, Ferguson found that the experience of society allowed for the full development of the capacities of human nature, and hence the very essence of what it meant to be human. "Send him to the desert alone, he is a plant torn from its roots: the form indeed may remain, but every faculty droops and withers; the human personage and the human character cease to exist."²³¹ Society was not, as Rousseau claimed, the opposite of the man's natural state. Rather, sociability was essential to human nature, and without which, in Ferguson's view, the humanity of the species would be nonexistent.

Drawing on Buffon's terminology of *dispositions*, Ferguson denied in human beings the extreme and opposed original natures in which mankind in its "first condition" was possessed either of "mere animal sensibility, without any exercise of the faculties that render them superior to the brutes" or "perpetual wars, kindled by competition for dominion and interest," respectively.²³² The consistent representations in historical and contemporary travel accounts of societies around the globe indicated that the human character consisted of "mixed dispositions." Both theory and evidence made clear to Ferguson that placing the original character of human nature at one or the other end of a Hobbes-Rousseau spectrum of was untenable. Given his acquaintance with the work of Buffon, Ferguson's position can be seen as an embrace of a hallmark of vitalist epistemology that of the "extended middle,"

²³¹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 23.

²³² Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 8.

a theoretical space that allowed for a mediating of polar oppositions. This concept involved a way of thinking that brought together or attempted to balance opposed or contradictory elements. This theoretical maneuver of understanding binaries as in interaction and mutual modification provided a deeper understanding of the complexity of reality and a recognition of the mixed disposition of things.

Negotiating between the binary oppositions of human nature proposed by Hobbes and Rousseau, Ferguson located the human personality in a middle ground between the former's "war of all against all" and the latter's pre-social animality. Theoretical supposition and empirical observation confirmed that humans were clearly of a "mixed disposition" towards "friendship or enmity," in which "his reason, his use of language and articulate sounds, like the shape and the erect position of his body, are to be considered as so many attributes of his nature: they are to be retained in his description, as the wing and the paw are in that of the eagle and the lion...in the natural history of different animals."²³³ Ferguson, perhaps more so than any other Scottish moral philosopher, gave greater prominence to what he called the "seeds of animosity" in the human mind. Yet he acknowledged this attribute existing in the human character as inseparable from the propensities for friendship and sociability emphasized in Enlightenment social thought.

Ferguson followed eighteenth-century naturalists in classifying man as an animal, but rejected the analogical comparisons of man to orangutan as in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* or of human society to insect colonies as in Mandeville's *Fable of the*

²³³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 9.

Bees. Ferguson conceded that the progress of mankind from "a supposed state of animal sensibility, to the attainment of reason" had been "painted with a boldness of invention...that would tempt us to admit...perhaps, as the model of our nature in its original state, some of the animals whose shape has the greatest resemblance to ours." Yet he took issue with Helvétius's reasoning in *De l'esprit*, noting "neither the possession of similar organs, nor the approximation of shape, nor the use of the hand" had "enabled any other species to blend their nature or their inventions with his." Curiously, Ferguson acknowledged that it might be "ridiculous to affirm, as a discovery, that the species of the horse was probably never the same with that of the lion." He refused, however, to concede any such possibility with regard to the human species. Following Buffon, he asserted that, "men have always appeared among animals a distinct and a superior race." Even in "his rudest state" man is found to be superior to the animals. Man, even in "his greatest degeneracy, never descends to their level. He is," Ferguson declared, "in short, a man in every condition; and we can learn nothing of his nature from the analogy of other animals."²³⁴

Man, in his animal or physical nature, differed "from the brutes only in the degree or manner of what he exhibits; but in that of his intellectual nature, he differs totally, and in kind."²³⁵ The natural attribute of human intellection played the decisive role in human perfectibility, or progressive self-development, which Rousseau considered a latent capacity among pre-social humans. In non-human

²³⁴ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 11.

²³⁵ *Institutes of Moral Philosophy: For the use of students in the college of Edinburgh/By Adam Ferguson, LL.D.* (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1769), 118.

species of animals, "the individual advances from infancy to age or maturity; and he attains, in the compass of a single life, to all the perfection his nature can reach: but, in the human kind, the species has a progress as well as the individual; they build in every subsequent age on foundations formerly laid...to which the aid of long experience is required, and to which many generations must have combined their endeavours."²³⁶ Individual and collective development were the result of an incremental, interactive process. Human progress was therefore historically relative.

The notion of a "state of nature" derived from the natural law tradition of Grotius and Hobbes had been given new life by Rousseau in his critique of modern society. However, for Ferguson, the travel accounts, as well as the flow into Europe of aesthetic artifacts from tribal societies in North America, undercut the rigid opposition between nature and culture asserted by Rousseau. It was evident to Ferguson from these sources that aesthetic creation was characteristic of human beings. Indeed, Ferguson objected that,

if nature is only opposed to art, in what situation of the human race are the footsteps of art unknown? In the condition of the savage, as well as in that of the citizen, are many proofs of human invention; and in either is not any permanent station, but a mere stage through which this travelling being is destined to pass. If the palace be unnatural, the cottage is so no less; and the highest refinements of political and moral apprehension, are not more artificial in their kind, than the first operations of sentiment and reason.²³⁷

The continuity of human dispositions towards invention exhibited across time indicated that artifice was a natural characteristic of

²³⁶ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10.

²³⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 14.

the species.²³⁸ Hence, he considered use of the terms *natural* and *unnatural* with regard to humanity as the "least determinate in their meaning."²³⁹ Aesthetic creation was a natural propensity common to both rude and cultivated peoples. Therefore, he argued, the "latest efforts of human invention are but a continuation of certain devices which were practised in the earliest ages of the world. What the savage projects or observes, in the forest, are the steps which...conducted the human mind from the perceptions of sense, to the general conclusions of science."²⁴⁰ Ferguson refuted Rousseau's opposition between nature and culture, and claimed that human aesthetic invention emanated from the essential nature of the human species. The historical progression through the gradations from simplicity to complexity meant that the inventions of the ancients differed from those of moderns only in degree, but not in kind.

Ferguson asserted that, "art itself is natural to man" who "is destined, from the first age of his being, to invent and contrive."²⁴¹ Citing Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages*, he wrote that the "tree which an American, on the banks of the Oroonoko, has chosen to climb for the retreat, and the lodgement of his family, is to him a convenient dwelling. The sofa, the vaulted dome, and the colonade, do not more

²³⁸ See Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Muthu argues for cultural productivity as the criterion of human equality, and thus the basis for a critique of empire in the thought of Herder, Diderot, and Kant. While the equality of all peoples was not universally held by members of the Scottish Enlightenment, Smith and Ferguson regarded the *capacity* for, rather than production of, cultural or aesthetic expressions as the criterion for judgment of potential for progress among a people. These related topics are further explored in Chapter 4.

²³⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 15-16.

²⁴⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 14.

²⁴¹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 14.

effectually content their inhabitant." Capable of a wide variety of arts, but dependent upon none particularly for their self-preservation, man seemed to "enjoy the conveniencies that suit his nature, and to have found the condition to which he is destined."²⁴² This observation of the continuities between primitive and cultivated societies moved him to radically recast the idea of a "state of nature."

If "we admit that man has "in himself a principle of progression, and a desire of perfection," Ferguson argued, "it appears improper to say, that he has quitted the state of his nature, when he has begun to proceed; or that he finds a station for which he was not intended...he only follows the disposition, and employs the powers that nature has given." He reasoned that,

If we are asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? we may answer, It is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan. While this active being is in the train of employing his talents, and of operating on the subjects around him, all situation are equally natural.²⁴³

Man did not presently exist, nor has he ever existed, in a state of nature; nature, rather, existed in man.

Where man was an "active being," Ferguson concluded, all situations were natural to him. Though the role of the aesthetic in his thought has received little attention from scholars, Ferguson clearly recognized it as fundamental in the formation of the human personality. Indeed, he further went so far as to suggest that man is

²⁴² Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 13.

²⁴³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 13-14.

"in some measure the artificer of his own frame, as well as his fortune." Yet, as Ferguson told his moral philosophy class in 1784, "In one Sense the Cancer of Fortune is independent of human Power, for no Single Man or number of Men Planned & executed it or are in Condition to stop or turn its Course." Nevertheless, the "whole is the Result of Human Nature & the Action of Man."²⁴⁴ The seeming design in human history proceeded out of the aggregate exertions of the species and its responses to the resulting "Cancer of Fortune," not from its intention to frame itself or the world. This was a central operating assumption of Scottish Enlightenment social thought in the second half of the eighteenth century. As I have argued in the previous chapter on Adam Smith, this assumption was grounded in new conceptions of matter, and hence of human nature itself, in the natural sciences. Though he differed philosophically with Smith on many issues, Ferguson shared the belief that moral philosophy modeled on a natural history of the human species offered the greatest promise for complete system of the human sciences.

Natural Design and Spontaneous Order in Human Nature

New models of causality and design in the contemporary natural sciences presented the human sciences with both challenge and promise for a new understanding of human moral nature. As respectable members of the Kirk, the courts, and the university, enlightened Scots had no interest in overturning or even undermining the British moral or social order. However, much of their work, however, implied a

²⁴⁴ Ferguson, Lectures on Moral Philosophy, Edinburgh University Library (hereafter EUL) Dc.1.84.

philosophically radical new understanding of morality. Most Scots explicitly acknowledged divine providence in the design of the moral world, but which could only be inferred from that of the natural world. Those moral philosophers, such as Ferguson, whose work was informed by the new natural sciences attempted to mediate between providential design and historical accident in human history. Yet he entirely bracketed providence from his explanatory model of civil society and grounded moral sentiments in the passions and drives of human nature.

In *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* Ferguson acknowledged the natural productions of the earth as designed by God. "On the credit of a few observations, we apt to presume, that the secret may soon be laid open [to the source of existence], and that what is termed *wisdom* in nature, may be referred to the operation of physical powers. We forget that physical powers, employed in succession, and combined to a salutary purpose, constitute those very proofs of design from which we infer the evidence of God." Yet Ferguson admitted that, "this truth being once admitted, we are no longer to search for the source of existence; we can only collect the laws which the author of nature has established; and in our latest as well as our earliest discoveries, only come to perceive a mode of creation or providence before unknown."²⁴⁵ Ferguson here attributed the powers operating in nature to previously unknown aspects of providence, but at the same time the conception of physical *powers* employed in *succession* suggests a Buffonian language of generation and reproduction. While acknowledging the ultimate cause of the wisdom of nature, Ferguson

²⁴⁵ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 12.

nonetheless offered an explanatory model that focused upon its design, not upon its designer.

While Glasgow had a reputation for its moral philosophy early in the century through the teaching of Gersholm Carmichael and then, preeminently, Francis Hutcheson, Edinburgh acquired its prominence in this field only following the appointment of Ferguson.²⁴⁶ Significantly, however, the ascent of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University in the 1760s would come after its reframing by Ferguson within a natural historical approach, much as had been done at Glasgow by his friend Adam Smith, who quickly and perfunctorily covered the theological as part of his course on natural jurisprudence.²⁴⁷ Ferguson, whose religiosity was not generally suspect, taught moral philosophy, like Smith, largely as a natural history of the human nature and society. As Lisa Hill observed, "All of Ferguson's theological conclusions are gleaned, not from established religious doctrine, but from the works of nature."²⁴⁸

In explaining to his students the proper approach to the study of moral philosophy in 1783, Ferguson noted that in considering the created "Spirits" intermediate between God and man, the sciences were

²⁴⁶ See Richard B. Sher, "Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 87-126.

²⁴⁷ The natural theology portions of Smith's lectures were never printed. Rather, the ethics, which according to John Millar, "consisted chiefly of the doctrines...afterwards published in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*" in Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Works of Adam Smith, L.L.D.," I. 18, III.1. On the brevity with which Smith treated natural theology in his moral philosophy courses at Glasgow, see Philipson, *An Enlightened Life*, 133-4. Ferguson, though his theological education was in the Calvinist tradition, could be openly critical of orthodox religion.

²⁴⁸ Hill, *The Passionate Society: The Social, Political and Moral Thought of Adam Ferguson* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 245.

"limited to what we may know by the light of Reason alone concerning our own nature & that of the Supreme Being." Therefore, "as we have no certain Knowledge of Separate Created Spirits, I have ventured to omit the consideration of that Subject." Rather, moral philosophy was to provide a "Picture of Man...verified by history, observation, experience, and recollection." Moral philosophy as natural history required the consideration of man "both in his Animal and Rational Capacity...Whether his External Circumstances or Personal Qualitys." Morality was a product of both external and internal causes, and therefore the moral sciences "must attend to both."²⁴⁹

Contemporary natural and life sciences increasingly focused the attention of many Scottish moral theorists towards the physical bases, internal and external, of human morality after the 1750s. The physical and the intellectual were not the same, but the treatment of both was necessary for they interacted and mutually modified one another. As Ferguson instructed his students, the study of human nature was thus to be conducted initially under two separate aspects, the first being the actual state of humans past, present, and future, and the second the good or evil which it is susceptible. The first of these Ferguson regarded as the object pneumatics, which he viewed as part of the physical sciences; the second was the subject of moral philosophy. "Notwithstanding the expedience of the Separation," Ferguson argued, the "Physical and the moral sciences of human Nature are intimately connected."²⁵⁰ Careful to avoid a charges of promoting a materialist interpretation, Ferguson attempted reframe the understanding of human

²⁴⁹ Ferguson, Moral Philosophy Lectures, EUL, Dc.1.84.5-6.

²⁵⁰ Ferguson, Moral Philosophy Lectures, EUL Dc.1.84.93-4; 99-100. Emphasis in the manuscript.

moral nature by re-situating it in a middle ground between the physical and the spiritual. Mediating between oppositions, a midpoint where the two interacted with one another, was an epistemological maneuver evident in vitalist thought of the life sciences of Buffon and the Edinburgh medical men.

Though he explicitly rejected materialism, at times, Ferguson came close to denying the existence of a mind-body dualism consistent with an orthodox Christian division of spirit and matter. While observing that, "when the body sickens, the mind droops; and when the blood ceases to flow, the soul takes its departure," Ferguson nonetheless maintained that, "Man, it must be confessed, notwithstanding all this activity of his mind, is an animal in the full extent of that designation." The "distinction betwixt mind and body is followed by consequences of the greatest importance," he conceded, "but the facts to which we now refer, are not founded on any tenets whatever. They are equally true, whether we admit or reject the distinction in question, or whether we suppose, that this living agent is formed of one, or is an assemblage of separate natures." Yet Ferguson argued that, the materialist by "treating of man as of an engine, cannot make any change in the state of his history." Rather, man was a "being, who, by a multiplicity of visible organs, performs a variety of functions...performs other operations which we cannot refer to any corporeal organ." Nonetheless, he concluded that, all "these different functions, in some measure, go well or ill together."²⁵¹ The natural sciences suggested an analogue of the human being as an ecological system, or what was in eighteenth-century terms, a system

²⁵¹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 48-9.

or *economy* of active, often contestatory, forces, which for better or worse, gave the species its particular character. In short, the sum of the human system was greater than its individual parts.

Alongside the obligatory, orthodox moral instruction, in his university prelections and published writings, Ferguson both confirmed and challenged conventional understandings of the physical world and the attributes of matter, frequently incorporating ideas drawn from the new natural philosophy. On the one hand, he maintained a mechanistic conception of matter. In the *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, for example, a textbook published for the use of his moral philosophy students, Ferguson wrote that, "Matter is divisible and inert; mind is indivisible and active."²⁵² The upshot of this position in the lecture was to affirm for his students the immortality of the soul.²⁵³ At the same time, he also supplemented older mechanistic conceptions of matter as dead and inert with vitalist notions of matter imbued with inherent and active forces. Ferguson was perhaps most explicit in invoking vitalist epistemology when he told his students in a moral philosophy lecture of 1783 that, "Animal Life take place in Subjects Organized & Sensible & Spontaneous Matter moves in

²⁵² Ferguson, *Institutes*, 119.

²⁵³ In the *Institutes* Ferguson drew upon essentially materialist conceptions to affirm a conventional dualistic conceptions of mind and body: "The fact at death is, that the body ceases to be animated, or to give signs of the presence of mind: but the mind being of a different nature, may exist apart" (120). Ferguson upheld his duty as a representative of the church and state to inculcate conventional physical laws. Yet, at other times, he also seemed to have felt obliged to supplement this instruction with enlightened ideas that were more satisfactorily addressed intellectual problems. Again, the seeming tensions may be explained by an attempt consonant with the vitalist epistemological move of forging a middle ground of interaction between oppositions.

all directions."²⁵⁴ It was this spontaneous movement of matter throughout organized and sensible life that most informed Ferguson's understanding of the intimate connection of the physical and moral in human affairs. Recognizing and understanding the principle of vital force was instrumental to addressing problems of causation, chance, design, and progress. Indeed, Ferguson's work was an important exemplar of and contribution to the idea of spontaneously generated and organized design of the social or moral world that marked so much of the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment.²⁵⁵

For Ferguson social order was the sum greater than the parts of individual actions. Strikingly, he asserted, it was humankind itself, rather than the divine, that was primarily responsible for its form and condition. The "whole career of human affairs," he told his students in 1783, had been "the Result of human Nature & of human Actions."²⁵⁶ Perhaps the classic statement of the eighteenth-century idea of spontaneous order or design appeared in the *Essay on the History of Civil Society*: "Every step and every movement of the multitude, even in what are termed enlightened ages, are made with equal blindness to the future; and nations stumble upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."²⁵⁷ Ferguson's attributed this in a

²⁵⁴ Ferguson, *Moral Philosophy Lectures*, EUL Dc.1.84.71. Emphasis in Ferguson's.

²⁵⁵ For a historical account of the concept among Scots literati, but which does not specifically consider the engagement with the thought emerging from the natural sciences, see Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Journal of the History of Philosophy Monographs) (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).

²⁵⁶ Ferguson, *Moral Philosophy Lectures*, EUL Dc.1.84.284.

²⁵⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 119.

footnote to the *Memoirs* of the seventeenth century French churchman, Cardinal de Retz. While this formulation perhaps does not explicitly appear in that work cited, it was, however, consonant with the vitalist idea of self-organizing matter implicit in the works of Buffon and other naturalists, which Ferguson was well acquainted through his teaching of natural philosophy.

The analogue of self-organizing systems or economies was a grounding assumption of Ferguson's thought and appeared in the opening pages of the *Essay* where he proposed a thought experiment to suggest how human social formation or design was an immanently *natural* process.

We have every reason...to believe, that..an experiment made...with a colony of children transplanted from the nursery, and left to form a society apart, untaught, and undisciplined, we should only have the same things repeated, which, in so many different parts of the earth, have been transacted already. The members of our little society would feed and sleep, would herd together and play, would have a language of their own, would quarrel and divide, would be to one another the most important objects of the scene and, in the ardour of their friendships and competitions, would overlook their personal danger, and suspend the care for their self-preservation. Has not the human race been planted like the colony of in question? Who has directed their course? whose instruction have they heard or whose example have they followed²⁵⁸

To this question Ferguson answered, "Nature, therefore, we shall presume, having given to every animal its mode of existence, its dispositions and manner of life, has dealt equally with those of the human race."²⁵⁹ Thus, the spontaneous and *instinctual* actions prompted by dispositions of the human character accounted for the design of moral and social forms. "The bulk of mankind, are," Ferguson argued,

²⁵⁸ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10.

²⁵⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10.

like other parts of the system, subjected to the law of their nature, and, without knowing it, are led to accomplish its purpose. While they intend no more than subsistence and accommodation, or the peace of society, and the safety of their persons and their property, their faculties are brought into use, and they profit by exercise. In mutually conducting their relative interests and concerns, they acquire the habits of political life; are made to taste of their highest enjoyments, in the affections of benevolence, integrity, and elevation of mind; and, before they have deliberately considered in what the merit or felicity of their own nature consist, have already learned to perform many of its noblest functions.²⁶⁰

Significantly, he attributed the "noblest functions" neither to reason nor benevolence, but to the course of human attempts to fulfill the baser, physical needs of the body. Nature had given humankind its mode of existence, dispositions, and manners of life. As the thought experiment of the colony of lost children suggests, the fundamental elements of human life continued without external direction. The apparent design of all human affairs, individual and collective, was the result neither of divine intervention nor mechanical laws. Rather, spontaneous order in the social world could be seen as the result or byproduct of the exertion of vital forces operant in humanity, that is, the movement of matter "in all directions."

For Ferguson the essential characteristic of the human species was one of *activity*. Throughout the *Essay* he emphasized that human

²⁶⁰ Ferguson, *Principles of Moral and Political Science; Being Chiefly a Retrospect of Lectures Delivered in the College of Edinburgh*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1792), I.iii.1. Compare this with Adam Smith: "With regard to all those ends which, upon account of their peculiar importance, may be regarded, if such an expression is allowable, as the favourite ends of nature, she had constantly in this manner not only endowed mankind with an appetite for the end which she proposes, but likewise with an appetite for the means by which alone this end can be brought about, for their own sakes, and independent of their tendency to produce it." Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, II.i. 5.10.

happiness resulted from the application of the mind or body in an active pursuit of some object.²⁶¹ Ferguson was an enthusiastic agitator for the creation of a Scottish militia.²⁶² His championing of a military ethos in his work stemmed from the belief that military service offered the "most animating occasions of human life," which were "calls to danger and hardship, not invitations to safety and ease." He argued that,

man himself, in his excellence, is not an animal of pleasure...but like his associates, the dog and the horse, to follow the exercises of his nature...his disposition to action only keeps pace with the variety of powers with which he is furnished."²⁶³

Ferguson called the shift towards struggle, rather than enjoyment, as a "refinement" in modern philosophy. Yet this refinement was one that could be found in ancient thought and in the accounts of both ancient and modern tribal societies. Ferguson noted that this shift had been "made by Regulus and Cincinnatus before the date of philosophy," but it was also one "every savage confirms, when he looks from his forest on the pacific city, and scorns the plantation whose master he cares not to imitate."²⁶⁴ Vitalist conceptions of life force were confirmed by Ferguson's anthropological investigations of tribal as well as commercial societies. The movement of matter in all

²⁶¹ "Happiness is not that state of repose, or that imaginary freedom from care, which at a distance is so frequent an object of desire, but with its approach brings a tedium, or a langour, more unsupportable than pain itself...it arises more from the pursuit, than from the attainment of any end whatever." Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 51.

²⁶² See John Robertson, *Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1985).

²⁶³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 47-8.

²⁶⁴ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 48.

directions meant that active contestation and struggle was a feature of natural forces within and between peoples and societies.

In ascertaining the rules of morality for mankind and in rendering proper moral judgment, it was therefore necessary, Ferguson argued, to know "the history of man's nature, his dispositions, his specific enjoyments and sufferings, his condition and future prospects."²⁶⁵ In other words, it was requisite to determine what human nature consisted of before determining what human morality should be. Still, Ferguson observed that the existence of "expressions of praise and blame in every language, the importance of mens actions to mankind, the opposite nature of dispositions that form the characters of men, the most vehement sentiments of the human heart...show, that the distinction of moral good and evil is real, and universally acknowledged."²⁶⁶

This might suggest that Ferguson was a moral realist who held good and evil to really exist in the world. Yet, the distinction between the two he attributed to the universal nature of the species as active beings. As he instructed his moral philosophy students, man complained of evil in his external circumstances or in his own nature and conduct. The first subject of complaint was "termed *physical evil*; the second, *moral*."²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, man's "complaints of physical evil are not symptoms of absolute evil in nature," but rather were "the symptoms of an active nature in himself properly placed, and having proper excitements to exert its power." Morality, then, was to be

²⁶⁵ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 10.

²⁶⁶ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 106.

²⁶⁷ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 130.

understood as the natural result of the interactions and modifications between the active nature of human beings and their contexts. Hence Ferguson found that a "scene in which there were no apparent evils to be corrected, or, what [was] equivalent, no accession of good to be gained, would be a scene of inaction, adverse to the nature of man." It would be adverse precisely because in animal life matter moved spontaneously in all directions; inactivity was in effect unnatural. Movement and activity were the nature of humans. "Or, in other words," as Ferguson put it, "a being that perceived no evil, or had no want, could have no principle of activity."²⁶⁸ The absence of human activity implied an absence of moral striving. It is little wonder, then, that the physical and moral were intimately connected in his thought.

In a moral philosophy lecture of 1780 Ferguson told his students that, "The Appearance or actual form of mans Nature however may be traced to some original Propensity." Further, in these propensities of human nature appeared to have "laid the first foundation of the distinction between good & Evil."²⁶⁹ These propensities were of two varieties, animal and rational. The former included the appetites for food, sleep, and the propagation of the species; the latter included "the care of self-reservation, the affections of parent and child, the affections of the sexes, the affection to society, and the desire to excel." In a critique of a Hobbesian natural law or materialism, Ferguson observed that these propensities were in "effect prior to the experience of pleasure or pain."²⁷⁰ All these propensities for Ferguson

²⁶⁸ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 130-32.

²⁶⁹ Ferguson, *Moral Philosophy Lectures*, EUL Dc.1. 84. 537.

²⁷⁰ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 70.

had their source in very structure of the human organism. Ferguson did not advocate moral relativism. Yet like Adam Smith, he aimed to explain the natural operations that produced human moral sentiments and argued that morals and manners existed within a range or continuum appropriate to the particular "scene" or stage occupied along a universal historical path.

In surveying the varied social and cultural practices of societies across the globe given ancient and contemporary travel writings, Ferguson concluded that, "This diversity does not arise from any difference of opinion, or experience, concerning the nature of good or ill affections and dispositions." There was "no external effect" among different cultures where "men may not entertain contradictory opinions, even of life and of death." As illustration, Ferguson simply juxtaposed, without further comment, the examples of the "father among the Esquimaux [who] requires, at a certain age, that his own children should put him to death," the "widow in Europe [who] desires to have a good settlement made by her deceased husband," and the widow in India who "desires to be burnt on his funeral pile."²⁷¹ Such practices might be regarded as anathema to Europeans. Yet, in assessing the good and evil of customs and manners, Ferguson enjoined his students to distinguish between matters of indifference and importance.

In cases where moral or cultural practices were of the first order, of relative indifference, he argued that, "we ought to observe the manners of our country," such as speaking its language or wearing its dress. Where matters were of importance, he asserted, "we ought to

²⁷¹ Ferguson, *Institutes*, 182.

chuse what is for the good of mankind, in opposition to opinion and custom."²⁷² Not all natural developments, of course, could be considered morally good or unintended consequences as beneficial. Tolerant towards the moral and social practices of primitive, non-European societies, Ferguson's severest criticism was reserved for those of modern commercial society. He was far less sanguine than Adam Smith or David Hume in believing nature provided the remedies to the very ills it had seemingly afflicted upon humanity. A leitmotif of his *Essay* was a warning of the dangers of a withdrawal from social and political engagement encouraged by conditions in commercial society. In Ferguson's view, the active participation of the individual in social and political life of the earliest, the savage and barbarian, stages of progress, evidenced a natural characteristic of the species, which was increasingly circumscribed in modernity and threatened human potential.

Ferguson at once embraced a trust in and a critique of a naturally unfolding social order. One of the charges against the idea of spontaneous or self-generating order was that of a conservative acquiescence to the status quo of the circumstances in which one found oneself.²⁷³ If all human affairs were the result of human actions, but not of human designs, what then should be the response to the inevitable circumstances or conditions this produced? "What is the Individual to Do afloat upon this Torrent. "To commit himself to its

²⁷² Ferguson, *Institutes*, 186.

²⁷³ The view that idea of spontaneous order justified conservatism and the status quo was perhaps both the concern and the conclusion of Hamowy in his *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order*. However, theories of self-organization were embraced across the political spectrum by intellectuals to support conservative and liberal positions.

direction without any Effort!" Ferguson rhetorically asked his students in a 1784 lecture. "No," he answered, "for if every Individual were to do so, there would be no Torrent. And if men were to do so in every instance there would be no Action. The Torrent is formed by united impulse of such Efforts as his own."²⁷⁴ While acknowledging that human beings were subject to the "Cancer of Fortune," they at once struggled against and contributed to the aggregate forces that were the "Torrent" of life.²⁷⁵

What, then, could the moral philosopher determine from the comparative study of the *pensée sauvage* of the teleological ends of the human species? What then was the *destination* of man in the world? Human nature was, Ferguson answered, "Undoubtedly free to pass through all this Variety, without being limited to any." However, he also noted that the varied "circumstances" or external conditions of human beings informed their specific manners or morals. However, "these habits once formed fix the Individual to his description as every other Animal is fixed by the Instincts of Nature."²⁷⁶ Ferguson thus mediated between freedom and necessity, unity and diversity, in establishing the essential features of the species. Matter, and hence the human species and the moral or social forms it acquired, moved in "all directions." The passage through the stages of society delineated

²⁷⁴ Ferguson, Moral Philosophy Lectures, EUL Dc.1.84.

²⁷⁵ Ferguson's social and political conservatism stood in surprising contrast to his philosophical radicalism. For instance, he opposed the enlargement of the franchise in Britain and the colonists in the American War for Independence. His opposition perhaps stemmed from anxieties about radical change that might potentially threaten or undo social and political progress. Rather, his preference, shared by many enlightened thinkers, was progress through slow, incremental change. Despite this Ferguson would largely favor the revolution in France.

²⁷⁶ Ferguson, Moral Philosophy Lectures, EUL Dc.1.84.333.

by Smith was the natural impulse of vital forces inherent within human beings. "In Distinguishing the States of Man," Ferguson told his students, "through all of which he is carried by his Natural Disposition & without any external Force or Direction it is unreasonable to mark any Particular State by the Exclusive appellation of Nature."²⁷⁷ All scenes, states, or stages are natural to humans, carried as they were in all directions by their own natures.

Conclusion: Human Nature and Anthropology

Beginning in the mid 1750s, enlightened Scots literati began reconstructing a science of man upon the foundation of a new understanding of human nature inspired by a critical engagement with the natural, as well as moral, philosophical writings of the French Enlightenment. Montesquieu's systemization of the historical dynamics of social and political forms in *L'esprit des lois* had been decisive in directing Scots intellectuals to a reexamination of the historical forms of society. Yet Scots thinkers were critical of *L'esprit* for its lack of attention to human nature. As David Hume had proposed several decades prior, a proper understanding of human nature was requisite for *all* the sciences.²⁷⁸ Contemporaneous theoretical and methodological innovations in the natural and life sciences proposed new understandings of the operations of physical nature, which in turn held significant implications for rethinking human nature. Adam Smith, alert to the import of the new epistemology for a revised

²⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Moral Philosophy Lectures*, EUL Dc.1.84.364.

²⁷⁸ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds., David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 4.

understanding of the moral order in natural historical terms, had prescribed Buffon and Rousseau as the most important interlocutors for enlightened Scots in reorienting the science of man.

Adam Ferguson was among the first of Scottish literati to follow Smith's "anthropological turn," signaled in his published work by the fifth part of the *Moral Sentiments*, in this recasting of enlightened moral thought.²⁷⁹ Though he would differ in many respects from Smith, Ferguson was similarly engaged with the new natural sciences and the vitalist epistemological directions taken in them. Besides Ferguson's acquaintance with Smith, he was also friends with William Cullen, professor at Edinburgh, who was an important figure in the vitalization of the medical sciences in Scotland. The role of these ideas in the Scottish Enlightenment have received less attention than should be the case.²⁸⁰ The five years spent teaching natural philosophy courses, in which he used Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, cannot be underestimated.

For Ferguson continued to make use of the ideas in Buffon after his move to the chair of moral philosophy in 1764, and vitalist assumptions informed his thinking about the historical dynamics of both human nature and social progress. Indeed, what he had begun in the 1750s as an "Essay on Taste" underwent significant transformation as a result of his exposure to the vitalist ideas contained in the new natural philosophies, and, by the time of its publication in 1767, *An*

²⁷⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁸⁰ For perhaps the most important works in changing our understanding of vitalist thought in the Enlightenment, see Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) and Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Essay on the History of Civil Society had been remodeled as a natural history of the human species. Eighteenth-century natural philosophy had incorporated the study of peoples from around the world, and Rousseau and Smith had early realized that an "anthropological turn," a critical, if second-hand, investigation of "primitive" societies, in the human sciences would reveal a wealth of information regarding human moral and social development otherwise inaccessible. Following Smith, Ferguson vitalized, as it were, human nature itself, making it the wellspring of moral and social historical progress.

Scholarship has rightly focused on the primacy of society in the Scottish Enlightenment, and Ferguson has often been seen as the "father of sociology." However, ignoring the fundamental source of society in the natural dispositions of the human beings skews a proper understanding of the dialogical relationship between individual and society promulgated among Scottish philosophical historians, such as Smith and Ferguson. The common or universal progress of what we would term human cultural systems, the morals and manners of a people, was increasingly seen as existing upon a historical continuum. Moral differences were explained as the result of the mutual modification that occurred in the exchanges between a uniform human nature and particular "circumstances." While reflection and agency were not discounted in the formation of morals, the passions and basic physical needs of the animal system characteristic of the species were recognized not only as the point of departure for moral and social development, but also its present foundation.

Society, for Ferguson, as well as many of contemporary Scottish social theorists, was at once the product and habitat of humanity.

Like the natural world, it constituted what, in current terminology, could be termed an ecosystem, a vast, complex system of systems. Human beings, and by extension the societal forms composed by them, were animated by a principle of vital energy or life force. Society thus took on a life of its own, animated by the collective vital forces of its inhabitants, and formed complex social system. More than other Scottish moral philosophers, Ferguson gave animosity in the human character a weight equal to that of benevolence, viewing individual and social progress in part as a result of often conflicting passions and contestatory actions. He was perhaps only slightly more explicit than Smith in naming those forces inherent to the animation and organization of matter, which could not, of course, be seen directly. Their effect, however, could be seen in the direction and organization given to living nature. Ferguson considered not only the universe being animated by a principle of motion, but also humanity. The fundamental nature of all human beings was that of activity.

For Ferguson the implications of such an understanding of the original and essential character of human nature required rethinking assumptions about the aesthetic and political agency of human beings. He sided with Smith against Rousseau, in the view that aesthetic production reflected the human impulse to act upon others and the world around them. In short, culture was natural to mankind. Ferguson dissented from Smith regarding political agency. Unlike Smith, Ferguson appeared far less sanguine about the future course of political culture in Britain. Indeed, his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* was filled with admonitions and warnings of the dangers

posed to the liberties of the citizen in withdrawing from active social and political engagement.

Yet perhaps most striking in Ferguson's work, and that of Scots theorists engaged with vitalist ideas, was its *naturalization* of human nature and of moral sentiments. What the new natural philosophy did was to offer a "scientific," or at least scientific, foundation to many of the insightful, but theoretical, social observations of early eighteenth-century moral thinkers. This new understanding of the dynamics of social historical change drawn from the life sciences was useful in addressing long-standing philosophical problems such as those of causality and design. David Hume, for example, in his examination of cause and effect, had intuited the answers, or at least the analogue, of vitalist natural philosophy when he asked rhetorically who it was that instructed a tree to grow as it did.²⁸¹ The answer was obvious to orthodox Christians, but the one Hume gave was that an *autonomous nature* of each species that directed its formation and development.

The Scottish Enlightenment exhibited little of the religious skepticism, with the notable exception of Hume, that marked the French Enlightenment. Enlightenment in Scotland came largely from within, not from without, establishment institutions as in France. The literati generally sought an incremental reform of, rather than a radical challenge to, existing social and political structures that might destabilize the very conditions allowing progress. Indeed, many

²⁸¹ Hume's own, often ambivalent, argument concerning design, see his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which was widely circulated in manuscript among his friends, but only published posthumously in 1779. Again, Hume and Buffon can be seen as working independently on similar philosophical problems often reached similar conclusions. Hume would acquire volumes of the *Histoire naturelle* only in the 1760s.

members of the Scottish Enlightenment served in the Kirk, and were part of what Richard Sher has called the Moderate literati.²⁸² Scots intellectuals recognized that their positions in the Kirk, as well as the universities and law courts, were largely a function of the social and political stability of Great Britain and the advances of Scotland as a member of the Union. The Moderates, often the target of Evangelical criticism, largely directed their focus upon the understanding and improvement of society in the present, rather than spiritual or doctrinal rigor in preparation for the hereafter.²⁸³ Yet the eighteenth-century vogue in natural history and philosophy was enjoyed even among many of the most religiously devout members of the literati, and the "book of nature" was seen as supplementing the book of God, and they sought to elaborate systems that refuted the conclusions of those accepting vitalist presuppositions.²⁸⁴

Ferguson, like Smith, suggested that society, along with systems of morality formed in them, emanated from an essential human character. In the process of pursuing the fulfillment of their basic needs, human beings engaged in activities that produced, but did not intend, social, cultural, and political forms and institutions. The perceived structure or *design* of moral and social order, traditionally

²⁸² See Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990).

²⁸³ For revisionist interpretation that argues for the importance of revealed religion in Scotland, see Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690-1805* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

²⁸⁴ Thomas Reid, who replaced Smith as chair in moral philosophy at Glasgow in 1764, was perhaps the most significant Scottish opponent of the moral conclusions derived from the natural sciences, especially those espoused by Hume and Smith. See *Thomas Reid on the Animal Creation: Papers Relating to the Life Sciences*, ed. Paul Wood (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

attributed as a gift of the divine to humankind, was rather the result of the spontaneously produced and autonomously directed internal forces. Like Smith, Ferguson ostensibly acknowledged a designer, but his writings and lectures largely emphasized that the instructor of humanity was "Nature" itself, which had given it its distinctive character or essential traits. That language, society, and the other civilizational forms or institutions grew directly out of human nature was most clearly expressed in the *Essay* by Ferguson's thought experiment of the colony of lost children.

The seminal attempts of Smith and Ferguson to set the moral sciences upon the same empirical footings as the natural sciences effectively elided the supernatural from their philosophical systems. Primary causes might be acknowledged, but could only be inferred, not empirically observed. Natural models of understanding human nature increasingly left little need for direct recourse to a supernatural, or to biblical, authority to support it. Thus, as Robert Wokler has noted, during the late eighteenth century God was "transported from the proscenium to the wings of scientific explanation."²⁸⁵ Regardless of the degree of religiosity of particular Scots thinkers, the idea of innate autonomous forces within the order of things as an explanatory model for the structure and development of organisms, natural and social. Whatever their source, the operation of the principles of life and motion were sufficient for Smith and Ferguson to explain the history of human progress, social and moral, as the result of *natural* principles.

²⁸⁵ Wokler, "Anthropology and Conjectural History," in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, eds., Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 32.

The moral or social implications of the innovations occurring within the midcentury, particularly French, natural sciences were both a challenge to and inspiration for enlightened theorists seeking to understand the human condition as it *was*, rather than *ought* to be. Further, the attempts of naturalists to catalogue the general physical and behavioral characteristics of humanity as part of the natural world were suggestive for the development of a universal model of social progress predicated upon common human nature. A proper understanding of that nature required moral theorists to ascertain the continuity and change of the human character. Thus, an early form of historical anthropology came to comprise much of Enlightenment moral thought during late 1750s through the 1770s. In a stadial conception of development, where human moral and civilizational differences were explained according to the historical position occupied by a particular people upon a universal trajectory, the earliest characteristics of the species were accessible through the study of "primitive" non-European societies. The Scots responded to this move signaled by Rousseau, but generally reached rather different conclusions. Ferguson undercut Rousseau's bifurcation of culture and nature, finding in tribal societies and the attributes of their inhabitants the aboriginal form of *civil* society. The common historical path of social institutions, cultural practices, and moral systems from the most rudimentary forms among "savages" and "barbarians" to the complex ones of the moderns in Europe. Ferguson located the affinities of human social organization in his study of contemporary tribal societies, which suggested the historical seeds of

the most polished modern societies. In a sense, then, every form of human society was a form of civil society.

The concern with understanding the sources of universal historical progress in Scottish Enlightenment thought exhibited a growing humanitarian concern for non-European peoples. For Ferguson the civilizational path of humanity was universal, and hence his anthropological thought reflected an egalitarianism toward "rude" nations with which Europeans were increasingly coming into contact. Though he appears at times to have accepted, or at least taught in his moral philosophy courses, Buffon's classification of the human species into six different races is absent from *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*.²⁸⁶ Yet, as suggested by the addition of a footnote to the 1773 edition of the *Essay*, he explicitly rejected the idea that the capacity for progress was a *hereditary* characteristic. Ferguson here was likely responding to those contemporary theorists who attempted to attribute fundamental differences or characteristics to peoples based upon the division of the world's peoples into "races." Dismissing the notion that a capacity for perfectibility was the inheritance of particular peoples, he wrote, "The attainments of the parent do not descend in the blood of his children, nor is the progress of man to be considered as a physical mutation of the species."²⁸⁷

In Ferguson's view, human perfectibility and the social forms that grew out of it were part of an incremental and progressive process that differed among peoples in degree, not in kind. Moreover,

²⁸⁶ See Chapter 4.

²⁸⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 10-11.

the human capacity for progress was not a biological endowment of particular groups, but was rather a universal characteristic of the entire species.²⁸⁸ Indeed, the most extensive elaboration of anthropological thought to that time, Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* set the template for the Scottish study of society founded in a historical anthropology of tribal and pastoral societies as the precursors of modern, commercial societies. As we will see in the next chapter, the Scottish Enlightenment anthropological thought was necessarily becoming bound up with an attempt to sketch out a theory of globalization that explained the unevenness of world civilizational progress and explored its implications of these patterns for the present and future.

Indeed, while the early section of the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* aimed to include an empirical study of "rude societies" as the foundation civil history, Ferguson's anthropological interests must also be read against not only European intellectual contexts, but also British geopolitical and imperial contexts. For the writing of the *Essay* took place against the backdrop of the Seven Years' War (1756-63) in which the hostilities provoked by imperial competition between the British and French occurred within a global theater.²⁸⁹ Indeed, this conflict also made attentive observers aware that the British Empire was increasingly becoming a central point of contact with and the source of knowledge about the world's inhabitants,

²⁸⁸ Here Ferguson was perhaps responding to the circulation of proto-evolutionary ideas inspired in part by Rousseau's work and developed in Scotland by Lord Monboddo. This was likely also a response to debates on the possibility of progress among non-European peoples, which will be taken up in Chapter 5.

²⁸⁹ Daniel A. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War 1754-1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

particularly those of the Americas and later of Asia. Many Scottish Enlightenment historical theorists, especially those with a significant interest in non-European societies, appear to have been profoundly aware of the effects of empire upon the formation of civil society, presciently recognizing the reciprocal relationship between self and other, center and periphery, that were coming to characterize globalization in the late eighteenth century. The impact of these processes, especially those of imperial expansion in the nonwestern world, were simultaneously being experienced both at home and abroad. This recognition of the interconnections between empire and civil society would form the subtext of much of the philosophical inquiry of the Scottish Enlightenment.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ See James Livesey, *Civil Society and Empire: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Global Sympathies and Provincial Sociabilities: Civil Society, Empire, and Moral Philosophy as Anthropology

The processes of globalization are increasingly being recognized in historical scholarship as central to the formation of European, and indeed, world, modernity. Though long in the making, the development of global networks of exchange experienced a vast acceleration during the early modern period that fundamentally shaped the course of social, economic, political, and intellectual history. Globalization and modernity may thus be seen as integrally related processes.¹ The historical formation of much early modern thought can be seen in part as a complex engagement with new information about the world and its peoples that both destabilized old paradigms and spurred new understandings of the natural and social worlds. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the cumulative experience of contact and exchange between Europe and the world formed one of the most important contexts for a broad rethinking of many areas of human

¹ Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 150-51.

knowledge that was *the Enlightenment*.² Globalization, however, remains an understudied aspect of Enlightenment studies, and, as Dorinda Outram noted as late as 2005, scholars of the eighteenth century “have yet to come to grips with the issues of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the creation of a global world.”³

It was among several of the more self-reflexive members of the Scottish Enlightenment that the processes of globalizing modernity as an object of study began to be incorporated as part of a science of man. The impetus to investigate what we now term globalization was

² I view the Enlightenment as a critical inquiry involving a set of intellectual, social, and political concerns rather than a common project involving particular outcomes. This inquiry sought to improve the human condition through a comprehensive rethinking of human nature and society. Enlightenment might take on differences valences in particular cultural contexts, however, those engaged in this critical inquiry generally regarded themselves as contributors to the international production of useful knowledge. Thus, the debate on whether Enlightenment is to be understood as singular or multiple has produced an extensive literature, and might be perhaps unsatisfying answered that it was both. For the most prominent proponent of multiple enlightenments, see John Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion* Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The responses to Pocock's view are too extensive to list here, but for several representative reviews, see Michael C. Carhart and John Robertson, “The Enlightenments of J.G.A. Pocock,” *Cromohs* 6 (2001) and Sankar Muthu, “Politics of Enlightened Histories,” *Political Theory* Vol. 31 2 (April 2003).

³ *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 8. This deficiency is increasingly being addressed in more recent historical scholarship. The following recent works, while by no means exhaustive, suggests this attempt, see especially, Sunil M. Agnani, *Hating Empire Properly: The Two Indies and the Limits of Enlightenment Anticolonialism* (Fordham University Press, 2013); Paul Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce: Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010); Harry Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World: Europe to the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Peter K. J. Park, *Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy: Racism and the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1839* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2014); Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires: An Eighteenth-Century History*; Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and, Gordon T. Stewart, *Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

precisely the dramatic social and economic changes to provincial Scottish society during the middle decades of the century resulting from Scotland's integration into British empire and access to its international markets through its Union with England in 1707. Significantly, this Union was made attractive precisely because of Scotland's own failed imperial venture, the financially disastrous Darien colony in Panama.⁴ Having lost its parliament under the terms of Union, Scotland was managed essentially as an English province from Westminster. Scotland's position within the British Empire was ambiguous, as it was neither fully colony nor fully autonomous nation-state. Nevertheless, by the 1740s Scotland had begun to experience the economic benefits of its participation in empire.⁵ The British Empire provided new employment for its surplus male population in the military and access of Scots merchants to lucrative international markets.⁶ The influx of wealth into the country contributed to improvements in the institutions of civil society and increased patronage of the arts and learning. This increasing wealth and social progress enlarged opportunities for the educated, emergent middle classes in the Kirk, law courts, and universities. By the 1760s and

⁴ See David Armitage, "The Scottish Vision of Empire: Intellectual Origins of the Darien Venture," in *A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the Union of 1707*, ed. John Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97-118.

⁵ See the collected essays on the relation of union, empire, and commerce, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Christopher A. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707-1830: Beyond Jacobitism, Towards Industrialisation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

⁶ On the role of empire in Scottish history, see T.M. Devine and John M. MacKenzie, eds., *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); T.M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire: 1600-1815* (London: Penguin, 2005). On commerce and society, see David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

1770s domestic prosperity in Scotland had become closely tied to British global monarchy.⁷

Scots intellectuals were acutely aware of the relationship between social and economic improvements of provincial society and membership in an expansive imperial polity. Scottish social philosophers engaged in sustained examination of the increasing interconnections between provincial societies and the world, and exhibited in their contributions to the human sciences a preoccupation with understanding the principles of human nature, social and economic organization, and historical change. Amelioration of the human condition as a pragmatic aim of the Scottish Enlightenment thus focused upon the relationship between human nature and society. At the same time, however, empire formed an underlying subtext of Scottish social theory. Increasingly from the 1760s, much of Scottish Enlightenment thought was at once a product of and contribution to the British Empire as its intellectuals attempted to negotiate a position for themselves and for Scotland within Britain, between the English imperial metropole and emergent British global empire.

Scottish moral philosophy, as Nicolas Phillipson observed, in part sought to help ordinary men and women lead happy, useful, and virtuous lives in the context of the accelerating social and economic change in a modern commercial society. If history was the natural process of peoples' development, and of the species itself, through the various stages of rudeness to refinement, then, understanding historical change would help form a society of happier men and women

⁷ Bruce P. Lenman, *Enlightenment and Change: Scotland 1746-1832* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) 63-4.

and better citizens. In Phillipson's view, the Scottish Enlightenment was concerned with the principles of propriety, virtue, and citizenship that made Scotland a Modern Athens in the eyes of much of the eighteenth-century world.⁸ As its capital city, Edinburgh, during Scotland's mid-century renaissance, was often referred to as the *Athens of the North*. It was not lost upon Scots intellectuals that just as Greece had provided much of the culture and learning for the Roman Empire, Scotland was particularly well situated to play an analogous role for the British Empire.

The promotion in Scotland of sociability and creation of institutions of civil society commensurate with those of England had long been a goal of Scots political and social leaders, especially in the years following the Union of 1707.⁹ However, in the wake of the Seven Years' War of 1757-1763, the investigation of the relation between empire and civil society perhaps acquired a greater sense of urgency among Scots thinkers as imperial competition enlarged the theatre of war to distant points of the globe.¹⁰ Although Scotland had benefited from access to England's domestic and international markets, unilateral English military engagements around the world often had a

⁸ While Phillipson has viewed the Union in 1707 of Scotland and England as the preeminent context of the Scottish Enlightenment, I emphasize here the consequence of the Union for a generation of Scots who took the United Kingdom as given, and emphasize rather the global context of the British Empire. See his still excellent synoptic account, "The Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Enlightenment in National Context* eds., Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 19-40.

⁹ On sociability in Scotland generally, see the essays in *Sociability and Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, eds. John Dwyer and Richard B. Scher (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1993); Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 31-78; 147-189.

¹⁰ See Daniel A. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War 1754-1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (London: Routledge, 2011).

direct impact upon Scottish trade. English international policy also had implications for Scottish provincial society. Moreover, the very successes against its European rivals produced anxiety regarding the possibility of Britain achieving "universal monarchy."¹¹ Since social and economic stability were regarded as requisites for progress, universal empire threatened not simply to forestall, but even reverse, progress.

Enlightened Scottish social theorists produced body of work in the moral or human sciences that in various ways delineated the interconnections among sociability, civil society, and empire. The field of political economy, for example, which emerged as an important component of a science of man, was particularly concerned with accounting for the workings of international economic and political forces and their implications for the nation-state.¹² The view of historical progress as unidirectional, a feature of eighteenth century thought often shared by our own, often obscures the insight of many enlightened Scots that the processes of globalization often involved the disintegration, as well as the integration, of international

¹¹ On the history of the concept of universal monarchy, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the Worlds: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). For an account of the crisis of empire, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 147-94.

¹² On this aspect of political economy, particularly in the Scottish case, see Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2010).

networks.¹³ Scotland's relatively recent economic improvement and the social and economic flux produced in provincial society from international trade, as well as imperial expansion, contributed to a recognition that progress might be neither constant nor inevitable.

If empire posed dangers to the progress of civil society, it had also contributed to its construction and the development of its institutions as a space for the citizen between the public and the private. As historian James Livesey has noted, whereas Scottish civic humanists had criticized England as the threat to Scotland, enlightened Scots criticized England as a threat to *Britain* and to the modern liberty it represented. British civil society was rather to be conceived as a space in which sympathetic relations of emotive and commercial exchange were conducted among its members. In this view, the idea of civil society and its institutions were developed by enlightened thinkers as a substitute for political life. The contributions of enlightened Scots to political theory were generally framed within their moral or social philosophies. Thus, there was in Scottish Enlightenment discourse, as Livesey argues, a sustained a critique of English imperialism that was "reabsorbed as a legitimating doctrine for a modern civil society."¹⁴

¹³ Osterhammel and Petersson, *Globalization*, 22-27. These global economic dynamics were recognized and examined by David Hume in the 1740s in essays such as "Of Money" and "Jealousy of Trade." Also, see Istvan Hont, "The 'rich country-poor country' debate in Scottish Political Economy," ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 271-316.

¹⁴ See "A Habitat for Hopeful Monsters: David Hume and the Scottish Theorists of Civil Society," in *Civil Society and Empire: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 169; 175. For a similar argument that connects French and Scottish discourse on civil society as compensation for the absence of political power, see Daniel Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Though often expressing their social and political ideas in the language of civic humanism and natural jurisprudence, many enlightened Scots were attempting not so much to perfect natural jurisprudence as to overcome it.¹⁵ The comparative historical approach of the contemporary natural sciences provoked a number of enlightened Scots to give the human sciences a new content and form for understanding the character of the human species and society.¹⁶ Moreover, the critique of empire as a "legitimizing doctrine" of Scottish social thought was at the same time integral to the philosophical anthropology that underpinned much of the science of man after midcentury.¹⁷ A universal empire was seen among many enlightened Scots as a threat both to the balance of power between nations and to the liberties exercised in civil society.¹⁸ The recent victories of Britain against the French in the Seven Years' War resulted in territorial gains in North America, the West Indies, and the Indian subcontinent incorporated a large number of subjects, including French-speaking Catholics and non-European peoples, into the British Empire. Empire was central to bringing Europe into contact with "rude" societies.

¹⁵ This position is also supported by Knud Haakonssen, "Natural Law and Moral Realism: The Scottish Synthesis," *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed., M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 61-62.

¹⁶ On the role of natural philosophy and history on the moral sciences, see Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁷ For a rather different interpretation of the anti-imperialist strand within European Enlightenment thought, see, for example, Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); see also the essays collected in *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, eds., Daniel Cary and Lynn Festa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ On the idea of universal monarchy and its relationship to modern and early modern European empire, see Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the Worlds, Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

The concern of Scottish social theorists with a comparative and historical investigation of non-European societies thus came precisely at a moment of growing awareness of globalization and its effective reduction of time and space. This moment was recognized and famously remarked upon by Edmund Burke in a letter to Scots historian William Robertson in the late 1770s, that, the "great map of mankind is unrolled at once, and there is no state or gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which we have not at the same moment under our view."¹⁹ The expansion of empire and international trade formed a linkage between center and periphery, which in the imagination of many enlightened thinkers, figuratively collapsed the intellectual and moral distance between them.²⁰ Indeed, it was precisely the simultaneous coexistence of these gradations of complexity in the world's societies that in part prompted many Enlightenment thinkers to investigate the natural historical causes of both the continuities and disparities of human progress. Keenly aware of the methodological and epistemological promise of the contemporary natural sciences, enlightened Scottish thinkers would increasingly reorient moral or social philosophy to a natural historical *system* capable of plausibly explaining global human and societal development, thereby laying the early foundations of the human sciences.

The Scottish context itself suggested to enlightened thinkers the need of explaining the reasons for inequalities in human social

¹⁹ 9 January 1777 letter from Edmund Burke to William Robertson, Edinburgh University Library, MS 3943, 17-18.

²⁰ On the concept of the periphery in Enlightenment thought, see Richard Butterwick, Simon Davies, and Gabriel Sánchez Espinosa, eds., *Peripheries of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008) and Peter H. Reill and Balazs A. Szelenyi, eds., *Cores, Peripheries, and Globalization* (New York and Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

progress. For the "gradations" of society were as evident *within* Great Britain as in Patagonia or the Cape of Good Hope. The literati of Edinburgh and Glasgow saw, for example, in the reports of tribal societies in the Americas and recent explorations of the South Pacific by European missionaries and explorers parallels with the "rude societies" of the Scottish Highlands. The Highland clans were set apart from the rest of Lowland Scotland and from England by an insular clan structure, economic stagnation, Catholic religion, and Jacobite politics. Unequal development of these societies often suggested an inherent inferiority that some used to justify British policy or unofficial mistreatment.²¹ The case of the Highlands with its seeming cultural and economic backwardness highlighted for Lowland intellectuals the need of understanding the conditions for and limits of progress.

Significantly, during the decades of the 1760s and 1770s, the historical anthropologies of the Scottish Enlightenment juxtaposed, if not always directly connected, discussions of non-European societies with those of empire and civil society. Importantly, anthropological inquiries into the "original" character of human nature and society served as a point of departure for the contemporary negotiation of increasingly complex and shifting social relations in modern European society. Foremost in these negotiations was the creation of sympathy, which Adam Smith explored extensively in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). I argue that the same theories of sympathetic

²¹ Policy of "polished" nations towards "rude" societies also included peoples with Great Britain, particularly those of the Scottish Highlands and of Ireland. On the political use of the past in the policy towards the Highland society, see Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of Anglo-British Identity, 1689-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

understanding, which aimed at promoting greater sociability within provincial civil society, were also employed in many of the same works of the most prominent Scottish theorists in the human sciences to promote sympathy *between* societies. This chapter examines the vicissitudes of the concept of sympathy, its adaptation and delineation by Adam Smith in the moral imagination, and the sympathetic cross-cultural understanding at once reflected and cultivated in the major works of Adam Ferguson and John Millar.

Ideas of Sympathy: From the Physical to Social Body

The idea of sympathy was of ancient origin but was revived and adapted during the eighteenth century first in the natural, and shortly thereafter, in the human sciences to describe or explain the operations of newly discovered or previously unnamed phenomena. Modern thinkers embracing this idea, like those of the ancient world, assumed that sympathies and antipathies, opposed but often complementary forces, underlay the workings of the natural and social worlds. Modern theorists often evoked the idea of sympathy to describe the effects of natural forces or energies, but seldom directly attributed these to a cause, or even defined the term clearly and unambiguously. Older ideas associated with sympathy continued to persist alongside the new formulations that eighteenth-century thinkers sought to give it, which, by the end of the century, perhaps ultimately undermined the concept.²² Still, for much of the century, in its various usages, sympathy functioned as a grounding assumption or accepted explanatory

²² For a survey of the ideas of sympathy, see Evelyn L. Forget, "Evocations of Sympathy: Sympathetic Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Physiology," *History of Political Economy* Vol. 35 (2003): 282-308.

mechanism that informed the understanding of both physical and social phenomena, and suggested parallels, if not always direct correspondences, between them.

The introduction of the concept of sympathy into the moral philosophy of Scotland was made by Francis Hutcheson in *An Inquiry into the Origins of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) and further developed in a rather different direction by David Hume in the second part of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). There was around the same time a revival of the idea of sympathy in Scottish and European medical sciences that offered new, physiological bases for the understanding of its effects.²³ The new medical sciences began to ground sympathy within the spontaneous and autonomous functions of the human body, using the idea of sympathy to refer to the correspondences or communication between the organs of the human body by some, as yet, unknown natural process. With the appointment of Robert Whytt as professor of medicine at Edinburgh in the 1740s, the nervous system became a prominent feature of medical discourse in Scotland, and ideas about the workings of the nervous system were suggestive in explaining the connection between mind and body. According to Christopher Lawrence, Whytt gave sympathy a structural and functional significance through the introduction of a "sentient principle" into human physiology. This principle received stimuli and directed the body to make the appropriate response. Prior to the appointment of Whytt, the Edinburgh medical school was dominated by men trained by Hermann Boerhaave at Leiden. Boerhaave had conceived the human body as working

²³ On the revival of the idea of sympathy in the European medical and life sciences, see Elizabeth A. Williams, *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 177, 259, 265, 269-71.

according to a mechanistic model of the physical sciences, viewing it essentially as a hydraulic machine. Aiming to transcend the limits of a mechanistic understanding of the relationship between mind-body, Whytt's model attributed the communication and coordination of the functions of the human body to the nervous system.²⁴

Whytt's work was seminal in the move of Scottish medical praxis away from a Cartesian, mechanistic understanding of human physiology, and over the course of the century, Edinburgh became a center of this new thought in the medical and life sciences. The work of Whytt and subsequent Edinburgh physiologists William Cullen, John Gregory, Alexander Monro built in various ways on the idea of a "sentient principle." Cullen, for instance, equally uncomfortable with a mechanistic model and the idea of a "sentient principle," which he thought perhaps too closely resembled the idea of the soul, and replaced it with what he termed a "vital principle."²⁵ Cullen conceived it as an etheric fluid in the nervous system that coordinated the bodily functions and transmitted sensation to the proper organs. Although there was disagreement on the nature and operation of the vital principle, it was generally regarded as operating unconsciously or spontaneously through sensation, without the need of introducing any outside directing principle or force. These ideas were of signal importance to the philosophical revisionism that took place from the 1750s onwards in the social thought of the Scottish Enlightenment.

²⁴ Christopher Lawrence, "The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, eds., Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (Beverly Hills: Sage Publishing, 1979), 25.

²⁵ William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1789).

Indeed, the operation of sympathy in medical discourse was easily transposed from the physical to the social body, and to explain the collective operations of individuals as part of a system or body-economy. New conceptions of matter and the vital forces inherent to it provided an analogue for the operation of moral or social forces. The physiological theories of the Edinburgh medical men provided a corollary, if not a physical foundation, for the theories of sympathy and sociability among their counterparts working in moral or social sciences. Medicine thus served as a major channel of vitalist ideas into broader eighteenth-century European intellectual discourse.²⁶ The seemingly natural formation and largely autonomous development of biological organisms was suggestive for theorists in the human sciences for a parallel understanding of the formation and development of social organisms.

Over the last half of the eighteenth century, the idea of a "vital principle" assumed a foundational status among many of the leading thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Still, the idea of an autonomous and inherent vital principle in matter operating outside of divine direction was viewed by many Scots as having materialist or atheistic implications. Though vital forces in nature might be reconcilable with a belief in divine creation, the explicit attribution of these forces to the design of the moral world was contested among the more religiously orthodox Scottish thinkers. Thus, there were seldom direct references to these forces as an explanatory model in most works of human science. Rather, those Scots who found

²⁶ Williams, *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism*, 4, 69, 89, 151, 158, 177, 180, 227, 264, 328.

the idea of a "vital principle" useful tended to characterize their work as *natural* history or philosophy. Given the increasingly wide dissemination of vitalist epistemological within the natural and life sciences from the 1740s onward, many of its grounding assumptions became commonplace among thinkers in the human sciences. Indeed, many enlightened thinkers otherwise hostile to the idea of autonomous forces conducting the workings of the human and natural worlds drew upon many of the ideas contained in the new natural philosophy. Even shorn of its vitalist associations, the idea of sympathy was widely embraced in the eighteenth century as the foundation of sociability, the "fellow-feeling" or benevolence that promoted social happiness and progress.²⁷

The most extensive treat of sympathy was given by Adam Smith, who was well acquainted with both French natural philosophy and Edinburgh and Glasgow physiologists, and whose thought was perhaps the most important conduit for the introduction of vitalist ideas into Scottish social thought.²⁸ His stadial framework of human historical development through four holistic stages can be seen as an analogue or translation of an epigenetic model of embryological development from the natural sciences to that of human society.²⁹ The stadial model was nevertheless widely disseminated and generally accepted among learned Scots otherwise unreceptive to the idea of a "sentient principle" in what had been defined by mechanical philosophy and traditional theology as inert matter. It is not entirely clear whether vitalist ideas

²⁷ Forget, "Evocations of Sympathy," 292.

²⁸ See Chapter 1.

²⁹ See Chapter 2.

primarily served as inspiration for Smith's stadial theory of progress or were deliberately obscured to avoid controversy. In any event, Smith, who appears to have regarded mind and body as integrally interconnected and inner forces within the human frame driving social progress, explicitly located the workings of sympathy in the faculty of the imagination.³⁰

As a product and process of the human imagination, sympathy could occur spontaneously or unconsciously, or deliberately and consciously cultivated. David Hume and Smith recognized that sociability, as well as threats to it such as violence provoked by, for example, religious enthusiasm, was the product less of reason than of the imagination. The operations of sympathy within a nation enabled the creation of concord between individuals, thereby creating the conditions for individual and collective progress possible. David Hume had explained the existence of "national characters" or cultures as the result of sympathy among circumscribed groups of people. Sympathetic exertions also occurred in cases where one nation sought to achieve parity with another, which Hume termed *emulation*.³¹ For Smith sympathy was ultimately the *precondition* for understanding the experience of others. The expansion of "fellow-feeling" among individuals was only possible when the moral situation of one was "brought home" to the other, that is, actively imagined and vicariously experienced.

³⁰ Smith examined the correspondence between the emotional and the physical through the power of the imagination most explicitly in his posthumously published essay "History of Astronomy" and in the first part of the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

³¹ Hume's view on the formation of culture was set forth in the essay "Of National Character" (1748). Hume's global antipathies, and those of other members of the Scottish Enlightenment, are examined in the following chapter.

Scholarly emphasis on the application of critical reason to empirical data in the Scottish Enlightenment has perhaps elided a full recognition of the centrality of the imagination in the production of human knowledge. Smith regarded philosophy as the "science of the connecting principles of nature," and it was the imagination that mediated between philosophical system and empirical realities. Systems of philosophy were to be assessed less for their absurdity or plausibility, than for "how far each of them was fitted to sooth the imagination, and to render the theatre of nature a more coherent, and therefore a more magnificent spectacle, than otherwise it would have appeared to be." Science and philosophy represented the "invisible chains which bind together all these disjointed objects, endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it...to that tone of tranquillity and composure, which is both most agreeable in itself, and most suitable to its nature."³²

No intellectual system, Smith noted, "how well soever in other respects supported, has ever been able to gain any general credit on the world, whose connecting principles were not such as were familiar to all mankind." The recognition of the simultaneous existence of the varied states of human social progress required a means of rendering them familiar to the European mind, as well as a coherent and magnificent "spectacle." Smith's four-stages theory of human social progress can be seen as "fitted to sooth the imagination" by introducing order into the "jarring and discordant appearances" of

³² Smith, "History of Astronomy," *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W.L.D. Wightman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 45-6.

human social organization and cultural practice. Yet for the "general credit of the world" it was enough to point to the contemporaneous existence of hunting-gathering, pastoral, agronomic, and commercial societies simply as different stages through which all humanity had or would pass. This model made each "gradation" or socio-historical stage legible and coherent, providing a system of "connecting principles" that rendered the "great map of mankind" a more coherent and magnificent spectacle to the European imagination.

The efforts of Scottish philosophers to revise the human sciences adequate to an enlarged knowledge of the world's societies required reframing social theory in part as a global theory. Understanding distant societies and their inhabitants, "distant" both in temporally and spatially from modern Europe, required an exercise of the imagination. In the context of increasing eighteenth-century European imperial and commercial expansion, many Scottish moral theorists recognized the need for and possibility of a universal extension of benevolence to "rude nations" of the world by "bringing [them] home" to the European imagination, which effectively reduced their unfamiliarity, and thus their *otherness*. I argue that the contributions of Adam Ferguson and John Millar to the human sciences during the 1760s and 1770s can be seen at once as exhibiting a model of universal benevolence towards the "rude nations" of the world and as actively attempting to cultivate it among their readers.

The Limits of Sympathy and Global Theory

As participant-observers of the effects of economic and social integration and disintegration of eighteenth-century globalization in

North Britain, many members of the Scottish Enlightenment variously theorized globalization as a part of its science of man. Recent scholarship has begun to recognize Hume, Smith, and others, as early globalization theorists.³³ The relationship between political economy and moral economy had been a particular concern of Adam Smith, who signaled both the possibilities and limitations of a universal expansion of human sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Indeed, the case for Smith as global theorist that connects his cosmopolitanism, moral theory, and global commerce has recently and compellingly been made by political theorist Fonna Forman-Barzilai.³⁴

In the view of Forman-Barzilai, Smith adopted the Stoic conception of human benevolence extending out from the self in concentric circles over time with the increasing familiarity of and proximity to others. The Stoic goal was to collapse these circles so that those peoples most distant might be treated with the same humanity generally reserved for those closest and most familiar to oneself. The individual achieving this utmost extension of benevolence was considered by the Stoics as a "citizen of the world," as a Cosmopolitan. Although Smith came to reject aspects of Stoic philosophy, he structured his discussion of human benevolence in Part

³³ Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective*; for an attempt to place Smith's global interests at the center of his political economy, see Emma Rothschild, "Global Commerce and the Question of Sovereignty in the Eighteenth-Century Provinces," *Modern Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2004): 3-25; Emma Rothschild, "The Atlantic Worlds of David Hume," eds., Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500-1830* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Fonna Forman-Barzilai, "Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist," *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* Vol. 14, No. 4 (2000): 391-419. For an extended examination of the topic, see also by the same author, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Ideas in Context) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

IV of the *Moral Sentiments* according to the Stoic model.³⁵ Smith rejected Stoic cosmopolitanism, Forman-Barzilai argues, precisely because the possibility of rationally expanding our duties beyond those proximate to us struck him as unrealistic, and because human affection was the result of "habitual sympathy" emerging over time in intimate contexts of human relatedness. Smith viewed "national prejudice" as mirrored in the condition of the individual in isolation or in the presence of "partial" spectators. He recognized the absence of a "neutral," "indifferent," and "impartial" power in the international sphere that might oversee and enforce universal compliance with international law. Neither were countries familiar enough with one another in the eighteenth century to sufficiently collapse the circles of sympathy necessary to ensure the rule of law among nations and peoples.³⁶

Smith's solution to the problem was what Forman-Barzilai calls his "commercial cosmopolitanism," the idea that a "commercial intercourse among nations could mitigate aggression and cultivate international peace without affective sympathy or external coercion." She contends that Smith developed his theory of commercial cosmopolitanism to "overcome the deficiencies of moral philosophy on a global scale. Thus, international commerce could produce cosmopolitan

³⁵ Thus, chapter I examined the order in which "Individuals are recommended by Nature to our care and attention;" chapter II extends outward to examine the in which "Societies" are so recommended; and chapter III extends the circle of sympathy further to consider "Universal Benevolence." Because of man's natural affection for the familiar, Smith concluded that, "the plan and system of Nature has sketched out for our conduct, seems to be altogether different from that of the Stoical philosophy." *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VII.ii.I.43.

³⁶ Forman-Barzilai, "Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist," 391-419.

ends without cosmopolitan intentions, balancing national wealth with global "virtue."³⁷

While the textual evidence supports this line of argument, I would suggest that it perhaps does not fully recognize Smith's critical attitude towards empire and commerce.³⁸ Forman-Barzilai argues that Smith regarded universal benevolence as an artificiality since it is a product of imagination.³⁹ Such an understanding, however, fails to recognize the importance Smith assigned to the imagination in the creation not only of sympathy, but also of science and philosophy. It is true he observed in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that, it "rarely happens...that our goodwill towards such distant countries can be exerted with much effect."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it is also true Smith found that, "Our good-will is circumscribed by no boundary; but may embrace the entirety of the universe." This global benevolence was achieved precisely through the imagination, for Smith asserted that, "We can not form the idea of any innocent and sensible being, whose happiness we should not desire, or to whose misery, *when distinctly brought home to the imagination*, we should not have some degree of aversion."⁴¹

International commerce might serve as a vehicle in expanding the circles of sympathy, but largely by creating familiarity of distant peoples with one another. As Hume had noted, both persons and things

³⁷ Forman-Barzilai, "Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist," 412-413.

³⁸ Sankar Muthu, "Adam Smith's Critique of International Trading Companies: Theorizing 'Globalization' in the Age of Enlightenment." *Political Theory* (2008): 185-212.

³⁹ Forman-Barzilai, "Adam Smith as Globalization Theorist," 399.

⁴⁰ *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.ii.30.

⁴¹ *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.ii.3.i. Emphasis added.

were in "continual fluctuation; and man, that lies at a distance from us, may, in a little time, become a familiar acquaintance."⁴² Given the "continual fluctuation" of global modernity, enlightened Scottish moral theorists recognized that distant and different peoples may be made familiar acquaintances to Europeans.⁴³ The influx of information about foreign peoples as a result commercial, missionary, and scientific contact between Europeans and the world during the previous century promised to reduce proximity and increase familiarization necessary to an expanded benevolence.

For Smith the imagination was, as Knud Haakonssen put it, that intellectual faculty that allowed mediation between nature and artifice, between binary events as well as of complex systems. Further, as Haakonssen suggests, society was the mirror in which one caught sight of oneself, morally speaking, through the exercise of the faculty of imagination.⁴⁴ The internalization of an impartial spectator in Smith's formulation required an act of sympathetic understanding whereby we become aware of ourselves, that is, both acquire self-consciousness and develop agency through social relationships with others. Sympathy thus created order in the flux of experience, including that of the various gradations existing between the world

⁴² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Part III, sec. I. Although Hume notoriously was less generous in his assessments of other ethnic groups, most notoriously of Africans, this attitude was not widely shared by enlightened Scots. See John Immerwahr, "Hume's Revised Racism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 3 (1993):481-486 and Aaron Garrett, "Hume's Revised Racism Revisited" *Hume Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 171-178.

⁴³ For a contrary reading of the literati and social diversity, see Christopher J. Berry, *The Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 74-90.

⁴⁴ Knud Haakonssen, Introduction to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xiii-xv.

societies. In the reconstruction of the human sciences into a coherent system encompassing the "great map of mankind," enlightened Scottish philosophers increasingly engaged with the question of what one caught sight of morally when the mirror was not one's own society.

Adam Ferguson on Civil Society, Global Empire, and the Anthropological Imagination

The first extensive elaboration of the anthropological turn in Scottish moral philosophy pioneered by Smith was that of Adam Ferguson in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). Written in large part during the Seven Years' War, in which British imperial ambitions were played out against France in multiple locales around the world, and published following British victories in that conflict that cleared the path to its imperial ascendancy, Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* juxtaposed examinations of non-European cultures, civil society, and empire, providing a template for subsequent works of the Scottish human sciences combining anthropology, social theory, and politics, which would also exert considerable influence on Continental thought.⁴⁵

Ferguson organized his *History of Civil Society* parallel to the stadial progression of human history, with each section dealing with the increasingly complex forms of social organization. It began with an investigation into the essential characteristics of the human

⁴⁵ On the German reception and "translation" of Scottish thought, and of Ferguson in particular, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). On the philosophical nexus between Scotland and France, see Alexander Broadie, *Agreeable Connexions: Scottish Enlightenment Links with France* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2013); and, Deidre Dawson and Pierre Morere eds., *Scotland and France in the Enlightenment* (Studies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland) (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2004).

species and delineate its "earliest" social and political institutions and ended with warnings of political corruption and slavery in modern commercial society. In the early sections "Of the General Characteristics of Human Nature" and "Of the History of Rude Nations," Ferguson drew extensively on the literature of travel for the ethnographic information it contained to locate in the "primitive" forms of social organization the "original" character of the human species. In the middle sections of the *Essay*, "Of the history of Policy and Arts" and "Of Consequences that result from the Advancement of Civil and Commercial arts" he applied these anthropological insights to understanding the threats to human social relations in modern commercial society. The final three sections of the *Essay*, "Of the Decline of Nations," and "Of Corruption and Political Slavery" sketched out a reworked civic republicanism as a bulwark against political complacency endemic to civil society from divisions of labor and unbounded empire. Throughout the latter part of his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* Ferguson's ostensible concern concentrated on the historical exemplar of the Roman Empire, however, it was the British Empire that formed the real subtext of the final part of the work.⁴⁶

Although modern Europeans were, as Ferguson put it, "apt to admire the empire of the Romans, as a model of national greatness and splendour," he found this greatness "ruinous to the virtue and the

⁴⁶ For a reading that challenges the conventional view of his civic republicanism, as well as explores the theme of the Roman past and European future, see Iain McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 115-154.

happiness of mankind."⁴⁷ Indeed, he warned of the threat to civil society from the "ruinous course of empire," that is, from the perpetual territorial enlargement necessary to maintain it. The military force required to keep distant provinces in subjection was regarded as easily translated into dictatorial powers that endangered the liberties of citizens in a free state. Although "those who are subdued are said to have lost their liberties," in the progress of conquest and "from the history of mankind," he asserted, "to conquer, or to be conquered, has appeared, in effect, the same."⁴⁸

Ferguson's critique of empire in the *Essay* was already prefigured in his discussions of "savage" and "barbarian" societies, just as the anthropological insights derived from this examination continued to resonant in its later discussion of empire. If Ferguson, the moral philosopher as natural historian, understood society as having a natural history, empire, too, appeared to follow a natural pattern of birth, growth, maturity, and decline. Thus, one nation in the process of its energies waning would likely be eclipsed by another whose were waxing. Historically, this process could be seen precisely in the case of the Roman Empire. It was, after all, barbarians who had overrun Rome. Britain's recent victories over the French in the Americas and the Indian subcontinent, had enlarged its empire and incorporated large numbers of indigeousness peoples into its dominions, and the

⁴⁷ Adam Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 60.

⁴⁸ In the preceding sentence, Ferguson observed that, in every state, the "freedom of its members depends on the balance and adjustment of its interior parts; and the existence of any such freedom among mankind, depends on the balance of nations." Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 257. Given this emphasis, Ferguson perhaps viewed international relations less as a rigid hierarchy than a sort of living, natural system subject to continual "balance and adjustment."

parallels with ancient Rome would not have been lost upon Ferguson or his contemporaries in 1767.⁴⁹

Yet Ferguson's apparent concern seemed to be less about the threat these recently incorporated indigenous peoples posed to empire than that posed to these peoples from European imperial and commercial expansion. Throughout his anthropological discussions, he was at pains to valorize the manners and conduct of tribal peoples. Ferguson, like many other eighteenth-century thinkers, viewed tribal societies as absent the social stratification that marked more "polished" societies. For all his acceptance of inequality in modern society, he nonetheless exhibited an egalitarianism when discussing "rude societies." For he noted that, among the native North Americans, "love of equality, and the love of justice, were originally the same." Further, he warned that, whoever "has forgotten that men were originally equal, easily degenerates into a slave; or in the capacity of master, is not to be trusted with the rights of his fellow-creatures."⁵⁰

Ferguson regarded antipathy as an equally important counterpart to sympathy in the human character, holding that oppositional energies were the productive source of personal, as well as social and historical, progress. Though he did not embrace a Smithian conception

⁴⁹ "The Romans extended their empire till they left no polished nation to be subdued, and found a frontier which was every where surrounded by fierce and barbarous tribes; they even pierced through uncultivated deserts, in order to remove to a greater distance the molestation of such troublesome neighbours, and in order to possess the avenues through which they feared their attacks. But the policy put the finishing hand to the internal corruption of the state. A few years of tranquillity were sufficient to make eve the government forget its danger; and in the cultivated province, prepared for the enemy, a tempting prize and an easy victory." Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 262.

⁵⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 87.

of sympathy or imagination, he clearly attempted in the *Essay* to engage in a sympathetic understanding of other cultures similar to that of Smith.⁵¹ In the absence of anthropological fieldwork, an exercise of imagination was a necessary part of his study of "rude societies," however, Ferguson gave the idea a somewhat different valence than Smith, defining the imagination rather as "the stating of Objects compleatly [sic] in all their circumstances & Qualities."⁵² Inspired by the ideas current in the natural sciences, particularly those of the French naturalist Buffon, he explicitly framed his moral philosophy as a natural history of the human species.⁵³

Of particular importance, both theoretically and empirically, for Ferguson was the comparative methodology pioneered earlier in the century in the accounts of several French Jesuit missionaries who had actually spent time among the peoples in North America. It was Joseph-François Lafitau, a Jesuit in French Canada, who, in his *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains, Comparées aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (1724), suggested parallels between ancient Europeans and modern North Americans. He was perhaps the first European writer to argue that the cultures of contemporary and ancient "tribal" peoples could illuminate one another.⁵⁴ Firsthand observations of the Iroquois in Canada

⁵¹ In their later years, Smith and Ferguson appear to have had general philosophical disagreements, perhaps regarding the issue of a Scottish militia and the benefits of the division of labor in commercial society. In any event, Ferguson would at times recommend Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* to his students in his lecture courses, yet at others, recommended the *Theory of Agreeable Sentiments* by Lévesque de Pouilly, as he did in his *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* (72), a handbook published in 1769 for use of the students in his moral philosophy course.

⁵² Ferguson, Moral philosophy lectures 27 Jan 1784, EUL Dc.1.84 (454).

⁵³ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁴ William Fenton and Elizabeth Moore, "Precursor of Scientific Anthropology," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 25 (1969): 175.

convinced Lafitau that the customs and manners of North Americans shared affinities with peoples on different continents and in past ages. However, as Britain took territorial possession of what had recently been French Canada, Ferguson did more than simply echo the conclusions of Jesuit missionaries, but rather deliberately represented the affinities between contemporary Americans and Europeans as common characteristics of the entire human species.

However, the epistemological assumptions informing the anthropological theories of enlightened Scots such as Ferguson separated them from the Jesuits. Whereas many Scottish thinkers around midcentury incorporated many of the ideas of the new natural philosophy, Lafitau's work operated firmly within a Cartesian framework.⁵⁵ His theological assumptions dictated his belief that all peoples had originally shared one religion, which had subsequently been lost during ancient migrations and the passage of time. Lafitau believed the existence of a "primitive monotheism," a belief in one true God among early humans, was confirmed by his observations of the religious practices of North Americans. He thus affirmed the existence of "degeneration" among the peoples of North America. His idea of degeneration differed from, though it might be interpreted as parallel to, the concept of physical degeneration promulgated by a number of eighteenth-century natural philosophers such as Cornelius de Pauw. In opposition to the notions of an original monotheism and degeneration, Smith and Hume had argued that the evidence indicated an inverse movement from an original polytheism to monotheism. The causes of

⁵⁵ On both the history and theoretical bases of Lafitau's ethnographic work, see the introduction by William Fenton and Elizabeth Moore to the first English translation of *Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1974), vliiii.

human difference were greatly debated, but Ferguson and Smith, following Buffon, located the source of differences between peoples in the complex interplay of human beings with their external circumstances, including but not limited to climate.⁵⁶

If Europeans were to "form a just notion of our progress from the cradle," he wrote, "we must have recourse to the nursery, and from the example of those who are still in the period of life...[and] take our representation of past manners, that cannot, in any other way, be recalled."⁵⁷ He thus drew upon a wide range of travel accounts, ancient and modern, to access characteristics of human beings living in the earliest and most simple forms of social organization otherwise lost to history.⁵⁸ This process of "observation" promised of yield insights into the history of Europeans. It also revealed the affinities between the past of European peoples and the present of non-European peoples generally perceived as *other*. This exposure of continuities effectively reduced the perceptual distance of Europeans that most believed separated them from "rude nations." Thus, the cultural and

⁵⁶ Degeneration in Buffon, for example, did not necessarily imply inherent inferiority, but rather a deviation from original forms of a species through various environmental factors. Buffon's ideas about degeneration were radically refashioned to apply to human beings, both indigenous peoples and Creoles, in the *New World* by Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Espèce Humaine. Avec une Dissertation sur l'Amérique & les Américains* (1771).

⁵⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 80.

⁵⁸ Among the most frequently cited works used to compare ancient and modern tribal peoples were Tacitus' *Ed moribus Germanorum*, Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Nations*, Pierre François Charlevoix's *Histoire et description général de la Nouvelle France*, and Joseph-François Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains, comparées aux moeurs des premiers temps*. Ferguson also made use Abulgaze Bahadur Chan's *Genealogical History of the Tartars*; Peter Kolben's *Description of the Cape of Good Hope*; Chardin's *Travels*; and, D'Arvieux's *History of the Wild Arabs*, as well as popular collections of travels narratives of Dampier and Rubruquis.

historical perspectivism displayed in the *Essay* also appears to have been its aim. For Ferguson the means to diminishing the *otherness* of tribal peoples was to bring them home to the European imagination through their systematic description "completely in all their circumstances & Qualities."

Ferguson's use of the trope of the "mirrour" of non-European societies indicates the conscious attempt to figuratively collapse the distance between ancient European and contemporary tribal peoples by offering modern Europeans a glimpse of the tribes from which *they* were descended.

The Romans might have found an image of their own ancestors, in the representations they have given of ours...It is in their [North Americans] present condition, that we behold, as in a mirrour, the features of our own progenitors; and from thence we are to draw our conclusions with respect to the influence of situations, in which we have reason to believe, our fathers were placed.⁵⁹

Rhetorically, the contemporary Briton was made to identify his ancestors, and by extension himself, with the indigenous peoples of America. Ferguson found little distinguishing the German or Briton in the "habits of his mind or body, in his manners or apprehensions, from an American" in similar conditions.⁶⁰

The Gauls and the Germans are come to our knowledge with the marks of a similar condition; and the inhabitants of Britain, at the time of the first Roman invasions, resembled, in many things, the present natives of North America: they were ignorant of agriculture; they painted their bodies; and used for cloathing, the skins of beasts.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 80.

⁶⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 80.

⁶¹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 75.

In a similar "situation" or mode of subsistence, the characteristics and practices of a people, whether in Europe or America, would be essentially the same. Such, Ferguson concluded, was the condition of all peoples in the most simple, and hence the earliest, stage of human progress. The present manner of living among contemporary peoples in the Americas and elsewhere was no different from that of ancient Europeans.

Ferguson used this shifting perspectivism between self and other to contextualize the manners and practices, as well as to valorize many admirable characteristics of tribal peoples, which were often reduced by Europeans to an irredeemable savagery. Drawing upon similar descriptions of the character of tribal peoples in Charlevoix, Lafitau, Tacitus, and Caesar, he shifted seamlessly here and in numerous other passages of the *Essay* between contemporary North Americans and the ancient Germans, effectively the sense of difference between them. The Romans, he argued, "have admitted, in the rudeness of their own ancestors, a system of virtues, which *all simple nations perhaps equally possess*; a contempt of riches, love of their country, patience of hardship, danger, and fatigue." Traits that traditionally had been esteemed or idealized in Western culture, and which were perhaps seen by Ferguson as jeopardized by the proliferation of wants and the means to satisfy them in commercial society.⁶² The ancient

⁶² Throughout *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* Ferguson valorized the virtues of tribal and clan societies, virtues he regarded as requisite to a republican form of government, as well as revived civic republicanism adequate to modern civil society. For an argument challenging earlier interpretation of Ferguson's civic republicanism, see McDaniel, *Adam Ferguson in the Scottish Enlightenment*; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 449-501. On the issue of the militia debate, see John Robertson, *Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue* (Edinburgh: John McDonald, 1985).

Romans, judging the Britons from a relative position of greater polish and sophistication, despite admitting the possession of these virtues among, Ferguson argued, had "vilified our ancestors for having perhaps only resembled their own; at least, in the defect of their arts, and in the neglect of conveniencies which those arts are employed to procure."⁶³

Ferguson, like Smith before him, regarded the proper assessment of civilizational progress as involving the development of a reflexive cultural perspectivism.⁶⁴ He ridiculed the Romans' sense of superiority, and, hence by extension, that of modern Europeans, over "rude" peoples, objecting that this sense was based on the vilification of another people precisely because of a resemblance to their *own* ancestors. How, then, could contemporary Britons disparage the American tribes for their savagery when bore an exact resemblance to their forbearers encountered by the Romans? That these virtues were "perhaps equally" the possession of *all* nations in simpler stages of social and technological development implied that moderns necessarily reevaluate the criteria by which they judged other peoples.

Throughout the *History of Civil Society* Ferguson wove a cautionary note warning of the risk of prematurely judging the potential of "rude nations." The Greeks and Romans, after all, had come to prominence only after a slow progression from a beginning as "unsettled tribes." All nations currently in possession of the arts and political establishments, he observed, had derived from a "feeble

⁶³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 78. My emphasis.

⁶⁴ See Larry Wolff, "Discovering Cultural Perspectivism: The Intellectual History of Anthropological Thought in the Age of Enlightenment," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* eds., Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 3-34.

original." The Greeks, Romans, Tartars, or Scythians had risen to historical prominence, he suggested, like the oak that "covered the field with its shade," but had once been a "feeble plant in the nursery...not to be distinguished from the weeds by which its early growth was restrained." Such appeared to Ferguson to have been the "commencement of history with all nations." The absence of the arts and sciences was an insufficient reason for devaluing the worth of an entire people. Europeans believed themselves "the supposed standards of politeness and civilization," he observed, "and where our own features do not appear, we apprehend, that there is nothing which deserves to be known." It was, he found,

probable that here...we are ill qualified, from our supposed knowledge of causes, to prognosticate effects, or to determine what must have been the properties and operations, even of our own nature, in the absence of those circumstances in which we have seen it engaged.⁶⁵

Absent certainty regarding human nature and causes of progress, Europeans should therefore exercise intellectual and moral humility in their judgments both of themselves and of other peoples.

Ferguson's mirroring of modern and tribal societies further rendered cultural practices historically relative. Europeans, he observed, were "generally at a loss to conceive how mankind can subsist under customs and manners extremely different from our own; and we are apt to exaggerate the misery of barbarous times, by an imagination of what we ourselves should suffer in a situation to which we are not accustomed." However, he objected that every age "hath its consolations, as well as its sufferings." In this he shared Adam

⁶⁵ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 74-5.

Smith's position that the moral sentiments of every people on the whole being appropriate to the particular context in which it subsisted. "Every condition is possessed of peculiar dignity," Ferguson asserted, "and points out a propriety of conduct."⁶⁶

In his "stating of Objects" in all their "circumstances" and "qualities" of tribal societies, Ferguson attempted to offer a more holistic and balanced representation of the character of their inhabitants. In his view, they exhibited virtues and vices not unlike those of commercial societies. He acknowledged, for instance, their addiction to gaming and superstitious beliefs, but noted that in these they were no different from Europeans. The retribution sought by the nation, canton, or family in cases of murder rendered "them cautious and circumspect, put them on their guard against their passions, and give to their ordinary deportment an air of phlegm and composure superior to what is possessed among polished nations." "Disorders, however, sometimes occur" among these nations, he found, "especially in times of debauch, when the immoderate use of intoxicating liquors, to which they are extremely addicted, suspends the ordinary caution of their demeanour, and inflaming their violent passions." Citing the authority of Charlevoix, Ferguson asserted that the peoples of North America were "more tender and more engaging, than what we profess in the ceremonial of polished societies."⁶⁷ On the whole, the Amerindians exhibited, according to travelers, a Stoic reserve, which Ferguson greatly admired, and manners that compared quite favorably with those of polished Europeans.

⁶⁶ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 70.

⁶⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 86.

While affirming inequality as natural to more complex forms of society, Ferguson praised the egalitarian manners exhibited among tribal societies. He noted that their "favourite maxim" was that, "no man is naturally indebted to another; that he is not, therefore, obliged to bear with any imposition, or unequal treatment." Tribal peoples, he asserted, had "discovered the foundation of justice, and observe its rules, with a steadiness and candour which no cultivation has found to improve."⁶⁸ He found that their political and military organization "resembled more the suggestion of instinct, than the invention of reason." The "policy" of the nations of the Americas was directed by the "suggestions of nature" and had been likewise "followed before on the banks of the Eurotas and the Tyber; and Lycurgus and Romulus found the model of their institutions where the member of every rude nation find the earliest model of uniting their talents, and combining their forces." Political and social structures were not the result not of reason or the superior intelligence of some original lawgiver, but of the instinctual character of human beings. Echoing Buffon's taxonomic web in which "imperceptible nuances" separated species, Ferguson observed that, the forms of government, and hence the stages of society, proceed from one to another by "easy transitions," for the "seeds of every form" were lodged "in human nature" and would "spring up and ripen with the season."⁶⁹

Ferguson could locate the embryonic forms of "civil society" among tribal peoples because these emanated from a universal human nature. Again, Ferguson used the mirroring of the revered Greek and

⁶⁸ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 87.

⁶⁹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 120.

Roman ancients and contemporary tribal peoples to point out the affinities in their characteristics and political arrangements. He suggested that, in the "happy, though informal, proceedings" of the tribal council of the peoples of the Americas, we may venture to say, we have found the origin of the senate, the executive power, and the assembly of the people." These were, as he noted, the very "institutions for which ancient legislators have been so much renowned."⁷⁰ Ideas such as the separation of powers, whether in ancient Rome or modern Europe, were to be attributable not to a sophisticated political theory, but in the superior promptings of human nature.

Ferguson acknowledged that in surveying the great map of mankind Europeans were "every where meet with nations on whom we bestow the appellations of barbarous or savage." Although mankind was fitted for almost every quarter of the globe, Ferguson held "political genius" to be a possession only of those living within the temperate zone, an area positioned between the extremity of the poles. Here he in part followed a number of eighteenth-century thinkers, most notably Montesquieu, who believed climate explained the existence of human physical, social, and political differences. As the earth contained "so great a variety of situation, climate, and soil," so the "manners of its inhabitants, exhibit all the diversities which arise from the unequal influence of the sun." Yet he also amended it with Buffon's belief that climate must also be "joined to a different nourishment and manner of life."⁷¹ Although the appearance of "political genius"

⁷⁰ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 83-4.

⁷¹ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 80-1.

was largely dependent upon the existence of temperate middle zone for its fruition, the "seeds" of progress were nonetheless latent in human nature.

World history had shown that the "most remarkable races of men...have been rude before they were polished." The present possession of the arts and sciences was no guarantee of civilizational attainment or genius, for many illustrious nations had "in some cases returned to rudeness again." Rather, the assessment of genius, Ferguson argued, was to be judged by a "vigour, a reach of capacity, and a sensibility of mind," which might "characterise as well the savage as the citizen."⁷² Therefore, it was necessary to "form some general conception of our species in its rude state," and thereby learn to distinguish "mere ignorance from dullness, and the want of arts from the want of capacity."⁷³ For Ferguson the task of the human sciences was to assess a *capacity* for, not merely the possession of, the arts of civilization among a people.

A comparative study of society, the historical forms of which were thought to be observable somewhere in the world, provided evidence that undermined many of the premises comprising that body of thought known as the natural law, which was mandated after midcentury as part of the curriculum in Scottish universities. Although use of the language of natural law theory continued to be employed by enlightened Scots thinkers, many of them gave it new content in part through sympathetic attempts to imagine the historical development of early human societies. Most Scots philosophical anthropologists

⁷² Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 107.

⁷³ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 83.

rejected the idea of a "state of nature." This idea was foundational in most of the iterations of the natural law tradition and had given renewed prominence by Rousseau in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*. Ferguson rejected, as had Smith and Hume, Rousseau's notion that man once existed as a mute and asocial animal. The "state of nature" was emblematic of natural jurisprudence in European thought among modern thinkers as different as Thomas Hobbes and Rousseau. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the importance of natural law theory had declined significantly, supplanted by other intellectual movements such as liberalism and positivism, which I would argue was perhaps in part attributable to the undermining of many of its tenants by the revisionism in the human sciences of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Whereas the natural lawyers tended to posit a "state of nature" as a observable condition existing in the Americas or the South Pacific, Ferguson located it *within* human beings. This radically revised the idea so that it was no longer a condition marking "rude" nations as *other*, rather he remade it as a characteristic of humanity. In one of the most memorable passages in the *History of Civil Society*, Ferguson asserted that the state of nature is "*here*; and it matter not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Megellan." Where there exists a "principle of progression" in the human subject, he concluded, "it appears improper to say, that he has quitted the state of his nature, when he has begun to proceed."⁷⁴ It was, rather, precisely in the

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 14. Emphasis added.

active nature of human beings and the exertion of powers on the world around them that made all situations *equally* natural.

Ferguson found that there was evidence of invention among both the "savage" and the citizen. In neither, he argued, was there "any permanent station, but a mere stage through which this travelling being is destined to pass." The various gradations of social organization around the world, and especially the morals and manners of their inhabitants, differed only in *degree*, but not, however, in kind. Indeed, Ferguson concluded from an examination of the historical record that the "latest efforts of human invention are but a continuation of certain devices which were practised in the earliest ages of the world, and in the rudest state of mankind."⁷⁵ How, then, was the contempt of Europeans for primitive societies, or further their subjugation, justified?

Ferguson's attitude towards the "rude nations," which were increasingly a part of the British Empire in the Americas, the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent, and even of the Scottish Highlands, was evident in his linkage of civil society and empire. Ferguson, who had grown up speaking Gaelic and served as chaplain to Royal Highland Regiment, the Black Watch, clearly identified with the martial ethos of both North Americans and Highland clans. The various editions of the *Essay* were published during the early years of the Highland clearances in which British government attempted to force the Highland clans into modernity, that is, "civilizing" them, eradicating the economic backwardness, religious Catholicism, and political Jacobitism that distinguished them from Lowlanders. For Ferguson, that military

⁷⁵ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 14.

ethos preserved in tribal or clan societies epitomized an active engagement in the social and political life that marked civic republicanism. Clearly his sympathies were with the "civic republican" whether at home or abroad. Yet he recognized the potential dangers to the liberties of both from the reach of empire.

Ferguson's implicit parallel between Rome and Britain throughout his *Essay* indicated an anxiety in eighteenth-century political thought concerning universal monarchy. He clearly equated the violence committed against the native inhabitants of the British Isles by the ancient Romans with that committed in the Americas and elsewhere by modern Europeans. While "savages" were addicted to war and "qualified by their stratagem and valour to throw terror into the armies of a more regular enemy," he also observed that, in the course of a continued struggle, tribal peoples "always yield to the superior arts, and the discipline of more civilized nations." Just as the Romans were able to overrun Gaul, Germany, and Britain in ancient times, Ferguson observed, at present Europeans were gaining a "growing ascendancy over the nations of Africa and America." Perhaps precisely because this was the case, Ferguson was critical of the "credit of a superiority which certain nations possess" and makes them "think that they have a claim to dominion." Later in the work, he juxtaposed contemporary conquests with that of the Romans of the British Isles, noting that, "even Caesar appears to have forgotten what were the passions, as well as the rights of mankind" when the Britons after sending him a "submissive message...pretended to fight for their liberties, and to

oppose his descent on their island."⁷⁶ Imperium required the submission of "barbarians" in its provinces and on its peripheries.

Significantly, in an age when many Britons perhaps identified Great Britain as the modern successor to the Roman Empire, Ferguson placed his reader in the position of identifying with his ancestors who had themselves been subjugated by a foreign empire. Nonetheless, he clearly foresaw the long-term prospects for indigenous peoples in their resistance against European military power. Ferguson fostered an anthropological imagination through the full representation of non-European others in their "circumstances" and "qualities." While he laid out no plan or suggested policy towards non-Europeans, Ferguson offered the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* effectively as an intervention into British, and European, imperial policy, he undoubtedly hoped might be efficacious in warning enlightened, and politically influential readers of the dangers of unbounded empire to provincial and global societies.

Ultimately, Ferguson perhaps considered the very sources for his anthropological research, the corpus of travel writing that enjoyed great popularity among the eighteenth-century reading public, as one of the surest means of creating familiarity with the peoples of the world and, in acknowledging that they occupied a different position on the arc of a common civilizational trajectory, might promote a universal benevolence capable of preventing the disruption, if not their outright destruction, of indigenous societies by Europeans. For Ferguson suggested that, "if ever an Arab clan shall become a civilized nation, or any American tribe escape the poison which is

⁷⁶ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 93-4.

administered by our traders of Europe, it may be from the *relations* of the present times, and the *descriptions* which are now given by travellers."⁷⁷ Indeed, and not only those of travelers, but also of enlightened philosophical anthropologists.

Bringing Global Sympathies Home: John Millar's Anthropology and/of Authority

Political theory in Scottish Enlightenment thought was seldom treated explicitly and extensively in the human sciences, David Hume excepted. Rather, political observations tended to be interspersed within broader discussions of society and history. Whatever liberal sentiments Scottish literati might hold in private, virtually none advocated revolutionary social or political change, at least in British society. For they recognized the intransigence of custom to change. Social and economic disruption threatened the stability requisite for progress. Still, fairly radical social and political implications were suggested in, if not derived from, their philosophical anthropologies. These investigations challenged traditional conceptions of what constituted the natural order of things. Ideas and practices considered as "natural" or "unnatural" were often exposed as customary, opening the possibility of change in the consciousness of their readers.⁷⁸

A notable case in which he philosophical anthropology extended beyond moral philosophy to challenge the bases of legal thought,

⁷⁷ Ferguson, *History of Civil Society*, 80. My emphasis.

⁷⁸ For an opposed interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment as part of a "Conservative" Enlightenment, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 209-268.

particularly the theories of divine right and natural law, occurred in the work of John Millar (1735-1801), professor of civil law at the University of Glasgow. Millar had studied with Smith at Glasgow in the 1740s. As one of Smith's most prominent students, he received support from his former mentor and from Lord Kames, whose children he had tutored, in his bid for the teaching position at Glasgow, which he held from 1761 to 1801. The historical anthropology established by Smith and Ferguson provided him with a model for his own inquiry into the foundations of social inequality and critical intervention into contemporary Scottish and Anglo-American political and legal, as well as moral, discourse.

Much of the scholarly work on Millar's thought has focused on its economic and material aspects, and it has often been regarded as an important precursor in the development of sociology and anticipating historical materialism.⁷⁹ Yet Millar understood the forms of political subordination, and of culture generally, as having their basis in human nature and developed his argument within the stadial framework of his mentor, Adam Smith.⁸⁰ His *Observations Concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* (1771) was a global survey of the manners and customs of various social and historical stages of progress undermined the notion that the authority of fathers, kings,

⁷⁹ An exemplar of this scholarship is that of William C. Lehmann, "John Millar, Historical Sociologist: Some Remarkable Anticipations of Modern Sociology," *British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 3, No. 1 (March 1952): 3-46.

⁸⁰ Millar would later write, "I am happy to acknowledge the obligations I feel myself under to this illustrious philosopher, by having, at an early period of life, had the benefit of hearing his lectures on the History of Civil Society, and of enjoying his unreserved conversation on the same subject.- The great Montesquieu pointed out the road. He was the Lord Bacon in this branch of philosophy. Dr. Smith is the Newton." Millar, *Historical view of the English Government*, Book ii. Chap. 10. Note.

husbands, and slave owners as founded in nature and, hence, transhistorical.⁸¹ The *Distinction of Ranks* was perhaps the most direct intervention among the Scots literati into contemporary British debates surrounding the rights of women and African slaves.

The aim of the *Distinction of Ranks* was, Millar wrote, "to illustrate the natural history of mankind," through the "obvious and common" improvements arising in society and showing the "influence of these upon the manners, the laws, and the government of a people."⁸² An inquiry into the manners and customs of other nations had, in his view, two main objectives. The observation of world systems of laws and their consequences permitted men first, to "reap advantage from the experience of others, and second, to make a selection of such institutions and modes of government as appear most worthy of being adopted." Such an investigation Millar considered both "useful and entertaining speculation" to enquire humanity embraced such an "amazing diversity" of laws in "different countries, and even of the same country at different periods."⁸³ In the search for the causes particular systems of laws and government, he argued, one must necessarily become acquainted with "circumstances" or "situation" that contributed to them before a proper notion of utility or practicability could be formed. Still, Millar clearly held that many

⁸¹ The work was retitled with the publication of its third edition of 1773 to *The Origin of The Distinction of Ranks. An Inquiry Into the Circumstances Which Give Rise to Influence and Authority, in the Different Members of Society.*

⁸² John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, ed. with an Introduction by Aaron Garrett (1806; Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press 1990), 89-90.

⁸³ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 83.

of the practices and institutions worthy of adoption were not exclusive to modern Europeans.

Millar acknowledged that when "we survey the present state of the globe, we find that, in many parts of it, the inhabitants are so destitute of culture, as to appear little above the condition of brute animals." Yet, like Adam Ferguson, he situated nations' progress on a common civilizational trajectory. For "when we peruse the remote history of polished nations," Millar found that, "we have seldom any difficulty in tracing them to a state of the *same* rudeness and barbarism."⁸⁴ He agreed with Adam Smith that the reason for this was that there existed in man a "disposition and capacity for improving his condition, by the exertion of which, he is carried on from one degree of advancement to another." The similarity of wants and capacities among human beings had "every where produced a remarkable uniformity in the several steps of his progression."⁸⁵

The advancement of the species was "natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude to civilized manners, the several stages of which are usually accompanied with peculiar laws and customs." While various "accidental causes" might contribute to the acceleration or retardation of that progress, Millar regarded the "character and genius" of every nation to be "nearly the same with that of every other in similar circumstances." Applying Hume's illustration of the casting of a biased die to determining cause in systems of law and government, he attributed the "greater part of the political system of any country" to the "combined influence of the

⁸⁴ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 83-9. My emphasis.

⁸⁵ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 84.

whole people, a variety of peculiar institutions." Here, like Smith and Hume, he rejected the notion of an original Lawgiver and the contract theory of the natural law tradition.⁸⁶ National character and manners were the result of "differences of situation, which have suggested different views and motives of action to the inhabitants of particular countries."⁸⁷ He questioned climatological theories in explaining different national characters. "How far these conjectures have any real foundation, it seems difficult to determine," as there were no "regular marks of that secret influence" of climate. Further, the ability to "discern the alterations in the state of the mind, which may possibly proceed from a different conformation of bodily organs" was unlikely given how little acquaintance there was at present with the structures of the human body. Rather, difference had another cause, the "existence of which is capable of being more clearly ascertained."⁸⁸ Rather, national characters were the result less of cultural emulation and more, as it were, the natural "life cycle" of societies, which ultimately were rooted in human nature.⁸⁹

What was perhaps most remarkable about the *Origin of Ranks*, beside taking as its subject the social and political subordination of women, children, citizens, and slaves, was the mix of liberal

⁸⁶ See Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of the Legislator: Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), on Millar specifically, 154-181.

⁸⁷ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 83-5.

⁸⁸ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 89.

⁸⁹ Thus, for example, in considering similarity of feudal policy of German-speaking nations, he observed that: "But it ought to be considered, that the growth and decay of society have, in some respects, a resemblance to each other; which, independent of imitation, is naturally productive of similar manners and customs." Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 228.

political thought and cultural perspectivism that Millar gave to both its form and content. Indeed, one historian of science has characterized Millar's *Origin of Ranks* as an "anomalous fusion between radical politics and historical relativism."⁹⁰

A historical anthropology of laws and government suggested that human societies, as well as the various forms of inequality present in them, were the result of a complex interplay of human needs and social contexts, rather than natural or divine law. Millar's global anthropology allowed for a rethinking of erroneous or unexamined assumptions upon which political and social subordination of various groups was predicated, revealing the forms of subordination as the result of convention or cultural construction rather than nature. He drew his evidence from a wide range of works of ancient and contemporary literature, especially travel writing. The cumulative effect of Millar's kaleidoscopic citation of the diverse manners and customs from around the world, past and present, implied that many of the differences among disparate cultural practices were largely relative. In both form and content of the *Origin of Ranks*, the proliferation and juxtaposition of varied manners and institutions illustrating human history effectively "naturalized" them.

Millar began his work with an examination of the fundamental institution of marriage and the position of women in the early stages of human society. Like most enlightenment thinkers, he viewed the

⁹⁰ Richard Olson, "Sex and Status in Scottish Enlightenment Social Science: John Millar and the Sociology of Gender Roles," *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (1998): 93.

improved treatment of women as a barometer of historical progress.⁹¹ While the condition of women in eighteenth-century European society had improved considerable, great social and political inequalities remained, especially in Britain where equal freedoms for women were denied under Scots and English common law. The treatment of women under the law in Scotland was particularly poor. Women were unable to enter into contracts except in connection with the household, and even then the right of a wife to purchase groceries could be repudiated by her husband. Lord Kames, had long campaigned to bring Scots law into line with the continental tradition of Roman law. Through his acquaintance with Kames and his study of Roman law, Millar was well aware that there was no subject that differed more between Roamn and Scots law than the legal rights of women.⁹² Millar's work suggested that, though they might be treated as virtual slaves by the male sex in most hunter-gatherer and pastoralist societies, women in many of these societies often possessed a rank *superior* to those in modern Europe.

Millar regarded the satisfaction of inherent human needs in large part as the motor of historical change.⁹³ Indeed, in his view the passions uniting the sexes had produced the "most wonderful variety of

⁹¹ For perhaps the most extensive treatment of gender in relation to the Scottish philosophical anthropology, see Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), especially chap. 5; and by the same author, "Race, Women, and Progress in the Late Enlightenment," in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, eds., Barbara Taylor and Sarah Knott (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 75-96.

⁹² Olson, "Sex and Status," 81-2.

⁹³ Michael Ignatieff, "John Millar and Individualism," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, eds., Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 318.

appearances, and, in different ages and countries," had "produced the greatest diversity of manners and customs."⁹⁴ Marriage, a "universal establishment," illustrated a variety in uniformity. From the textual historical record, it appeared to Millar that marriage had "taken its origin from the accidental and unforeseen exertions of parental affection" for their offspring. The "first inducements to marriage" among the "rude and barbarous inhabitants of the earth," he proposed, were the result of both utility and fashion. In a seeming preemptive move to circumvent religious criticism, Millar noted in a footnote that, "what is here said with regard to marriage, together with many other Remarks which follow concerning the manners of early nations, can only be applied to those who had lost all knowledge of the original institutions, which as the sacred scriptures inform us, were communicated to mankind by an extraordinary revelation from heaven."⁹⁵ Nonetheless, despite this caveat, his extensive citation of the of forms marriage practiced throughout the world paradoxically relativized its *naturalness*, undermining the Western European conception of the institution as transhistorical and divine gift.

Millar found this "wonderful variety" of cultural practices illustrated in a wide array of ancient and modern sources, including Charlevoix's *Journal historique de l'Amérique* and Lockman's *Travels of the Jesuits* (1762), Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages Américains*, Antonio de Ulloa's *A Voyage to South America*, and the *Modern Universal History*, as well as works of ancient writers, Strabo, Herodotus, Caesar, Tacitus, and especially the Old Testament, which he treated as

⁹⁴ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 93.

⁹⁵ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 96.

any other historical source. While offering numerous examples of "rude" societies where women were treated as absolute property of husbands, he nonetheless argued that this position was "not unsuitable to the mean condition in which they are placed, and to the numberless hardships and difficulties which they are obliged to encounter." The "refined taste of pleasure" and the "delicate distresses and enjoyments of love" that were "naturally derived" from the passions in a "civilized and enlightened age," he argued, would be "altogether misplaced in the breast of a savage." Indeed, such dispositions in the "savage" would "be exceedingly hurtful, by turning his attention from real wants, to the pursuit of imaginary, and...fantastical gratifications." Millar immediately juxtaposed the various forms of marriage to cultural practices even more unsettling to the eighteenth-century European imagination, torture and cannibalism. He assured his readers that cannibals would "entirely depart from their ordinary habits" if placed in a "different situation." For no matter "how poor and wretched soever the aspect of human nature in an early state, it contains the seeds of improvement, which, by long care and culture, are capable of being brought to maturity."⁹⁶ Millar thus shared with Smith a belief in the semi-normativity of cultural practices. Practices abhorrent to Europeans such as cannibalism were to be attributed not to an essential nature of particular peoples, but judged according to their appropriateness relative to their specific context or situation.

With regard to marriage, before its "complete establishment," the social position of women in "barbarous communities" was, Millar

⁹⁶ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 114.

asserted, superior to that of their counterparts in civilized societies. This elevated status enjoyed by women was documented in historical and contemporary travel accounts of "rude nations" having a matriarchal structure. He paid particular attention to that "unusual form of polygamy," or polyandry, the marriage of one woman to multiple husbands, which was "established at present on the coast of Malabar, as well as in some cantons of the Iroquois in North America." He pointed out, for example, that currently in Formosa, the man passes into his wife's family, while in the Ladrone Islands she is absolute mistress of the house who could dispose of the husband at will. The existence of such practices suggested that neither polyandry nor patriarchy were universal. Millar conceded that, while there was "no practice more inconsistent with the views and manners of a civilized nation, it has in all probability been adopted by many individuals, in every country where the inhabitants were unacquainted with the regular institution of marriage."⁹⁷ Though confirming "regular" marriage as best, that is, for those living in commercial society, his copious citation of diverse examples of marital forms suggested that a plurality of "natural" relations between the sexes was common throughout the world. That such societies existed where women were equal to men, or where men were subordinate to women, without descending into chaos or self-destruction, implied that such practices violated neither nature nor morality.

Millar's relativization of marriage and gender roles implied the relativization of paternalistic authority and the exclusion of women from political participation. The travel accounts offered abundant

⁹⁷ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 118-19.

examples of the high rank of women and their political participation typical of "rude" societies, even those which were not matrilineal societies. Millar specifically highlighted for his readers the case of the ancient Britons among whom "women were accustomed to vote in the public assemblies."⁹⁸ Although affirming that there was "no country in the world where the female sex is in general more neglected and despised" than North America, he also noted, on the authority of Charlevoix, that when women had reached a certain age of "influence and dignity," they were admit into their public councils, and even allowed "the privilege of being first called to give their opinion upon every subject of deliberation."⁹⁹ The abundance of historical and contemporary accounts of female political participation in tribal societies reflected poorly upon modern, "enlightened" European societies where women exercised virtually no political power.

If women played an active part in the collective decision-making process of tribal societies, then, Millar seemed to suggest, they might also plausibly exercise a similar role in the public, political life of modern commercial societies. Further, he suggested, citing Virgil, how the actual historical participation of women in military matters "might easily give rise to those fictions of a female republic, and of other circumstances equally marvelous." Though seemingly dismissive in the use of the words "fictions" and "marvelous," Millar nonetheless concluded that, "we can hardly suppose that they would have been propagated by so many authors, and have created such universal attention, had they been entirely destitute of

⁹⁸ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 120.

⁹⁹ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 119.

real foundation."¹⁰⁰ Significantly, if a *female republic* might have some basis in history, how then to deny a greater participation of women in the present public sphere?

Here Millar attempted to negotiate cultural anxieties regarding gender relations, destabilized conventional perspectives without engaging in open polemic. For in the eighteenth century politeness was considered a natural feminine virtue, but a trait to be cultivated in modern, male dominated, society. As Silvia Sebastiani has argued, these tensions engendered anxiety about the "feminization" of society.¹⁰¹ Millar suggested that in regard to the freedom and restraint placed upon female sexuality, the situations of rude and polished societies had, in a sense, come full circle. For he observed that, in "refined and polished nations there is the same free communication between the sexes as in the ages of rudeness and barbarism." The difference was that, in rude society, "women enjoy the most unbounded liberty, because it is thought of no consequence what use they shall make of it." In polished nations, he argued, women were "entitled to the same freedom, upon account of those agreeable qualities which they possess, and the rank and dignity which they hold as members of society."¹⁰²

Still, the natural tendency towards "great luxury and dissipation" in commercial society threatened to diminish the rank and dignity of women, "rendering them only subservient to the purposes of

¹⁰⁰ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 121-22.

¹⁰¹ Sebastiani, "'Race,' Women and Progress in the Scottish Enlightenment," 75-96.

¹⁰² Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 101.

animal enjoyment."¹⁰³ Though he conceded that the free intercourse of the sexes in commercial societies might produce "licentious and dissolute manners," Millar argued that the real danger of luxury for women was "preventing all refinement in their connection with the other sex." Millar echoed a common eighteenth-century Orientalist trope famously employed by Montesquieu in his *Persian Letters*, to problematize the relation between luxury and exclusion of women from the public sphere. The "voluptuousness of the Eastern nations," Millar suggested, arose from a "degree of advancement in the arts, joined, perhaps, to the effect of their climate, and the facility with which they able to procure subsistence, has introduced the practice of polygamy." Under such conditions, women were "reduced into a state of slavery and confinement" in the harem and seraglio. Such seclusion, Millar argued, reduced women to "such offices as render them incapable of contributing either to the population, or to the useful improvements of the country."¹⁰⁴ Thus, the exclusion of women from the public sphere and restriction to private life kept them an untapped resource of modern progress.

Millar's attitude towards modernity was closer to that of Smith and Hume, than to Ferguson, and appears to have had little fear that politeness and luxury would produce a "feminization" of commercial society. Citing the Middle Eastern seraglio to implicitly critique the diminished rank of women in European societies. The confinement of women to the private sphere epitomized by the seraglio had, he argued, "undoubtedly prevented the two sexes from improving the arts of

¹⁰³ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 151-52.

¹⁰⁴ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 152.

conversation, and from giving a polish to the expression of their thoughts and sentiments."¹⁰⁵ For Millar defined *refinement* as expanded *intellectual* intercourse between the sexes. Thinking and the exchange of ideas was largely conceived among the male members of the Scottish Enlightenment as a social activity.¹⁰⁶ The impediment to the engagement of women in this activity, he suggested, was precisely the limits placed upon a free and equal exchange between men and women, not an inherent lack of capacity among the latter.

Society had reached a stage of cultivation that allowed for a greater appreciation of women's talents, but at the same time these talents were also adapting to the changed conditions of social interaction. In commercial society, he argued, the pleasures "nature has grafted upon the love between the sexes" had become the "source of an elegant correspondence, and are likely to have a general influence upon the commerce of society." Increasingly, this "elegant correspondence" had produced a social world where women of "condition" were "universally admired and courted upon account of the agreeable qualities which they possess, and upon account of the amusement which their conversation affords...As they are introduced more into public life, they are led to cultivate those talents which are adapted to the intercourse of the world."¹⁰⁷ Problematizing the gap between rhetoric about and social reality of women, Millar's work challenged the self-satisfied sense among the male intellectual class that the condition

¹⁰⁵ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 96.

¹⁰⁶ On the centrality of thinking as a social or communal activity in the Scottish Enlightenment, see Alexander Broadie, *Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Berliinn), 14-25.

¹⁰⁷ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 150-51.

of women in Europe had reached the terminus point of social progress, and that reforms in education and the legal system were unnecessary.

Millar's deconstruction of the historical subordination of women both evoked and undermined eighteenth-century gender conventions. The cumulative effect of his prolific illustration of the "wonderful variety" of human morals and manners had the effect of destabilizing the assumed basis of these conventions in nature. For example, on the one hand, Millar noted that *woman* was possessed of "peculiar delicacy, and sensibility," capable of "securing the esteem and affection of her husband, by dividing his cares, by sharing his joys, and by soothing his misfortunes." On the other, in modern society, he argued, men had come to place a value on "those female accomplishments and virtues which have so much influence upon every species of improvement." Women thus became "neither the slaves, nor the idols of the other sex," but rather their "friends and companions."¹⁰⁸ These latter roles implied not only a greater social, but also an intellectual, equality of women with men. This being the case, he further implied a necessary education of women in nontraditional subjects so as to bring together, as Hume put it, the "learned and conversable" worlds.¹⁰⁹ Millar raised the question, though refrained from definitively answering, whether this supposed "delicacy" and "sensibility" of women derived from an "original constitution, or from her way of life." Yet, in the "wonderful variety" displayed in gender relations around the world, Millar problematized the strict attribution of gendered characteristics to either natural biological or sociocultural

¹⁰⁸ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 144.

¹⁰⁹ David Hume, "Of Essay-Writing," in *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1741-2), II: 1-8.

foundations, implying that it was more likely some complex interplay between them.

While a direct engagement with vitalist ideas is difficult to ascertain, Millar was likely exposed to them through his wide-ranging reading, which included contemporary natural philosophy.¹¹⁰ Millar's thought was certainly informed as a student by the instruction he received from Smith in jurisprudence, the underlying tenants of which were infused with vitalist principles. Vitalist ideas were by the 1770s generally diffused as a part of learned discourse of Scotland, and he was likely further acquainted with them through his colleagues at the University of Glasgow, William Cullen and Joseph Black.¹¹¹ The *Origin of Ranks* was clearly conceived as a natural history and predicated on Smith's four-stages model of historical progress. Whatever the case, Millar's problematization of the relationship between biology and culture was certainly consonant with the epistemological move of vitalists' attempts to transcend dichotomies of either-or in favor of a both-and position. Indeed, this was precisely what he did with the open-ended framing of the question of women's "sensibility."

¹¹⁰ In the biographical sketch attached to the fourth edition of the *Origin of Ranks* (1806), his nephew, John Craig wrote of Millar, "Nor was he ignorant of the physical sciences, although his knowledge of them rather embraced the different theories by which the facts are explained, than showed any very intimate acquaintance with the facts themselves. To the task of minute observation, or the drudgery of accurate experiment, he could not submit: but, wherever there was an appearance of system, his attention was roused...it almost engrossed his mind. It was thus, that, after Lavoisier published his astonishing experiments, and no less astonishing system built on these experiments, Mr. Millar, for a whole winter, thought of nothing but chemistry; and so great was his veneration for that philosopher, that no circumstance in the French Revolution struck him with so much horror, as the murder of the man whom he considered as the brightest ornament of the age." Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 58.

The historical relativism of Millar's anthropology underlined the necessity of reexamining the bases of human rights and their basis in the natural law tradition. Millar foregrounded familial rights to problematize the idea of natural rights. He followed Hume in critiquing Lockean natural rights, arguing that all rights were in some degree adventitious.¹¹² If, as it appeared from the historical evidence, mankind had always existed in society, then all rights were largely artificial and dependent upon particular needs in specific contexts. This was the case Millar made regarding the power of fathers over children. Where there was a "gradual advancement of a people in civilized manners, and their subjection to regular government," he noted, there was a "natural tendency to limit and restrain this primitive jurisdiction" of paternal authority.¹¹³

Although Millar noted that the idea of the divine right of kings to be "at this day, unworthy of serious refutation," he nonetheless attacked it, singling out Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680), which he seemed to regard as epitomizing a thoroughly discredited theory of political absolutism justified upon paternal authority. Millar suggested that such reasoning could only have gained credence among those in societies just beginning to reflect on the first principles of government. Both forms of paternalism, however, were untenable in the context of more complex forms of sociability and society. Millar demolished the analogical relationship between paternalism and absolutism in one fell swoop, observing that, to "say a king ought to

¹¹² See Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy*, chap. 5.

¹¹³ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 169.

enjoy absolute power because a father has enjoyed it, is to defend one system of oppression by the example of another."¹¹⁴

Millar extended his critique of paternalistic or absolutist authority in the final section of the *Origins of Ranks* to the question the right of masters over servants and to attack the African slave trade. The practice of slavery, he observed, had been "no sooner extinguished by the inhabitants in one quarter of the globe [Europe], than it was revived by the very same people in another [the Americas], where it has remained ever since, without being much regarded by the public, or exciting any effectual regulations in order to suppress it."¹¹⁵ Millar was well aware that much of the material, and hence, social progress in eighteenth-century Europe had been facilitated by a system of transatlantic trade connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Indeed, much of new wealth of Scotland from the 1760s through the 1780s was generated directly from the slave trade or indirectly from tobacco and sugar crops that were products of the plantation system.¹¹⁶ The enslavement of one people by another constituted at once an affront to and a blindspot in much enlightened political economy and social thought. Both Smith and Ferguson had inserted brief, but scathing, passages into their moral philosophies against the institution of slavery; Millar devoted nearly a quarter of the *Origin of Ranks* to an examination of the rights of African slaves.

¹¹⁴ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 175.

¹¹⁵ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 270.

¹¹⁶ On Scotland and transatlantic slavery, see T. M. Devine, ed. *Recovering Scotland's Slavery Past: The Caribbean Connection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

The persistence of slavery was entirely inconsistent with a modern, polite, and enlightened society, Millar argued, and he mobilized both moral sentiment and self-interest in the case against it. Maintaining a "wealthy and luxurious nation," he observed, required such a large number of slaves that they became "formidable to the state; and it is requisite that they should be...kept in the most utmost subjection, in order to prevent those desperate attempts to which they are frequently instigated in revenge of their sufferings." The harsh subjection necessary to maintain slavery threatened the very stability of slave societies and the very humanity of its inhabitants. This severity of discipline demoralized slaves and slave owners alike. The "shocking barbarity to which the negroes in our colonies are frequently exposed," Millar argued, was, in an age otherwise distinguished for its "humanity and politeness," "exhibited even by persons of the weaker sex." Slavery was so morally corrosive that it penetrated even into the private sphere and corrupted the sensibilities of women, the arbiters of politeness, who exhibited a barbarity towards black slaves not unlike that of the slave masters. In "whatever light we regard the institution of slavery, Millar concluded, "it appears equally inconvenient and pernicious."¹¹⁷

Millar attacked the institution of slavery as antithetical to the ideals of enlightened moral and political sentiments, highlighting the hypocrisy of British colonial slaveholders in America. For he found it a "curious spectacle to observe, that the same people who talk in a high strain of political liberty, and who consider the privilege of imposing their own taxes as one of the unalienable rights of mankind,

¹¹⁷ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 272; 254.

should make no scruple of reducing a great proportion of their fellow-creatures into circumstances by which they are not only deprived of property, but almost of every species of right."¹¹⁸ The paradox of institutional slavery for Millar was that "any species of slavery should still remain in the dominions of Great Britain, in which liberty is generally so well understood, and so highly valued."¹¹⁹

Recognizing the limits of moral persuasion, Millar followed Smith in encouraging voluntary abolition through an appeal to the economic self-interest of slaveholders. Millar argued, it "will be found that the work of a slave, who receives nothing but a bare subsistence, is really dearer than that of a free man, to whom constant wages are given in proportion to his industry."¹²⁰ For, he observed, "men will commonly exert more activity when they work for their own benefit, than when they are compelled to labour for the benefit merely of another." The introduction of personal liberty among former slaves would increase both personal and national happiness. For personal liberty had an "infallible tendency to render the inhabitants of a country more industrious; and, by producing greater plenty of provisions, must necessarily increase the populousness, as well as the strength and security of a nation."¹²¹ Abolition would thus be a patriotic act. All things considered, the costs of acquiring and maintaining slave labor argued against its continuance, and Millar

¹¹⁸ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 278.

¹¹⁹ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 275.

¹²⁰ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 252. Here Millar largely followed Smith's appeal to economic self-interest in an argument against slavery in the *Lectures in Jurisprudence* (A) iii.112-17, (B) 138, and in *Wealth of Nations*, III.ii.9.

¹²¹ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 272.

suggested that the wise slave owner would recognize that his interests could be advanced, rather than threatened, if slaves acquired personal liberty.

Historically, inequalities of wealth had gradually destroyed the social equality of earlier ages when there had been little distinction between the master and his servants. Millar sketched the argument, which Smith developed in *Wealth of Nations*, that although wealth and opulence created inequality, in commercial modernity it had also paradoxically contributed to the rise of the lower ranks in direct proportion to the undermining of monarchical and noble authority, and thus promised a general expansion of personal liberties. The advancement of commerce and the arts among polished Europeans, "together with the diffusion of knowledge, in the present age," had contributed to the "removal of many prejudices, and [had] been productive of enlarged opinions, both upon this [slavery] and upon a variety of other subjects."¹²² This simultaneous diffusion of knowledge and enlargement of opinion, and with it the creation of sympathies, Millar regarded as part of the current "revolution" of Enlightenment.

In human history, he asserted, there was "no revolution of greater importance to the happiness of society than this which we now had occasion to contemplate."¹²³ For Enlightenment, which consisted of the "laws and customs of the modern European nations...carried the advantages of liberty to a height which was never known in any other age or country." As evidence of this unfolding revolution, he focused in the remainder of the *Origin* on the outcomes of two recent British

¹²² Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 279.

¹²³ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 271.

legal cases brought by black slaves against their masters. The first was the 1772 case of James Somerset, a black man who had been brought into England by his Scots master, Charles Stewart. As Millar noted, it had "long been held, in Britain, that a negro-slave, imported into this country, obtained thereby many of the privileges of a free man."¹²⁴ Somerset had escaped while in England, but was recaptured, and Stewart attempted to send him to Jamaica in the attempt to recover his powers as master. The antislavery activist, Granville Sharpe convinced Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, and a Scot, to intervene. Mansfield eventually ruled in Somerset's favor and freed him.

The second case, brought by Joseph Knight against his master, John Wedderburn, in Scotland in 1774, Millar regarded as having even more important implications for the abolition of slavery. For the 1778 decision of this case found slavery to be incompatible with Scots law, and declared, "That the dominion assumed over this negro, under the law of Jamaica, being unjust, could not be supported in this country to any extent." Millar wrote that this decision had condemned "the slavery of the negroes in explicit terms, and, being the first opinion of that nature delivered by any court in the island, may be accounted an authentic testimony of the liberal sentiments entertained in the latter part of the eighteenth century."¹²⁵ And with this, Millar ended the *Origin of Ranks*. Given the general thrust of his work, he no doubt found it gratifying that this legal (and moral) precedent had been made in Scotland. This slow revolution in sentiments eventually resulted in the end of the British slave trade in 1807 and the

¹²⁴ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 280.

¹²⁵ Millar, *Origin of Ranks*, 280.

abolition of slavery itself within British dominions in 1833. The condemnation of slavery was undertaken by many in Britain on moral grounds, not only by the Scottish literati. Yet Millar's work was perhaps unique in the science of man not for its condemnation of the institution, but for its extended treatment of disempowered groups, subverting the bases employed to justify their subordination.¹²⁶

Indeed, it was unusual during the period to find a work by a white European male of middling rank devoted to an examination of the history of socially and politically marginalized groups, most notably women and people of color. Millar gave the *Origin of Ranks*, both in its form and content, a subversive, emancipatory undercurrent, making it one of the most liberal political works of the Scottish Enlightenment human sciences.¹²⁷ The historical and cultural perspectivism that Millar cultivated was typical of the natural historical approach of the late Scottish Enlightenment. Yet, in the extensive treatment of the "wonderful variety" of manners and morals, his work threatened a degree of epistemological subversion and relativism that was rare. So, too, was the interventionist nature of the *Origin of Ranks*, drawing upon the insights of natural history, of

¹²⁶ On the role of Scotland in the abolition of British transatlantic slave trade, see Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

¹²⁷ Millar was certainly one of the most progressive members of the Scottish Enlightenment. His political engagement can perhaps be seen in the anonymous tracts attributed to him and collected as *Letters of Crito, on the causes, objects, and consequences of the present war*. In the reactionary political climate of Britain while at war with France, Millar's nephew, John Craig, was circumspect in his biographical introduction to the 1806 edition of the *Origin of Ranks*. There Craig attempted to moderate and qualify Millar's political positions, and thereby re-situate them squarely within the mainstream of British patriotism and distance his uncle's legacy from a liberalism that was regarded by many at the turn of the century as having unleashed extreme and monstrous forms of social and political radicalism on the Continent.

anthropology, to destabilize the "natural laws" upon which legal and conventional forms of subordination were predicated.

Millar followed the anthropological approach to human sciences in which he had been initiated as a student at Glasgow through Smith's jurisprudential lectures. He attempted to reestablish the study of law as anthropological investigation, that is, as developing through a series of complex, holistic systems outlined in Smith's stadial theory. Viewed in this context, the natural foundation of rights and hence the authority that circumscribed individual rights was rendered relative and adventitious. Human beings need not be the slaves, figuratively or literally, to arbitrary interpretations or constructions of natural law. The value of a historical anthropology was that it familiarized his readers with the "wonderful variety" exhibited by humanity throughout the world that promoted an expansion of opinion and sympathetic sentiments. Millar recognized the global as constitutive of Enlightenment, and, as the Somerset and Knight cases indicated, of a revolution in human thought when the interconnections with the inhabitants of the global peripheries were "brought home" to British civil society.

Conclusion: From Natural Law to Natural History

At the close of the 1750s Adam Smith provided in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* the most extensive delineation of human sympathy. The discussions of the physiological workings of sympathy underway for some time in the medical and natural sciences perhaps served as impetus for Smith's theorization of sympathy as the interaction of psychological and social mechanisms. Though it was given differing

valences among Scottish moral theorists, over the course of 1760s and 1770s, sympathy or cultural perspectivism became both grounding assumption and general aim of the Scottish human sciences. In the face of rapid social and economic change in Scotland from the 1740s onward, its social philosophers sought to understand and promote the operations of sympathy as integral to social happiness and advancement. Moreover, many began to recognize in the global processes unfolding abroad, especially commercial and imperial ventures in the Americas and Asia, the linkages to change in provincial British society. The new human sciences increasingly taking philosophical anthropology as their point of departure served not only as a vehicle for promoting sympathetic understanding within societies, but also between them as international contact and interaction accelerated.

Recent historical scholarship has made the case for an understanding the development of civil society in the eighteenth century as compensation for the political marginalization of cultural and intellectual elites in early modern European monarchies.¹²⁸ Yet Scots thinkers such as Hume, Smith, Ferguson, Millar, among others, recognized that civil society was not simply formed in opposition to or isolation from empire. Rather, civil society and empire were inextricably bound with a burgeoning globalization. Indeed, facilitated by the Union with England, Scotland eagerly participated in empire and international trade, including the slave trade, which were all an impetus for and the subtext for the Scottish Enlightenment

¹²⁸ This case has been compelling made by Daniel Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty* and James Livesey, *Civil Society and Empire*.

investigations into the sociohistorical conditions and structures that promoted or retarded human progress.

Following the lead of the new natural sciences, enlightened Scots theorists sought the historical antecedents of progress in human nature through the study of non-European peoples. What perhaps began as an attempt to ascertain what constituted nature and what culture in the construction of human characteristics grew into a systematic elaboration of a body of thought that may properly be designated as anthropology *avant la lettre*. If the arc of human progress was situated within a common human nature, the simultaneous existence of the varied forms of social and political organization evident on the "great map of mankind" required a turn toward globalist theory to understand the uneven development of historical progress. Smith's stadial framework allowed a telescopic collapsing of past and present moral and social forms. Absolute difference was denied in a conception of society as passing through common epigenetic stages. Whatever the differences in their orientations or emphases, Smith, Ferguson, and Millar made familiarization with "rude nations" the prelude to the creation of a global anthropological imagination capable of recognizing the self in the other.

Though acknowledging obstacles to the universal extension of the circles of sympathy, Smith and Hume held that sympathy with those at great distance was nonetheless possible. Familiarization with the situation of others allowed for the natural operation of sympathies of those distant from one another spatially, or, as it were, temporally. The temporal "distance" being conceived as separating those peoples of the world living in "early" forms of social organization from those

"late" forms of modern Europe. The humanitarian impulse within their works is evident in the critique of the impact of European commerce and empire upon indigenous peoples, particularly in British North America. The processes of globalization were bound up with European modernity, and Enlightenment thought in Scotland was especially notable for its self-reflective attempts to incorporate the study of these processes and their effects into the human sciences.

Assessing the short- and long-term significance of Scottish global anthropology to historical developments is difficult to assess, yet it was certainly crucial to the cultural perspectivism that transformed Enlightenment social and moral philosophy.¹²⁹ Arguably, one of the most significant changes in European intellectual history effected by the reception of Scottish philosophical anthropology was a gradual and general reworking of natural law theory, which dominated the curriculum of eighteenth-century universities in Scotland. This body of thought was not a tradition in the sense of a coherent doctrine, but rather, as Knud Haakonssen has argued, an apparatus of juridical concepts in the service of fundamentally different philosophies, characterized as much by disputes as by conceptual coherence.¹³⁰ What investigations of "rude nations" nevertheless revealed was alternative knowledge or ethnographic evidence that undermined or contradicted concepts such as "natural man" and a "state of nature" that formed the bases of the natural law tradition. The natural history of the human species gradually and generally

¹²⁹ Larry Wolff, "Discovering Cultural Perspective."

¹³⁰ Knud Haakonssen, "Protestant Natural Law Theory," in *New Essays on the History of Autonomy: A Collection Honoring J. B. Schneewind*, eds. Natalie Brender and Larry Krasnoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 92.

supplanted natural law, which contained various iterations of contract theory, the origin of legal and religious systems, and the bases for international law.¹³¹

Adam Smith remodeled much of his early jurisprudence upon insights derived from an anthropological perspectivism that set him apart from the natural law tradition within which he is often seen as squarely situated.¹³² As Haakonssen has argued, what Smith did was to replace the metaphysical or theological basis of rights with a sociopsychological theory in which rights were to be understood in their social and historical contexts, and established a minimal and empirical content of rights applicable to any recognizably human form of life, and thus "natural" and "inalienable."¹³³ Smith's inculcation of his revisionist jurisprudence perhaps remained largely restricted to his students at Glasgow.¹³⁴ Indeed, a study of his and other students exposed to enlightened anthropology at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen and who went on to serve as functionaries of the British Empire would be well worth undertaking. Still, in representing the humanity of "rude nations," and their commonalities with "polished nations," in their published writings, Smith, Ferguson and Millar asserted an egalitarianism towards the indigenous peoples that made a

¹³¹ Though not focused on the Scottish Enlightenment, on the rethinking of international law during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³² See Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of the Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹³³ Haakonssen, "Protestant Natural Law Theory," 105.

¹³⁴ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), (A) I, 1-25 and (B) 5-11.

denial of their possession of at least minimal rights untenable. In the humanitarian and egalitarian thrust of their work, the philosophical anthropologists sought to exert influence upon how both the literate public and British policymakers understood their relationship to others, which would eventually reframe not only the economic, but also the moral and ethical, conduct of empire.

Scotland's participation in empire and international commerce provoked ambivalence among many of the literati, who as North Britons, were acutely aware of the dual-nature of globalization. Empire and trade were at once engines of progress and potential threats to civil liberties. British and European imperial competition and hegemony abroad also presented an actual threat to the indigenous inhabitants of those areas subjugated. There was no expectation, or perhaps even desire, for a wholesale dismantling of empire, but its critique was constitutive of much Scottish philosophical work during the 1760s and 1770s. Given the course of British empire in the nineteenth century, the literati's warnings of unbounded imperial expansion might be judged as having had limited efficacy. Still, Scottish moral theorists *cum* natural historians formulated as part of the human science an internal critique that revalued the relationship of Europe vis-à-vis the rest of the world, contesting the bases for cultural antipathies and cultivating human understanding. Scottish philosophical anthropology in providing a universal framework for the history of human nature and society evidence how the Enlightenment was product, as well as theorization, of early modern globalization.

Chapter 5

Anthropological Antipathies: Monboddo, Kames, and the Construction of Race in the Scottish Enlightenment

The two major dissenters to the mainstream of late eighteenth-century Scottish philosophical anthropology were the Edinburgh Court of Session judges, James Burnett (Lord Monboddo) and Henry Home (Lord Kames). In addition to their duties as jurists, both men were active members of the Edinburgh philosophical societies and both shared the broader intellectual interests of their fellow literati, including an interest in primitive non-European societies. Though the two men had an intellectually and personally antagonistic relationship, each developed systems of anthropological thought that differed markedly not only from that of the other, but also from the pioneering philosophical anthropologies of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar.¹ These "sympathetic anthropologists" brought a cross-cultural and historical perspectivism to the study of non-European and primitive peoples that was not entirely shared by either Monboddo or Kames. Yet, the anthropological antipathies of both thinkers were perhaps directed less toward the peoples of "primitive" societies, though this was often the case with the latter, than toward the egalitarianism and progressivism in the work of the more liberal

¹ The following reported exchange was emblematic of the antagonistic relationship between Kames and Monboddo. John Ramsay reported that when Kames asked if Monboddo had read his recently published *Elements of Criticism*, the latter replied, "I have not, my lord. You write a good deal faster than I am able to read." John Ramsay of Ochtertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. A. A. Allardyce, 2 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1888), I.356, n. 2.

members of the Scottish literati who foresaw a more unified global future.

Sharing many prejudices common to the age, Monboddo and Kames imagined a future in which the globe's inhabitants remained divided much as they had in the past and they sought to ground this in syntheses of disparate elements drawn from ancient and modern systems of thought. Both regarded the anthropological systems of their fellow Scots, as well as most modern naturalists, as insufficient to account for the differences, physical *and* cultural, existing between the peoples of the world. Both, though in different ways, regarded anatomical differences as a sign of divinely instituted natural divisions between the branches of the human species. Thus, their work at once reflected and contributed to a late eighteenth-century discourse in the natural and human sciences that was in the process of transforming "nations" into "races."² In their attempts to construct alternative understandings of human nature and history, both men privileged a category of physical-biological race as an explanatory model that gestured towards the physical anthropology of the nineteenth century.³

Their focus upon physical traits distinguishing peoples was framed by attempts in the natural sciences to establish a modern

² Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (New York: Palgrave, 2013). See also, Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996): 247-64.

³ This was the conclusion of Robert Wokler, "Apes and Races in the Scottish Enlightenment: Monboddo and Kames on the Nature of Man," in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh: John McDonald, 1988), 145-68.

classificatory system of organisms.⁴ As part of this, the boundaries between man and animal were rendered fluid in the wake of the discovery of the orangutan at the end of the seventeenth century. The Swedish naturalist Linnaeus, for instance, had put *Homo nocturnus* or *Homo sylvestris*, exemplified by the orangutan, under the same *Homo* genus. Although Edward Tyson had shown in a detailed anatomic comparison that the body and organs of apes were nearly identical to that of humans, he nonetheless had concluded that man was endowed with the faculty of the soul that elevated him above the animals. Tyson's analysis of the similarities between man and ape could also lend itself to alternate conclusions such as that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, namely, that the orangutan was a species of natural man who also had a soul.⁵ Conversely, Linnaeus's French counterpart, the Comte de Buffon attacked the Linnaean system of nomenclature as arbitrary, confusing humans with the animals. Buffon's taxonomy replaced an older idea of a hierarchical chain with a web of relations with man at its center wherein he was imbued with the faculty of speech and reason that elevated him far above the animals.

In his "Variétés dans l'espèce humaine" of the third volume of the *Histoire naturelle*, Buffon suggested that the physical differences between the peoples of the world exemplified the "imperceptible

⁴ Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae* (I edn., 1735). See Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999). On the conflict between the two naturalists, see Phillip R. Sloan, "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy," *Isis* 67 (1976): 356-75.

⁵ Edward Tyson, *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: Or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie Compared With That of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man*, 2 vols. (London: T. Bennet, 1699). See Robert Wokler, "Tyson, Buffon, and the Orangutan," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 155 (1976): 2301-19. On Rousseau, see Robert Wokler, "Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau's Anthropology Revisited," *Daedalus* Vol. 107 No. 3 (1978): 107-34.

nuances" existing in nature, nuances that implied a larger unity of the human species. Though both Buffon and the German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in his *De generis humani varietate native* (1775) were instrumental in introducing the idea of "races" into the study of humanity, both embraced monogenesis, the idea that the all people had descended from a common stock. Yet, despite believing in a common descent of all peoples and the unity of the human species, the use by Buffon and Blumenbach of the words "varieties" or "races" could be, and was, interpreted as supporting an opposite interpretation. Indeed, debates about the existence of different "races" opened the theoretical possibility of polygenesis, the idea that there had been multiple and separate origins of different species of humans.⁶

The terms monogenism and polygenism themselves would not be coined until the nineteenth century, but the concepts were consciously explored by eighteenth-century thinkers. In the eighteenth century, the term "race," according to Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), was synonymous with "a family ascendancy" or a "particular breed." It would not be until the next century when "race" came to refer to "a group of several tribes or peoples, forming a

⁶ Scotland followed the European trend during the 1770s of a comparative study of human anatomy and facial characteristics. John Anderson, a professor of Natural Philosophy at Glasgow, and John Hunter, a military physician and Royal Society member, largely followed the direction of Blumenbach's establishment of the principles of racial classification and modern physical anthropology. For Hunter and Blumenbach, see *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Inaugural Dissertation of John Hunter on the Varieties of Man* trans. and ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London: Longman for the Anthropological Society, 1865). Buffon identified six main human varieties: Samoyed, tartars, Hindus, blacks, Americans, and Europeans. Focused primarily on cranial proportions, sense organs, and teeth, Blumenbach originally began with four, later five, races: Caucasian (a term he coined), Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Blumenbach mentioned both Monboddo and Kames, and explicitly dismissed the latter's polygenist theses as invalidated by the evidence derived from a study of anatomical structures and a comparative analysis. See *The Anthropological Treatises*, 98 and 163-4.

different ethnic stock.”⁷ Both Monboddo and Kames were seminal in making the linkage between “family ascendancy” and ethnic stocks, as the family was writ large as the nation. Though a monogenist and a polygenist respectively, Monboddo and Kames gave primacy to the physical in explaining human moral and social history, paradoxically reducing temporal and spacial contingencies to a biological determinism. Writing against a strand of thought running from Montesquieu through Hume, they located what were termed “national characters” not within the interplay of a complex constellation of factors, but rather within perceived racial differences, that is, deeply within human biology itself.⁸

The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical Anthropology: Lord Monboddo on Minds, Matter, and Monkeys

The alternative anthropological model of James Burnett (1714-1799), Lord Monboddo, was based on rather different theoretical foundations and reached opposed conclusions as Smith and Ferguson in

⁷ Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3-16.

⁸ Despite the main thrust of his “Of National Characters” that cultural uniformity resulted from “moral causes” and the operations of sympathy, Hume expressed antipathies toward non-Europeans, most notoriously in the footnote on race in this essay, aligning him more with Lord Kames than his friend Adam Smith. Unlike Kames, Hume saw no need to produce an extended work of anthropology. Given his leanings toward a theory of polygenesis, he perhaps thought nothing was to be learned from a comparative study of tribal societies. On the historiographic *querelle* about Hume and racism, see Richard H. Popkin, “Hume’s Racism,” in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 251-66; Popkin, “Hume’s Racism Reconsidered,” in *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 64-75; John Immerwahr, “Hume’s Revised Racism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 481-86; Aaron Garrett, “Hume’s Revised Racism Revisited,” *Hume Studies* 26 (2000): 171-77; and, Garrett, “Hume’s ‘Original Difference’: Race, National Character and the Human Sciences,” *Eighteenth-Century Thought* 2 (2004): 127-52.

the 1760s.⁹ Monboddo, the author of two multivolume works, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92) and *Antient Metaphysics* (1779-99), laid out an extensive anthropological theory as an integral part of his work on language. An ardent Graecophile, Monboddo regarded modern philosophy as vastly inferior to that achieved by the ancients. Much like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of the few contemporary thinkers for whom he had any regard, Monboddo took part in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, even if his thinking often was not of the Enlightenment. Rousseau's natural historical speculations were highly suggestive for the direction of Monboddo's anthropological system, especially his preoccupation with the idea that some higher apes might be a species of humans.¹⁰ Monboddo incorporated it as a central pillar of his broader philosophical and linguistic work. Language was crucial to his project, for he believed that it allowed the greatest certainty in tracing human progress through time.¹¹ Proceeding from Rousseau's belief that language was not natural to early man, he objected that the absence of speech among the "Orang Outang," which otherwise so resembled man, was no reason to deny its humanity. Both Christian theology and Greek metaphysics informed his understanding of the natural philosophy and the history of the human species, as well as his eccentricities, set him apart from the natural historical model of

⁹ Given the eccentricities of his thought, which perhaps set him in opposition to much of the mainstream of Enlightenment thought, Monboddo has received less scholarly attention than other Scottish contemporaries. The sole monograph on his life and thought remains an intellectual biography of perhaps limited scholarly use, see E.L. Cloyd, *James Burnett, Lord Monboddo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹⁰ On the relationship to the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Monboddo and Rousseau," *Modern Philology* (1933): 275-96.

¹¹ *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: J. Balfour; London: T. Cadell, 1774), I.xii.154.

late eighteenth-century Scottish human sciences. Though his intellectual sources might have militated against it, he increasingly applied the idea of physical-biological race to distinguish the spiritual differences among peoples.

Given his inclusion of higher apes in the human species, Monboddo has often been credited with creating a proto-evolutionary theory anticipating Darwin.¹² While he affirmed that humans had "evolved" from animals through culture and education to become almost a new species, and recognized a close kinship between humans and apes, he appears not to have believed in evolution in any Darwinian sense or that apes were our direct ancestors. Though his preoccupation with the kinship of primates and humans was undoubtedly suggestive for nineteenth-century evolutionary theories, his anthropological thought, a synchronistic mix grounded in ancient metaphysics, Christian theology, and likely Hermetic thought, to his mind, precluded the possibility of processes such as evolution. Unlike many enlightened Scots, Monboddo understood the workings of both human and physical nature principally through the prism of ancient Greek philosophy. He was highly critical of "our modern philosophers," most notably Locke and Newton, for their failure to ground their theory and practice in the body of knowledge produced

¹² On Monboddo's place in the history of anthropology, see Alan Barnard, "Orang Outang and the Definition of Man: The Legacy of Lord Monboddo" in *Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology* ed. Han F. Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldán (London: Routledge, 1995), 95-112.

in ancient Greece.¹³ A belief in a theory of "evolution" as later developed by Darwin would have violated not only holy scripture, but also Aristotelian taxonomy and Platonic metaphysics.

Critical of contemporary natural philosophy and history, Monboddo maintained that the works of Aristotle and Plato offered a more certain foundation for understanding the natural and moral worlds. The definition of man had also been treated in a superior manner by Aristotle and the Peripatetic school than by the leading modern naturalists, Linnaeus and Buffon. What the systems of the modern natural philosophers did, Monboddo argued, was to compile the latest information on recently discovered species of animals, and peoples, unknown to Antiquity. Monboddo believed this new information, much of it gleaned from various travel accounts, would correct the spurious understandings of human nature found in modern philosophy. It would also confirm the systems of the ancients, supplementing rather than superseding them. The discovery or rediscovery of hitherto unknown or unacknowledged species of men and animals he was convinced existed, Monboddo believed, would at once radically reorganize the Great Chain

¹³ Monboddo continued into the 1790s to inveigh against the ideas of both Locke and Newton, the implications of which he regarded as materialist and atheist. His objection to Locke was that he had confounded the materials with what was made of those materials. In other words, Locke's philosophy had made the mind entirely dependent upon the body. Perceptions of sense, which are the source of our ideas, were confounded by Locke with the ideas themselves. Implicit in this was that the idea that intelligence proceeded from matter, which was the basis of scepticism. Rather, following ancient philosophy, Monboddo argued that mind "alone has activity, and the principle of motion in itself." *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.vii.88. He was similarly critical of Newton for not believing that Mind or Intelligence was the cause of motion, and he aligned Newton's theories with those of Epicurus and a *vis insita* [an innate force in matter]. "Such Philosophers may be called Materialists: but for my part I hold them to be Atheists, as much as Epicurus was, who was treated as such by the Antient Philosophers." Sir Isaac was, in Monboddo's opinion, an instance of how dangerous it was to "meddle" in philosophy when one was not classically educated! Unpublished manuscripts, National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), MS 24516.140.

of Being that extended from God to the lowest organisms and reaffirm its underlying metaphysical hierarchy.

The taxonomies of modern natural philosophy failed for Monboddo precisely as did modern physics, that is, because they were unsupported by metaphysics. The shortcoming of modern philosophers was that they "measure, compute, and collect facts of Natural History," but unlike the ancients, "know nothing but body[,] the Subject of the operations of Mind."¹⁴ However, while giving primacy to mind or spirit in any philosophy worthy of the name, Monboddo embraced neither a Cartesian dualism with its mechanistic understanding of the operations of matter, nor an Enlightenment vitalism that was at the heart of much of the new natural philosophy after midcentury, such as that of Buffon and many of the Edinburgh medical men. Monboddo's objection was that vitalism, which endowed matter with an inherent life force that spontaneously directed and animated it, blurred the distinctions between mind and matter, if not reducing mind to the latter. He confronted the challenge of the new natural philosophy by reinterpreting the idea of a vital principle in a manner consistent with both Platonic philosophy and Christian theology.

Nothing was to be known through consciousness other than its own existence, and so proof of the existence of the Deity could not be made *a priori*. Rather, Monboddo argued that proof was to be attained only through the senses and the natural world. Observation of the natural world, Monboddo admitted, clearly indicated that there existed a "Principle of vitality in every animal and vegetable Body." As there must also be "some general Principle of Vitality from which that is

¹⁴ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.21

derived," he argued that, for this "same reason, there must be a general Principle of Intelligence."¹⁵ If one accepted with the modern philosophers that "by Motion the whole Business of Nature is carried on," he suggested, "So it affords the most convincing Proof that Intelligence governs & [illegible] things in the Universe."¹⁶ In the same manner we know that there is "a Vitall Principle in us, & Observing the same Motions in other Animalls we conclude that there is the same Vitall Principle in them." At the same, Monboddo distinguished differing gradations of the vital principle dependent upon its operation in particular organisms. For "likewise we discover Life in the Vegetable but of a much inferior kind, & also a kind of Life in Bodies inorganised but still more inferior." These "Principles of Vitality are different from One another," he argued, "but in Degree more than in kind." Importantly, these "principles" were "all different in kind from Intelligence."¹⁷ His co-opting of vital life force from the natural historians was made consistent with his theological/metaphysical principles through its gradation according to its operations in a unified Chain of Being, while also maintaining a strict dualism that denied a movement of matter autonomous and independent of the Deity or "intelligence."

Monboddo considered his treatment of the principles of vitality and intelligence as consonant both with Platonic philosophy and Christian theology, for Platonism had been, in his estimation, a "most christian philosophy" and the philosophy of the "fathers of the

¹⁵ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.25

¹⁶ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.24.

¹⁷ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.25.

church." Vital and intelligent principles were equated with the "trinity" of both Platonic and Christian thought. Indeed, the principles of the universe were, he wrote, the "three Persons of the Trinity and matter," which formed the "famous Tetractys of the Pythagoreans" and the "doctrine of Timaeus the Locrian, who makes Matter and Idea the Principles of which Body [is] composed."¹⁸ Monboddo interpreted the "One grand Principle of Vitality" anchoring the Trinity as "the Father the Source of all Being from whom are derived not only the two Active Principles of Intelligence & Vitality, but [also] the Subject upon which they operate I mean Matter."¹⁹ In the natural world, he wrote, it was the "Species of Intelligence or Animall which are all immediately produced from the two grand Principles [Intelligence and Vitality]," that is, the Son and Holy Spirit. These two principles produced the "Several Species" from which came the individual. These species, he asserted, were "no other than the Ideas of Plato," which he "allways thought had a necessary connection with the Doctrine of the Trinity." The doctrine of Ideas, Monboddo had no doubt, had been learned by Plato in "Egypt or from the Books of the Pythagoreans, as he did the Doctrine of the Trinity." Furthermore, the "Ideas of Plato [were] necessary," he claimed, both "to a proper understanding of the truths of Christian dogma and "to make the Chain of Being Compleat."²⁰

Though ancient Egyptian civilization received scant attention in the philosophical anthropology of most enlightened Scots in the 1770s,

¹⁸ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.viii.136.

¹⁹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.26

²⁰ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.7-13.

Monboddo regarded it as the original source of the arts and sciences and the conduit through which they were disseminated to the rest of the world, an idea that was a hallmark of the Hermetic or esoteric tradition. Hence, the migration of the doctrines of Ideas and the Trinity from Egypt explained their presence not only in Plato, but also among the ancient Hebrews. For he found that, "there is in the Book of Genesis Something that looks as if Moses had believed in Ideas," and "therefore three Originall Causes of things" produced what "may be said to be the Operatif Causes in Nature, & these three together with the matter upon which they Operate constitute the whole Universe."²¹ That Moses had received his early education in Egypt, allowed Monboddo to link the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, early Judaic thought and later Christian *Logos*. The centrality of Egypt to his anthropology will be examined later, at present it is enough to note that Monboddo explained the affinity of ideas and practices across disparate nations was to be explained through direct contact or migration.

Denying conflict between Platonic Ideas and Christian theology, Monboddo's subdivision of the grand principle of intelligence threatened to introduce religious heterodoxy into his system. While affirming that "there is a Supreme Mind the Author and Governor of this Universe," he also claimed that, "there are other Minds in the universe, and there being no reason to doubt that these are minds [margin insertion: not only inferior to ours, but superior], filling up that great chasm that would otherwise be betwixt us and the supreme Mind, I am also persuaded that those superior Minds preside over

²¹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.27-9.

different parts of Nature."²² The direct operation upon matter was left to these subordinate "minds." "Our Modern Philosophers," he observed, "however even such of them as are Theists, do not approve of dividing the Divinity in this manner into three, but derive all particular Intelligences & Vitall natures from God immediately." This division of the Divinity was to be found confirmed in the arrangement of nature itself, and the modern philosophers "do not appear to me to consider Sufficiently the wonderfull connection & Subordination in Nature, which hangs alltogether by a Chain of which no Link is wanting."²³ For Monboddo there could be no "missing links" in the hierarchy of either the physical or metaphysical worlds, and this belief informed his efforts "to make the Chain of Being Compleat."

Completion of the Chain would in turn allow a definition of man quite different from that offered by modern natural and moral philosophy. Again, the ancient Greeks offered a superior definition of man as defined by reason and intelligence, and perhaps human form itself. Monboddo challenged their respective definitions of man in the two major systems of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, Linnaeus's *Systema naturae* and Buffon's multi-volume *Histoire naturelle*. Although speech was not essential to Linnaeus's definition of man, Monboddo contested his classification of the orangutan or the Troglodyte as occupying the same genus of man, but not the same species. According to the ancients, man was not a genus, but a species of the genus animal, below which there was nothing but individuals.²⁴ Though

²² Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.71.

²³ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.26-7.

²⁴ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iv.307.

Monboddo regarded Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* as the "fullest collection of the kind," he also the French naturalist as a producer of systems to which he accommodated his facts. Monboddo was especially critical of Buffon's claim that the faculty of speech was a fundamental characteristic of human nature.

Monboddo objected that modern systems of thought were flawed precisely because they misunderstood the fundamental structure of nature and the position man occupied within it. Indeed, a "modest inquirer into nature will set no other bound to the variety of her productions, than that which Aristotle has set, in that famous maxim of his, adopted, I see, by Mr Buffon," but insufficiently applied: "Every thing, that can exist, does exist; and every thing can exist, that does not imply a contradiction."²⁵ Therefore, Monboddo regarded Buffon's greatest failing to be his metaphysics, for the French naturalist had posited the possibility of *leaps* occurring in nature. As the variety of nature's production was unbounded, he concluded that there was no necessity for the occurrence of leaps or even the possibility for the existence of absent links within the Chain of Being.

Monboddo found authorization for his peculiar anthropology in the Aristotelian axiom and the ancients' criterion of a similarity of physical form. This included the inclusion of the "Ouran Outang" in the human species. Since nature was unbounded any existing gaps between currently recognized species in the Chain of Being might be filled by a variety of creatures that *could* exist. Travelers' reports of giants in Patagonia, mermaids in the North Atlantic, and men with

²⁵ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iii.269.

tails in Java suggested to Monboddo that there existed forms of life yet unrecognized among modern naturalists. He continually sought out information from a network of correspondents for verified reports of creatures supposedly belonging to mythological and folkloric traditions. Monboddo, who lived in a polity with an extensive maritime tradition, was particularly eager to acquire legal affidavits from reputable mariners claiming to have seen the *kraken*, an enormous levithan-like octopus, which was purportedly often mistaken for a small island.²⁶ He attributed the incredulity of his contemporaries to the variety of nature to the "dogmatical spirit of the age in which we live." Indeed, he derisively claimed, "many will not believe that there is in our species the common variation of great and small." The variations of size, color, and form would, he wrote, be admitted by all except for a "number of those philosophers who set bounds to Omnipotence, and pronounce decisively, that man with such variations cannot exist."²⁷

Monboddo clearly had Linnaeus and Buffon in mind, whom he referenced in a footnote, asserting that, "Those who have not studied the variety of nature in animals, will think this story of men with

²⁶ Perhaps based originally on sightings of large squid by Norwegian sailors in the Greenland Sea, the *kraken* subsequently acquired an enormous size, and was often reportedly mistaken for a small island. Linnaeus classified the *kraken* as a cephalopod, though, having never seen one himself, he would exclude it from later, revised editions of the *Systema Naturae*. Monboddo cited evidence of the existence of the *kraken* in the bishop of Bergen, Erik Ludvigsen Pontoppidan's 1752-3 natural history of Norway and François Valentijn's 1727 history of the Indies. Among his papers are numerous letters exchanged with various correspondents discussing eye witness accounts of the capture and description of Sea men or "Marmayds." Included among his papers is a signed affidavit of John Blaine concerning an August 1773 citing of a *kraken* by Robert Jamieson, captain of a herring boat, and his crew, which defended the veracity and plausibility of the story. See especially, NLS, MS. 24537.i-vi; 12-24.

²⁷ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iii.267.

tails, very ridiculous...But the philosopher...will not reject it, at once, as a thing incredible, that there should be such a variety in our species, as well as in the simian tribe, which is so near of kin to us."²⁸ That "there are men with tails, such as the ancients gave to their satyrs," he claimed, "is a fact so well attested that I think it cannot be doubted."²⁹ Though many Scots literati viewed Monboddo and his work as eccentric, he believed that the great variety of nature virtually demanded the existence of the *kraken*, mermaids, satyrs, and men with tails, and thus regarded his system as soundly grounded in science, philosophy, and religion.

Monboddo dissented from the position of most Enlightenment thinkers in his rejection of sociability and speech as primary human characteristics. However, he had to qualify his acceptance of the definition of man given by the ancient Greek philosophers. While they "allow man to be a social Animal," he argued that, "it is only in the sense that we say a Horse is a social Animal [margin insertion: that is an Animal who loves to herd with those of his Species], not as the Bees or such like Animals are social, who cannot subsist without a kind of State, or joint œconomy." While the species might receive pleasure from society, it was unnecessary for its existence, and was rather the cause of most discontents. Even the "most ancient Philosophers in Greece, I mean the Mythologists," Monboddo argued, "appear to have known this; and also, that Society is the genuine

²⁸ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iii.262.

²⁹ *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iii.267. This variation was corroborated not only by occurrences in the distant past or isolated countries, but also by local evidence, for he claimed to possess contemporary "legal evidence, by witnesses yet living, of a man in Inverness...who had a tail, about half a foot long; which he carefully concealed during his life; but was discovered after his death."

source of the infinite Evils that afflict the human Species." The Golden Age, which the Greeks had described as "the happiest period of our Race," Monboddo believed was none "other than the first Stage of human nature" in which man lived "truelly natural without Society or Property."³⁰ Philosophy and religion both gave assurances that the present nature of man was not of that more perfect and former state.³¹ Monboddo also shared with Rousseau the belief that human nature had undergone a precipitous decline in the modern age, but was perhaps more inclined to view philosophy, at least of an ancient Grecian variety, and the life of the mind as some compensation for its miseries.³²

Yet, whereas Rousseau and many enlightened Scots primarily sought the "original" of human nature among the tribal peoples of the West Indies and the Americas, Monboddo seems to have thought them too far advanced to provide much insight into the earliest humans.³³ Rather, he

³⁰ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.4-5.

³¹ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.viii.109.

³² Echoing Rousseau, Monboddo described modern society thus: "In short from one Degree of Corruption to another things came to the State in which you now see them, when the Poor & the Many are the Slaves of the Rich and few, wearing out their Lives in ministering to that Luxury and Vanity; while the Rich again are still more miserable by that very Luxury & Vanity & all those Disorders both of Body & Mind which are the necessary Consequence of that unnatural State of Life.

"In this Situation of Affairs, there is no other Remedy left for human misery but Philosophy; and as but very few from their Genius or Condition of Life can apply this Remedy, the Evil is still very great; so that I agree so far with Mr. Rousseau, that I think upon the whole Men have made no good Bargain when they exchanged their Accorns, for [insertion: the Pleasures & indulgences of Social Life even] with Philosophy to boot." Unpublished Sketches of Man, NLS, MS.24528.6-7.

³³ Given the degree of interaction between the Old and New Worlds during the previous three hundred years, it was not the Americas where mankind was to be found living in a natural state, but rather in the South Sea and unfrequented areas of the Atlantic. Further, the great extent of the interior of Africa, Monboddo believed, promised to disclose the "several steps of the human progression," and "perhaps all the varieties of the species discovered." *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iii.253.

was convinced that because of the close kinship of the human and "simian races," the "Ouran Outang," a term used indiscriminately to encompass several larger primates, perhaps offered a greater understanding of a stage of existence when human beings lived in society but without speech. If "I make him [the orangutan] out to be man," Monboddo claimed, "I prove, by fact as well as argument, this fundamental proposition, upon which my whole theory hangs, That language is not natural to man. And, secondly, I likewise prove that the natural state of man, such as I suppose it, is not a mere hypothesis, but a state which at present actually exists."³⁴

Orangutans, not Amerindians, were the real occupants of this state of nature. Their physical similarity to humans, as well as the ability to learn human behaviors, convinced Monboddo that they potentially filled a chasm between humans and other animals created by modern naturalists. Orangutans, he believed, erroneously, lived in "nations" and, though anatomically capable, did not yet speak. Given the physical and behavioral similarity of orangutans to humans, he unreservedly asserted their humanity in the first edition of *the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773). Unaware, however, that the anatomical differences between the humans and apes had been detailed by Tyson in the late seventeenth century, Monboddo quickly corrected this embarrassment in the second edition after several learned acquaintances alerted him to these differences.³⁵

³⁴ Monboddo, *Origin and Progress of Language*, II.v.360.

³⁵ See Robert Wokler, "Apes and Races in the Scottish Enlightenment" Monboddo and Kames on the Nature of Man," in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Peter Jones (Edinburgh: John Donald), 147-52; and "The Ape Debates in Enlightenment Anthropology," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 192 (1980): 1164-75.

Nevertheless, while moderating his claims somewhat in the subsequent edition of the work, Monboddo was reluctant to entirely abandon the hypothetical linchpin of his anthropological system. In a 1773 letter responding to comments on the *Origin* by John Pringle, who would later become royal physician and head of the Royal Society, Monboddo protested that, concerning the humanity of the orangutans and the existence of men with tails, "I think neither the one, or the other is necessarily connected with my System."³⁶ As for the contention that orangutans were anatomically capable of speech, he explained to Pringle that, "I had my Information upon that point from M. Jussieu at Paris, who either did not know; or did not think it worth his while to inform me of these differences, which Dr. Tison has observed."

And if I am in Error, I have only followed Linnaeus, and I think I have given a better reason than he has done for the Orang Outang belonging to us, I mean, his use of a stick; from which and many other circumstances it appears to me evident that he is much above the Simian race, to which I think you very rightly disclaim the Relation of Brother, tho' I doubt that race is of kin to us, tho' not so nearly related. For the larger Monkees or Baboons appear to me to stand in the same relation to us that the Ass does to the Horse, or our Gold finch to the Canary bird.³⁷

The belief in what could, and therefore *did*, exist in nature precluded the possibility of gaps or chasms between species, and the proximity of apes to humans in the Chain could not be denied. As he wrote to Lord Lyttelton,

For however mortifying it may be to us it is a Fact, that cannot be denied that the Baboon has an inclination for our Females; and I doubt it is likewise that they have not only

³⁶ Monboddo to John Pringle, June 16, 1773, NLS, MS 24501.89.

³⁷ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24501.89

copulated together, but produced...If this be true I am afraid it would be contrary to the Analogy of Nature to insert any other Animal betwixt Man & the Baboon, as much as it would be to divide the Interstice betwixt the horse and the Ass by putting in another Species. It is allowed I think by all who have spoken of the Ouran Outang that he comes nearer to us in Sagacity than any other Animal.³⁸

On the authority of reports from the Swedish traveler Koeping and other Europeans in Africa, Monboddo believed it was true that copulation between "baboons" and human females had produced fecund offspring, which was generally accepted as evidence that both parents were of the same species. Regardless of the discomfort of others with the idea, Monboddo refused to "divide the Interstice" between man and ape, a move contrary to both Aristotelian and Platonic principles. This refusal required the repositioning of the human species within an expanded and unified animal kingdom incorporating not only newly

³⁸ Monboddo, NLS, MS 34501.74. From his interpretation of the work of both Linnaeus and Buffon on the orangutan, Monboddo found it seeming to want nothing except speech to make it human. He recounted various accounts (la Brosse, Noëlle, Henry Gross, Battel, Purchas, Bontius) of the "Orang Outang," or rather of that species proper, as well as Jocko and Pongo, the chimpanzee and the gorilla, respectively. "The substance of all these different relations is, that the Orang Outang is an animal of human form, inside as well as outside: That he has the human intelligence, as much as can be expected in an animal living without civility or arts: That he has a disposition of mind, docile, and human: That he has the sentiments and affections peculiar to our species, such as the sense of modesty, of honour, and of justice; and likewise an attachment of love and friendship to one individual...They shew also counsel and design, by carrying off creature of our species, for certain purposes, and keeping them for years together, which no brute creature was even known to do. They appear likewise to have some kind of civility among, and to practice certain rites, such as that of burying the dead." *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.iv.289-90.

discovered and ever-more "primitive peoples," but also large apes, feral children, and fantastic creatures.³⁹

The attempt to redefine human nature necessarily required a reassessment of the history of human progress. Like Rousseau and Adam Ferguson, Monboddo acknowledged that the "distinguishing characteristic of our species" was that "we can make ourselves, as it were, over again, so that the original nature in us can hardly be seen."⁴⁰ However, he rejected both the historical accident of Rousseau and the spontaneous order as outgrowth of human nature of the stadial theorists as the cause and course of progress. Monboddo objected that, "Man there in his natural State being the work of God we cannot suppose liable to change or alteration, any more than other Animals in the natural State." Progress was thus antithetical to human nature. History, he argued, showed that it was only in "the Artificial State of Society," where the nature of man was "constantly changing and varying, and more commonly from better to worse than the contrary

³⁹ In the attempt to confirm his theory of language, Monboddo eagerly sought out introduction to several "feral children" found on the Continent, including "Peter the Wild Boy" and the "Wild Girl of Champagne," Marie-Angélique Memmie Le Blanc. Despite repeated attempts to teach Peter to speak and read, Peter appeared to be able only to say his own name and hum a few songs, Monboddo observed. Peter's resistance to the civilizing process was variously interpreted by eighteenth-century commentators as evidence for their theories of human nature. Modern researchers, however, suspect that Peter suffered from Pitt-Hopkins Syndrome, a rare chromosomal condition. Monboddo also wrote the preface for the Scottish publication of *An Account of a Savage Girl, Caught Wild in the Woods of Champagne. Translated from the French of Madam H[ecque]t* (Edinburgh: Kincaid and Bell, 1768), which was edited by the French explorer and scientist Charles-Marie de la Condamine and translated into English by William Robertson, Principal of University of Edinburgh and Royal Historiographer. In the case of Madame le Blanc, Monboddo concluded more or less correctly from the linguistic evidence that she was "originally of the Huron race, or at least, of a nation speaking the Huron language, the use of which, we know, is very wide spread over all the continent of North America." Preface to *An Account of a Savage Girl*, xiii.

⁴⁰ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.iii.25.

way."⁴¹ Since nature was "permanent and unchangeable, like its author," Monboddo concluded, the "many changes and revolutions it [human nature] is subject to, plainly shew, that it is not from nature, but of human institution."⁴²

If human nature was permanent and unchanging, what, then, had initiated these revolutions? Monboddo ostensibly agreed with the stadial theorists in finding the necessity of subsistence and self-defense as initial impetuses for human development.⁴³ He also agreed that progress had only been made in slow degrees. Yet, in his view, that the higher arts and sciences existed in so few places, including many civilized areas of the world, suggested that these had not been independent and spontaneous inventions of widely separated peoples. This was also notably the case with language, which was "not the gift of nature to man, but, like many others...acquired by him." Language appeared so difficult an invention to Monboddo that, "it is not easy to account how it could at all have been invented."⁴⁴ While he might be willing to concede that language, as well as the other arts and sciences, had been the invention of an exceptional people, but not of every people.

This exclusivity of intellectual production set Monboddo's theory of progress apart from the stadial anthropologists, who viewed moral, social, and intellectual institutional forms across world societies as roughly parallel, indigenous productions stemming from a common human

⁴¹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.102.

⁴² Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.vi.366-7.

⁴³ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.viii.382-83.

⁴⁴ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.ii.12.

nature. Rather, he held that the arts and sciences could only be explained through a diffusion from a single point of origin, which, as we have seen, was ancient Egypt. This belief was a feature of Hermetic or esoteric thought that continued to exist in the eighteenth-century alongside Enlightenment. Whether he arrived at this belief that Egypt had been the font of secret wisdom and practical knowledge to the rest of the world directly from the Hermetic tradition, it was certainly consonant with his Platonism.⁴⁵ His theories regarding the invention of language also suggest origins in the esoteric tradition, for "I am of the Opinion that the first language was spoken in Egypt." However, he admitted in an unpublished historical sketch that, "even upon this Hypothesis, I confess that I incline to be of the opinion, that Language is not altogether of human invention." Indeed, Monboddo found that the first rudiments of language "must have been taught Men by superior Intelligences...who, under the name of Gods, governed there for so many thousand years; and who I am persuaded, taught them likewise the Arts and particularly the Art of writing, which I think is generally allowed to have come from Egypt."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ On the esoteric tradition in eighteenth-century Western thought, see Antoine Faivre, "Esotericism in the Shadow of Enlightenment," in *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 53-68; Peter H. Reill, "The Hermetic Imagination in the High and Late Enlightenment," in *The Super-Enlightenment* (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century), ed. Dan Edelstein (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010); and, Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ NLS, MS 24528.25. Monboddo noted that even a people as isolated as "those New Hollanders [the Aboriginals of Australia] have the use of speech," and thus asserted that, "I can hardly believe that they have invented it, but have learned it by intercourse with some other nation; and this I believe to be true of all the nations that have been found in a very barbarous state, and yet having the use of speech." *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, II.421-22.

In any event, whatever its origins, Monboddo's diffusionist model of culture, which anticipated that of some later anthropologists, was to his mind also supported by theology and natural history. He found that, like nature, "Providence does every thing that is necessary and proper so it does nothing that is superfluous."⁴⁷ Multiple, separate inventions of so complex a thing as language would have violated this principle. Rather, language had spread through "one nation taught by the Egyptians teaching another," and in this manner had "been propagated all over the Earth except to some few places such as the Inland parts of Africa where the Orang Outang is to be found, and some remote Countries in Asia."⁴⁸ From his armchair study of languages and hieroglyphic writing, Monboddo concluded that the "Land of Nile is the parent Country of all Civility Arts & Sciences, at least upon this Side of the Globe." Ancient Egypt had propagated its Arts not only to the West, but also to the East, and he claimed that the Brahmins in India were to be "accounted a Colony from Egypt as much as the Caldeans in Assyria." The research on inscriptions by de Guignes served as likely proof "China also got its Arts, & particularly its characters from Egypt."⁴⁹ Neither Providence nor nature were superfluous, and a single origin of civilization in North Africa and

⁴⁷ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.29/27. Significantly, Monboddo here distinguished between Providence and nature.

⁴⁸ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.27.

⁴⁹ Unpublished manuscripts on European and American History, NLS, MS 24533.82. De Guignes, a French attaché to China, was the author of *Histoire des Huns* (1770).

its diffusion throughout Eurasia provided the simplest explanation of the course of human progress.⁵⁰

The peopling of the world was similarly explained as the result of migrations of a single stock of people from a single point of origin. Although humans could "live in every Climate & Country" Monboddo found it "probable & agreeable to the Analogy of Nature that man, like many of the Animals, may have been produced only in one part of the Globe."⁵¹ To posit separate creations of humanity would be inconsistent with both the account of human origins in Genesis and the workings of nature. Monboddo accepted that Africa or Asia had been the original home of the human species and the classification of both Buffon and Blumenbach of the world's peoples as one of five or six races. Though he rejected the idea of polygenesis, he held that there were "Bodily Marks by which Nature" had discriminated one people from one another. Thus, he argued that the "black men of Africa & Asia" were evidently of "a different race from the Whole men of Europe," who were in turn different "both from the red men of America, or the Yellow or Olm[] Colour men in other parts of the World & all these from the [putty] color'd Men...in Siberia."⁵² Despite accepting a common origin of peoples, he maintained that it was "of absolute

⁵⁰ Monboddo asserted that, "The Doctrine of the Trinity or Three Principles of the Divine nature which I have no doubt was first discovered in Eygypt appear to have spread very far as far as India, where there are Idols at this day to be seen with three heads and three Bodies." A note is inserted in the margin confirming this to be the case. He noted that Mr. Foster, "a living Author" had observed "the doctrine of the Trinity is maintained by the Brahmins." Unpublished manuscript, NLS, MS.24528.7. Not to be confused with Johann Georg Adam Forster, who accompanied Cook on his second voyage, George Forster (d. 1792) was an English traveler and civil servant with the East India Company, and the author of *Sketches of the Mythology and Customs of the Hindoos* (1785).

⁵¹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24533.73.

⁵² Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.37-8.

Necessity in the System of Nature that there should be different animals belonging to Different Climates."⁵³ Race was, in a sense, nature's way of acclimatizing the human species.

However, Monboddo had a very different climatological theory than most eighteenth-century thinkers. He conceded that man had likely been "originally a Natif of the Warm Climate" who "degenerates in the Cold Northern Countries as much as an Arabian horse does."⁵⁴ Yet climate itself was not entirely responsible for physical marks of degeneration. He argued that if one looked, for example to the northernmost parts of Europe, it could be observed that the Laplanders were "Smaller in body than the more Southern Inhabitants." Since humans had all migrated from the same warm climate, he asserted that "the Inhabitants of the Extremities of the Earth to the South as well as the North & not only in Europe but in Asia Affrica & America" had been "originally Men of the inferior to the Inhabitants of the better Climates."⁵⁵ Rather, much of the variation in human form was attributable not to the effects of climate, but to the relegation over time of originally "inferior" classes of people by their superiors to the inhospitable margins of the northern and southern hemispheres.⁵⁶

⁵³ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.37.

⁵⁴ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.37.

⁵⁵ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24528.51-2. My emphasis.

⁵⁶ Monboddo considered the Celts and Goths to have been originally the same people who were from Asia. Germany, Gaul and Britain were peopled with Celts before Odin led his colony into Scandinavia. In this unpublished manuscript he also asserted that the Greeks and Italians were of a different origin than the Celts and Goths, but did not elaborate. He concurred with those arguing that the recent discoveries of the Russians suggested that Chile and Mexico had been peopled from northern Asia, with the islands serving as stepping stones. NLS, MS 24528.72-4.

Although Monboddo's anthropology can clearly be characterized as racist, the man himself perhaps cannot be considered a racist. He opposed, for instance, the appellation of "degenerate" applied to non-Europeans by natural philosophers like Cornelius de Pauw. Given the reports of their behavior, the peoples of the New World could not, he argued, be considered a "degenerate Race."⁵⁷ "I must acknowledge the varieties to be numerous," yet he further objected that, "Hitherto Natural History has not to me furnished certain proofs of different species of men." All the peoples of the world, "I cannot," he wrote, "consider otherwise than as brethren, having a rational Soul, Speech and faculties perfectly similar to our own."⁵⁸ Certainly anyone willing to count orangoutangs as human would not deny the brotherhood of the world's peoples based upon the superficiality of physical differences. Though not antipathetic *per se* towards primitive peoples, his metaphysics greatly informed his interpretation of physical and intellectual differences between the inhabitants of primitive and complex societies.

He agreed with contemporaries who argued that the luxuries of commercial society had enervated Europeans, making them comparatively weaker than peoples living in primitive conditions. Still, this was only the product of different ways of living, and he considered "the body of a Savage" to be "the same as ours." What set savage and civilized apart was a difference of mind. In a rare instance of

⁵⁷ As Monboddo wrote, "the French Abby [actually the Dutch Cornelius de Pauw] who wrote the Reserches sur les Ameriquaines must be very much mistaken when he speaks of the Americans as a poor degenerate race of Men...Now if it be true what Cortes says of them (and he would not be mistaken) the Mexicans at least must have been as brave a People, as much Attach'd to their Prince & their Country...as any People that ever existed." NLS, MS.24533.149.

⁵⁸ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24501.82.

disagreement with an ancient Greek philosopher, Monboddo argued against Epicurus who held that the "Mind [of the savage] ought to be the same" as that of civilized man. This equivalence of minds was tantamount to materialism. According "to my System," he wrote, "his Mind [that of the savage] is quite different, it goes on a progress of its own acquiring every day new powers & faculties, which have nothing to do with the body."⁵⁹ Yet it was apparent to him that savages had "notions of similarity and difference in objects of sense," and therefore could "recognize the species in the individual, as readily as our children do." That being the case, despite his implied infantilization of primitive peoples, he asked, "Does not this plainly indicate, that there is no natural difference betwixt our minds and theirs, and the superiority we have over them is adventitious, and from acquired habit?"⁶⁰ Any existing differences between the minds of rude and polished peoples were thus adventitious, not intrinsic.

What, then, was the source of difference both between and within peoples? Monboddo, arguing against the natural historians, claimed that difference did "not come from Soil, Climate, Air, Water, or food." For it was clearly evident that there was "the greatest difference among Individuals of the same nation, who have all these in common."⁶¹ He likewise denied accident or divine intervention as the source of difference, for "No body who knows any thing of Nature, will say that...which happens as frequently is the effect of Chance, and tho' no doubt Providence does interpose sometimes in an extraordinary

⁵⁹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.132.

⁶⁰ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.x.147.

⁶¹ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24516.71-2.

manner in the Affairs of Men, we are not to suppose, that a thing so common as this is produced by a Miracle." In excluding these external factors, he concluded that,

There remains then, only one other cause and this is the race; and in this truly is the Cause confirmed by daily observation, which shows us that the qualities both of Body and Mind are derived from the Parents, not always the immediate parents, but sometimes the remoter.⁶²

Somewhat paradoxically, given his strict dualism, Monboddo attributed differences not only of body but also of *mind* to a more or less fixed, hereditary transmission that were the marks of biological race.

Perhaps the most disturbing implication of Monboddo's thought was the linkage of this idea of physical-biological race to the Aristotelian idea of a "natural Division of Men into those who are fit to Govern, the smallest number by far, and those that are fit to be governed, who are the many in all Countries." Again, he evoked an analogue between natural and metaphysical hierarchy to support a belief in social subordination. As "the Universe is one great System there must be Differences of things as well as likeness; for it is *rerum concordia discors*, that makes a System in every thing as well as in the universe." This agreement to disagree in nature required not only essential differences among peoples, but also implied a hierarchy of them as well. The subordination of minds in the metaphysical world paralleled that of bodies in the physical world. He argued against those who held that "all men are by nature equal, and that it is only Laws and Institutions which have made the distinction into Noble and Plebeian." He denied eighteenth-century egalitarian thought, often

⁶² Monboddo, NLS, MS 24516.73. My emphasis.

propounded by many of the other Scots literati. For, he argued, there was no nation among whom "Regular Policy was established" where there was not "a Distinction of the Ranks and orders of Men" and regard was not shown to "Birth and Family." This "Prevalence of Opinion" he attributed to an increasing democratization of government that elevated the lower classes and to corruption that debased the aristocracy. Subordination was "not of Arbitrary Institution," rather it was egalitarianism that subverted that social order "founded in Nature."⁶³ Indeed, there was a "Distinction of Ranks among Men as well as among other Animalls & that the excellence of our Species no less than of Dogs & Horses is [confined] to certain Families."⁶⁴

That "Excellency" or "Superiority of the Intellectual part of our Nature & those Qualities...such as Sense & Spirit which fit a Man to govern others," were as much a feature of nations as of families, and the categories of race and class thus neatly dovetailed in Monboddo's metaphysical anthropology. This natural superiority of spirit was, he argued, legible upon the physiognomy, for there existed "one mark of a Noble Descent, and that is the Beauty of their faces, and a certain look of Gentility, which distinguishes them from the Vulgar." That this embodiment of noble spirit existed among all peoples was attested to in the reports of the island societies of the South Pacific by Cook

⁶³ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24516.96; 49-50; 71; and 96.

⁶⁴ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24533.129.

and members of his crew.⁶⁵ Whereas in the popular imagination the South Sea Islands represented societies of equals living in a natural state, in Monboddo's imagination they indicated the universality of social and racial hierarchy. Indeed, he concluded from Cook's description of the Friendly Islands that a system of vassalage existed there not unlike that of feudal Europe.⁶⁶ Although he admitted that a distinction of ranks was reified in society only once property ownership had been introduced, Monboddo nonetheless equated superiority of spirit with a conflation of class and race that was common to all societies stretching from the British to the Sandwich Isles.

Monboddo appears not to have proposed any hierarchy of races. However, drawing on the principles of good animal husbandry, he argued that,

for tho' all these several kinds of Dogs being of the same Species, engender together, yet if they do so the race will not continue pure, but a Mongrel Breed will be produced, and for the same reason that like produces like, and the different kinds do not run into one another when they are not allowed to mix, what is best of these several kinds produces what is best. Tis true that there are sometimes in Nature Monstrous as well as regular Productions: and I say it would be a monstrous Production if Pointers should produce Greyhounds, very near as Monstrous as if Dogs engendering together should produce Sheep...I say it is also an unnatural Production when the best of each kind does not produce what is likewise excellent of the kind: And I think Horace argues well from the general Law of

⁶⁵ Monboddo found natural superiority confirmed in the description given by Captain James King, who accompanied Cook on his third and final voyage. "In the meantime it may be observed that what Captain King says of the greater health of the Men of distinction in those Islands is I believe true of Men of birth every where, if they live as they ought to do; for I hold it to be one of the Characteristic of the noble race among men that they are healthier and longer lived, if they do not destroy themselves by Debauchery than the rest of the people - And this I think is the necessary consequence of this natural Superiority in Size and Shape. The same I hold to be true of Horses of blood." NLS, MS 24516.67-8.

⁶⁶ Unpublished manuscript by Monboddo on European and American History, NLS, MS 24533.123.

Nature that like produces like, when he reasons in this way, and applies the argument to our Species.⁶⁷

Although Monboddo acknowledged all peoples of the world as "brethren," he nonetheless opposed their mixing, and appeared anxious about ambiguous or hybrid productions of nature that might dilute noble spirit or superiority of intellect. While he agreed with the natural historians that climatic extremes inhibited the growth of a species, he believed that a species could *become* degenerate when it failed to reproduce "the *best* of each kind." Mongrelization occurred when "different kinds...run into one another." Any mixing of superior and inferior spirit and body was tantamount to the violation of a general law. Prevention of promiscuous mixing reduced, if not eliminated, irregular or *monstrous* natural productions. In short, good breeding did not produce nobility; nobility produced good breeding.

There had been a long history of rationalizing the subjugation of "savage nations" in early modern European political thought.⁶⁸ Yet Monboddo objected that men who were "in capable of being governed like Slaves" would only be reduced to such only after being "much degenerated & debased." He observed that, just as "we do not hear of Greek Slaves," so "at present I believe it would be impossible to make

⁶⁷ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24516.76/49.

⁶⁸ In his history of the origins of comparative ethnology in sixteenth-century Spain, Anthony Pagden argued that the epistemological presupposition of a scientific approach to the savage was expressed in cultural, rather than "natural," terms, and was thus based on a declining perception of the Native American as "natural man." There was no need for a notion of "race" to justify the appropriation of land, exploitation of resources, and slavery with the prior existence of biblical, medical, and philosophical traditions that could provide justificatory rationale. See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

a Slave of an Indian of North America or a New Zeelander."⁶⁹ Monboddo viewed the Amerindians and Maori as neither degenerate nor inherently inferior races whose savagery put them beyond the pale of humanity. On the contrary, he suggested that a superior race might arise from within presently primitive peoples, and noted, for example, that the Italians had once been slaves of the Greeks. Monboddo nevertheless understood the social or class divisions of families writ large in nations. "For as there is by Nature a difference of Individuals," Monboddo argued, "so there is of nations, because the Qualities of Individuals are transmitted in their race and continued in their Families. And a Nation is nothing else but a Collection of families."⁷⁰

This analogue between families and nations carried implications for the conduct of empire, but was also at odds with aspects of his anthropological thought. On the one hand, he expressed some satisfaction that Britain was coming to rival, if not surpass, the dominion of the Roman Empire. On the other, he viewed nations as subject to the operation of laws that perhaps set limits to the expansion, and doubted the possibility of an extended empire ruled according to existing forms of governance. From his study of natural history, he found himself "persuaded...with respect to us and the brutes, the general law of nature takes place, that no species can be increased beyond its natural proportion, but at the expence of others."⁷¹ Empire was an encroachment of one people upon another that often resulted in large-scale destruction of life, if not an outright

⁶⁹ Unpublished manuscript, NLS, MS 24533.122.

⁷⁰ Monboddo, NLS, MS 24515.17-8.

⁷¹ Monboddo, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, I.xii.414.

extinction of peoples. The most glaring historical example of this was provided by the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru. It had, in his view, "produced a greater Destruction of the human Species than any Event recorded in history" and "destoy'd Europe as well as America first by Exporting Men, & then by importing Gold & Silver."⁷²

The large-scale genocide of the Americans by the Spanish was perhaps simply the most egregious case of imperialist expansion that resulted from this violation of natural laws. He was also critical of the depopulation of North America by the English through the intentional introduction of alcohol and small pox, and expressed the hope that "the British, who are now in possession of Canada," as part of the settlement of the Seven Years War, "will bestow some attention both upon Religion and Learning in it."⁷³ This might offer little compensation or mitigation of the ravages of contact with British traders and colonists, but he may have considered it to be the best that could be expected given the realities of European geopolitics. Whatever his feelings about the British Empire, and Scotland's participation within it, he appears to have seen the destruction of any part of the Chain of Being as abhorrent.

Still, it would be problematic to consider Monboddo's racialism as outright biological racism. After all, he claimed, it was "well known that the Antient Egyptians," the putative inventors of all higher arts and sciences and their transmitters to the Old World, "were black Men with woolly Hair." In a letter to William Jones, the English orientalist, Monboddo argued that the "Ancient Authors,"

⁷² NLS, MS 24533.153.

⁷³ NLS, MS 24536.17.

including Diodorus Siculus and Arrian, as well as contemporary travel accounts, would have to be rejected if it was not acknowledged that black Egyptians had traveled as far as India. Contemporary accounts such as Jacob Bryant's *A New System or Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (1774-76) and unspecified French works, he thought, proved "demonstratively not only that the Egyptians were in India, but that they or at least their Religion and their Art and Sciences went as far as Jappon for in both these Countries there are Idols to be seen of black men with woolly hair, flat noses and thick lips." The French work on the Dutch East India Company in Japan, quoted by Bryant, Monboddo thought, "puts it out of all doubt that there are several Idols of the kind I have described, that are worshiped by the Japponese in their Temples." The "Japponese being white men, and woolly hair not being found any where in the East," proved to him that the men deified in the temple idols had come from a foreign country. This purported deification of black Egyptians further proved that their presence in India and Japan had been not to "learn Arts but to teach them."⁷⁴ Monboddo thus appears not to have shared David Hume's prejudice against black Africans as inherently inferior to whites. On the contrary, he regarded blacks (regardless of whether they had been originally instructed by "higher beings") as the bearers of higher learning to the Near and Far East. Still, Monboddo's privileging of the idea of physical-biological race as an explanatory key in anthropology both underwrote a global extension of his classist

⁷⁴ Ever in search of information from a network of correspondents that would confirm his theories, Monboddo wrote Jones, "I should be glad if you would take the trouble to let me know, whether you have seen or heard of any of these Idols with woolly Hair in India." Kames to William Jones June 20, 1791, NLS, MS 24504.32.

prejudices and a reductive model that easily devolved from racialist to racist.

Polygenesis and Providence: Creating Races in Kames's *Sketches of the History of Man*

Henry Home (1696-1782), elevated to the Court of Session as Lord Kames, was a patron to many of the leading members of the Edinburgh Enlightenment, as well as one of its central figures. Generally regarded as the leading philosophical jurist of his day, he was also well versed in the latest developments of Continental thought and literature, and wrote on aesthetics and religion, as well as jurisprudence. Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* gave impetus to his study of jurisprudence, and Kames paid particular attentive not only to the inception and course of legal institutions but also to the connections between philosophical history and the laws of Scotland in his *Historical Law Tracts* (1758).⁷⁵ This prompted his kinsman, David Hume, to refer to the "agreeable composition" of Kames as "Metaphysics and Scotch Law."⁷⁶ His *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751) was meant to refute the skeptical import of Hume's work. However, in this work, he expounded orthodox Calvinist thought to its logical conclusion, which resulted in an apparent denial of free will. Consequently, he found himself threatened with

⁷⁵ David Lieberman, "The Legal Needs of a Commercial Society: The Jurisprudence of Lord Kames," in *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 203-34. For general accounts of his life and philosophy, see William Lehman, *Henry Home, Lord Kames, and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Study in National Character and the Scotland of His Day* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), and especially Ian Simpson Ross, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his Day* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

⁷⁶ Hume to Smith, 12 April 1759, *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), I.304.

excommunication from the Scottish Kirk by heresy-hunters in 1755-6 for the necessitarianism implied in his work. Yet, whereas many of his fellow literati suggested that design in the moral world was rooted in human nature, Kames found it in the workings of Divine Providence. Though he shared the interest of his age in creating a comparative and historical anthropology, his belief in an underlying providential design informed his particular conception of stadial history in which he sought to support a polygenetic theory of human origins.

Though he had collected materials for his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774) over the course of decades, Kames was likely pushed towards early publication by the appearance in the previous year of *The Origin and Progress of Language* by his intellectual adversary Lord Monboddo. Much in the *Sketches* was meant as a refutation of Monboddo's ideas. Having neither an interest in orangutans nor a belief in men with tails, Kames was less interested in unifying humans with other animal species than dividing them into *different* species. Despite his disagreements with Monboddo, Kames similarly became a major proponent of the idea of race as key to human understanding, and the articulation of a modern theory of polygenesis became his primary contribution to Scottish anthropological thought.⁷⁷

Kames sought to create the very sort of interstices to separate the "varieties" of human beings that Monboddo denied could exist between them. The thought of both men was clearly racialist, but in the case of Kames could well be considered racist. His anthropological antipathies in the *Sketches* were epitomized in his treatment of the

⁷⁷ George W. Stocking, Jr., "Scotland as the Model of Mankind: Lord Kames' Philosophical View of Civilization," in *Toward a Science of Man: Essays in the History of Anthropology*, ed. T. H. H. Thoresen (The Hague 1975), 65-89.

peoples of the New World. For if Monboddo had estimated the position of the orangutans in the hierarchy too high, Kames assessed that of the Americans far too low. In his view it was the "race" of the American inhabitants that largely prevented their progress beyond the initial stage of development. Kames suggested that the Americans were the product of a separate creation. Although the idea of separate human creations had been suggested in the Renaissance by Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno, and by Isaac de La Peyère in his *Prae-Adamitae* (1655). Kames appears not to have directly mentioned La Peyrère, but his argument was well known in the eighteenth century. Whereas La Peyrère had argued that the Americans had descended from pre-Adamite humans, Kames held that they were post-Noahites, and therefore a later creation. Thus, Kames, like Monboddo, contributed to a racialist discourse that would lay the foundations of scientific racism in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

Kames did acknowledge that some American tribes appeared to practice agriculture, and had therefore seemingly bypassed the second, pastoralist stage of progress. However, that the greater part of them remained hunters and gathers suggested to him evidence of their fundamental difference from other peoples. This seeming absence of progress Kames attributed to their relatively low population, which, in the model of stadial theory, would not have created the sort of pressures on the means of subsistence that would require a people to forsake hunting for agriculture.

⁷⁸ On the relation of eighteenth-century theories of human origins and scientific racism, see Colin Kidd, "Race, Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture," in *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 79-120.

Yet Kames also departed from the cultural perspectivism of philosophical anthropologists such as Smith and Ferguson, arguing that the lack of civilizational progress was to be attributed to the inherent inferiority of the Americans themselves. He interpreted the supposed stoicism of American males, which was widely noted by observers among them, as an insufficient ardor for their females. Further, he speculated that, given their reported lack of facial and bodily hair, the men possessed feeble generative organs, and thus mating was infrequent and produced few children. Buffon had explained the appearance of the Americans by the effects of climate and their lack of progress to having only recently peopled the New World. Kames found more convincing the argument in de Pauw's *Recherches philosophiques sur les américains* that extended Buffon's concept of climatic degeneration among the flora and fauna of the Americas to its human inhabitants.⁷⁹ He agreed that the Americans were clearly a degenerate people, yet he went further, arguing that their perceived physical and social differences were insurmountable obstacles to their inclusion within the same stock of humans as Europeans and other peoples of the Old World.

⁷⁹ In 1761 Buffon appeared to view climate as the cause of the smallness and weakness of both humans and animals of the Americas. However, by the 1770s, perhaps to distinguish himself from de Pauw, and having received specimens of North American animals, such as the moose sent from Jefferson, Buffon minimized the role of climate. See Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, "Addition aux variétés dans l'espèce humaine," in *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, 36 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1749-89), IV, *Suppléments* (1777), 525-538. See also, Lee Alan Dugatkin, *Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose: Natural History in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). On the idea of degeneration, see Phillip R. Sloan, "The Idea of Racial Degeneracy in Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*," in *Racism in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harold E. Pagliaro (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973). For an alternative interpretation, see John H. Eddy, Jr., "Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*: History? A Critique of Recent Interpretations," *Isis* 85 (1994): 651-54.

Whereas most Scots stadial theorists engaged the sympathetic imagination of readers to reduce the time and space separating them from the rest of humanity, Kames found the geographical remoteness of America and Australasia to be an unbridgeable gulf. He thought the distance from the Old World made their peopling via some land bridge unlikely, and he rejected the hypothesis, expressed by Monboddo, that Siberia had been the original home of various populations of North and South America. Kames disagreed with Monboddo in nearly every point except in his opposition to what he considered Buffon's overemphasis on the effects of climate on human development. It did not explain the "copper colour and want of beard" among the Americans, which were "invariably the same in every variety of climate." Rather, Kames believed that these physical characteristics must necessarily "depend on some invariable cause acting uniformly; which may be a singularity in the race of people."⁸⁰ That America had not been peopled "from any part of the old world," given the "external appearance of the inhabitants," he asserted, made "this conjecture approach to a certainty." Similarly, the distinctiveness and remoteness of the inhabitants of Australia suggested that they too were a singular race of people. Despite his religious devoutness, Kames thought the Biblical account of human origins from a single pair irreconcilable with biological and geographical evidence, and it appeared to him that a "local creation" of an aboriginal race in both America and Australia was an "unavoidable" conclusion. Yet, as Colin Kidd notes, Kames's heterodox line of reasoning diverged from scriptural orthodoxy, but

⁸⁰ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, II.68.

not necessarily from a providentialist interpretation of human origins.⁸¹

In weighing the natural historical evidence, the "unavoidable" conclusion reached by Kames was that, "God created many pairs of the human race, differing from each other both externally and internally; that he fitted those pairs for different climates, and placed each pair in its proper climate; that the peculiarities of the original pairs were preserved entire in their descendants."⁸² America and Australia, Kames thus argued, "must have been planted by the Almighty with a number of animals and vegetables" that were "peculiar" to these continents. If "such care has been taken about inferior life," he asked, would man, the "noblest work of terrestrial creation...be left to chance"?⁸³ If Buffon had been correct that America had arisen out of the sea more recently than any other continent, then its inhabitants would have been created by God well after the establishment of the Old World, and Kames argued that they might well be an altogether different species of humans. It was not precisely contrary to the teaching of Christian scripture to suggest, as Kames did, that, while Adam and Eve had been the original parents of the inhabitants of the Old World, they need not be the parents of those in the Americas or Australasia. Human differences were the result of Providence having created "different races of Men fitted for different climates."⁸⁴

⁸¹ Kidd, "Race, Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture," 96.

⁸² Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, I.76.

⁸³ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, II.xii.148.

⁸⁴ Kames to John Walker, professor of natural history at Edinburgh University, 12 December 1774, Edinburgh University Library, MS La.3.352/4.

In a 1772 letter to the Scottish physician John Lind, who had been invited to accompany Captain Cook on a circumnavigation of the globe, Kames wrote that, it was "a deep speculation" to ascertain "what is the scheme of providence for peopling the earth with the human race." Still, "Abstracting from Revelation," he wrote, it was natural to conjecture, that, "as there are many different climates, there were formed originally different races of men fit for these climates, in which only they flourish and degenerate in every other climate. Every experiment seems to correspond to this conjecture."⁸⁵ Indeed, the illnesses and death suffered by Europeans in their attempts to establish colonies in the Americas and Asia seemed to confirm the difficulties of transplanting species. If providential design explained how the world was peopled with different races, it also provided Kames with an explanation of its historical necessity.

Kames accepted the tenant of stadial theory that human beings had always lived in society and that in its earliest form society had been a savage state. However, he regarded the fact that this state persisted in so many parts of the globe a "dismal catastrophe." He departed from stadial theory in explaining the existence of primitive societies throughout the world as the result of a "terrible convulsion" early in the history of humanity. The "only known fact that can reconcile sacred and profane history," he argued, was the "confusion of Babel." The "terrible convulsion" related in the eleventh chapter of Genesis as the punishment of human conceit was God's confusion of human language following the destruction of the

⁸⁵ Kames to Lind, March 7, 1772, NLS, MS 10782, fos. 113r-114v. This letter is also published by Ross in *Lord Kames*, 333-35.

Tower of Babel. Kames inserted into Genesis 11 what Kidd terms a "racial hermeneutic" in which there had been not only the origin of differing languages, but also of differing races. A loving God, he suggested, would not disperse mankind to inhospitable regions of the globe without physically fitting each division of humanity to the particular climates it was destined to inhabit. There would have had to be an "immediate change of constitution," he reasoned, otherwise how would the "builders of Babel" have survived in the "burning region of Guinea" or in the "frozen region of Lapland"? This "deplorable event" had "reversed all nature," and had, by depriving men of society, rendered them savages. However, over time, some nations "stimulated by their own nature, or by their climate," had made a "rapid progress; some have proceeded more slowly; and some continue savages."⁸⁶ Departing from the naturalistic four-stages conception of historical progress that all peoples, whatever their present stage, progressed upon a common civilizational trajectory, Kames held that the particular "natures" of nations largely determined their potential for progress, though he conceded that climate might play a role in some cases.

The capacity for progress was reified by Kames as an act of divine creation, and he hollowed out the stadial framework of anthropology, inserting into it content that was both providentialist and polygenist. Providence's "change of constitution," which Kames believed to have been enacted after the Tower of Babel, ensured that the original "peculiarities" of a race would continue in its descendants. Whereas Montesquieu and Hume had given a natural

⁸⁶ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, I:84.

explanation to the concept of different "national characters," each exemplified by its own hereditary manners and morals, was linked by Kames a design of providence.⁸⁷ Henceforth, human groups were to be distinguished not only by their physical appearance, but also by their character and inclinations, morals and manners. These characteristics, which included intellectual or moral capacity, were linked to a divine design for human history. Voltaire, one of the few other Enlightenment thinkers to embrace a polygenetic theory, and whose work Kames drew upon but did not openly credit, had made a similar linkage. However, when he spoke of "internal constitution" of the human species, he referred to a conception of morality based upon action that he had developed in the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. Kames thus asserted the same sort of moral necessitarianism or determinism that had caused him to be accused of heresy to his anthropological theory.

"Such as the being is, such must its actions be," and the internal character of every species displayed a "uniformity of conduct," including the human "species." The "greater part of a nation," he claimed, "can have no foundation but nature."⁸⁸ Yet as there were clearly differing national characters, there must be different human natures that were not the offspring of chance. He likewise departed from a theory of spontaneous design implicitly underpinning a vitalist conception of matter, which had originally

⁸⁷ Kames argued against the main thrust of Hume's 1748 essay, "Of National Characters," which, despite its polygenetic implications, had been an argument for the primacy of, what we would call, social and cultural, rather than biological, factors in the construction of manners and customs.

⁸⁸ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, I: 16; 39-40 and II: 2-5.

informed Smith's four-stage theory.⁸⁹ Though claiming that the idea of inert matter conflicted both with experience and proper theology, he nonetheless favored divine providence as the source of diversity among human beings. "The several classes into which nature has distributed living creatures," Kames wrote, were "not more distinguishable by an external form, than by an internal constitution."⁹⁰ Whereas most Scots stadial anthropologists traced human progress from nature to history, Kames reversed the trajectory, moving from the moral to the physical, and in this theoretical reversal, the moral and intellectual characteristics of a people were "original characters" that had been fixed within the race.⁹¹

In surveying the map of mankind, Kames observed that, in the "progress from infancy to maturity, all nations do not ripen equally," and one nation might reach a "supposed perfection of society, before another has advanced much beyond the savage state." Given his position that capacity for progress was largely based upon an internal character, it was equally possible to posit that a people might *not* ripen at all, an argument he most clearly made regarding the Americans. Whereas a number of enlightened Scots produced a theory of globalization that suggested a unified and interconnected future, Kames imagined a divided past that perhaps implied a similarly divided future, one broken down along the perceived moral differences embodied in physiognomy. In his providential stadialism, early man had been

⁸⁹ See Chapter One.

⁹⁰ Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1758) (Edinburgh: J. Bell; London: J. Murray, 1779), 26-7.

⁹¹ Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, 87.

divinely created to subsist in divided tribes suited to specific climates and ways of living, each with its own language. Although Kames aimed for the *Sketches* to be a "history of the Species, in its progress from the savage state to its highest civilisation and improvement," what he produced was rather separate, divided histories of fundamentally different human beings set upon unequal paths of future progress.⁹² He proposed no explicit hierarchy of races and remained largely silent regarding empire. If his readers were to reflect upon the present providential global order, what security, he asked, did those in a savage state have against the supposedly perfected nations? Without elaborating, he simply answered, "Precisely the same that timid sheep have against hungry wolves."⁹³

The sympathetic understanding shown by many of his Scots anthropological thinkers towards the world's "primitive" peoples Kames reserved for those of Scotland's ancient past. While many of his close friends and acquaintances made a strong case for modern, commercial society in Scotland, he was more ambivalent, recognizing the losses as well as the gains involved. Though Highland culture was foreign to him, he expressed an almost nostalgic longing in the *Sketches* for Scotland's ancient, and largely imagined, past. While he agreed that morals and manners became refined and sophisticated commensurate with social and economic improvement, Kames also argued that, while benevolence was more often exhibited in advanced stages of society, some primitive societies might also exhibit moral qualities that rivaled or even surpassed the most polished modern society. This, he

⁹² Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, I: 84.

⁹³ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, II.i.213.

imagined, had been precisely the case with the ancient Caledonians, the Celtic ancestors of the Scottish people.

Whereas Ferguson, for example, had stressed the affinities of Britain's original inhabitants with the tribes of the Americas, Kames stressed their absolute difference. The Caledonians had, he claimed, been endowed with "manners so pure and refined" that they were "scarce to be equalled in the most cultivated nations."⁹⁴ Significantly, he drew rather uncritically in the *Sketches* upon James Macpherson's Ossian poems, published between 1760 and 1763 as *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Fingal, and Temora*, as a principal historical source.⁹⁵ In his mind, there was no doubt concerning the authenticity of Macpherson's work, though this was hotly contested at the time. Kames evoked Ossian to contrast the moral advancement of the ancient Caledonians with that of the ancient Greeks in the Homeric epics. As Robert Wokler noted, Kames's portrayal of the Ossianic Scots was perhaps the clearest example of the idea of the "noble savage" in eighteenth-century thought, an idea often incorrectly attributed to Rousseau.⁹⁶

For Kames the imagined Caledonian race represented by Macpherson's Ossianic society was the mirror image to that of the "ignoble savages" he believed inhabited the Americas. Although the

⁹⁴ Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, (Edinburgh, 1774), I.i.7.

⁹⁵ See Richard B. Sher, "Those Scotch Imposters and Their Cabal: Ossian and the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Man and Nature*, ed. Roger L. Emerson, Gilles Girard, and Roseann Runte (London, Ont.: Published for the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies by the Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, 1982), I: 55-63; Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 213-61, 368-71; Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

⁹⁶ Wokler, "Apes and Races," 153.

Caledonians were hunters of the earliest stage of human society, they were an exception to the four-stages model of progress. The Caledonians respected their women, voted in assemblies, and displayed manners that set them above not only contemporary Americans, but also the ancient Greeks. They neither ambushed their adversaries, nor fought for the sake of plundering them. Neither did they desecrate the bodies of their enemies as did the heroes of the Homeric epics. The exceptionalism of the ancient Caledonian race existed in their combination of heroism and courage in battle with elevated sentiments and manners. Kames singled out their treatment of women, the nobility of their sentiments, and the relations between the sexes as essential to the national character of the Celts.⁹⁷ It was only the remote isolation of the Highlands that had preserved aspects of the original customs and manners of the Celts that had otherwise been erased in those areas of Britain colonized by Rome. In this portrait of a mythic Golden Age of Scotland Kames asserted a counterweight both to Monboddo's privileging of the ancient Greeks and to an English Anglo-Saxon lineage, thereby elevating and distinguishing the North Britons over their neighbors to the South.⁹⁸ Indeed, he conceived the Caledonians as different, physically and culturally, from the other peoples who were the ancestors of modern Europe. In short, Kames used

⁹⁷ For perhaps the fullest discussion of gender and its relation race and nation in Scottish thought, see Silvia Sebastiani, "Measures of Civilization: Women, Races, and Progress," in *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 133-62. See also, Ruth Rendell, "Tacitus Engendered: 'Gothic Feminism' and British Histories, c.1750-1800," in *Imagining Nations*, ed. Geoffrey Cubitt (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 57-74.

⁹⁸ On the cultural politics of evoking Celtic or Germanic ancestry, see Murray G. H. Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1686-1789* (Macmillan Press, 1997).

his *Sketches of the History of Man* to reconstruct a historical or mythic people into an "anthropological race."⁹⁹

Conclusion: Towards a Scientific Racism

Although the respective anthropologies of Monboddo and Kames diverged in many respects, the main thrust of their works was both informed by and contributed to the late eighteenth-century construction of a modern myth, that is, of the category of race.¹⁰⁰ The racialist, if not always racist, model of anthropological understanding provided an explanatory apparatus with which to philosophically legitimate old prejudices towards the physical and cultural differences of others, which was precisely what the historical and cultural perspectivism of Smith, Ferguson, and Millar sought to undermine. Indeed, the greatest antipathies of Monboddo and Kames were directed at the theoretical innovations, as well as the egalitarianism, of the mainstream of Scots anthropological thought. Monboddo's attempt to more closely integrate man with the rest of the animal kingdom, above all the larger apes, which was more suggestive of the nineteenth century than of his own. Similarly, Kames's polygenism provoked a backlash that played out in Edinburgh's Royal Medical Society and elsewhere, most prominently in American works such as those of the Edinburgh-trained physician Benjamin Smith Barton and the president of the College of New Jersey Reverend Samuel Stanhope

⁹⁹ Sebestiani, "Measures of Civilization: Women, Races, and Progress," 157.

¹⁰⁰ On race as a cultural, rather than biological construct, see Alain F. Corco, *The Myth of Human Races* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997); Daniel B. Blackburn, "Why Race is Not a Biological Concept," in *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice*, ed. Beryl Lang (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 3-26; Steve Olson, *Mapping Human History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002); and, Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, 1-18.

Smith.¹⁰¹ Polygenesis was largely a theory that appealed to a small fringe of contemporary thinkers. It was attacked by the Aberdeen moral philosopher James Beattie, while Edinburgh minister and historian William Robertson, though a monogenist, exhibited antipathies towards Amerindians in his *History of America* (1777) not unlike those of Kames. Ultimately, in their privileging of physical, and with it moral, difference, Monboddo and Kames contested a founding assumption of the Enlightenment that a science of *man* was possible, effectively undermining this ideal through their artificial division of mankind into different kinds of men and turning nations into races.

Monboddo and Kames validated older prejudices towards physical difference through the reintroduction of metaphysical or theological assumptions into the human sciences, which Smith and other enlightened Scots had in large part calved off in favor of natural historical principles. Although the belief that human diversity was inherent in the design of God's creation was not new in the eighteenth century, what Monboddo and Kames did was to enshrine as divine or providential design both physical and cultural differences as hereditarily transmitted traits specific to fundamentally unconnected biological *races* or *species* of humans. Their antipathetic anthropological systems transferred Rousseau's concept of perfectibility and the progressive dynamism of the Smithian four-stage model from the human species as a whole to particular nations. Even Kames, who ostensibly embraced the stadial paradigm, found the idea of race a more compelling explanatory

¹⁰¹ As Colin Kidd has noted, polygenism perhaps had a greater life in nineteenth-century America than in Britain. On the varied contemporary responses to Kames, see Kidd, "Race, Enlightenment and the Authority of Scripture," 100-20; and Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, 94, 101, 153, 168, 183, 195, 199, 215, 218.

model, one that largely denied the importance of external or environmental factors.

Over the course of the century, the stadial model would increasingly be interpreted not only as a static typology of human societies, but also of the character of their inhabitants. National character would be viewed less as the product of history or geography, than the result of a fixed and essential biology. The respective anthropologies of Monboddo and Kames distanced peoples from one another through the reassertion of a hierarchy or subordination of peoples based in the belief that physical difference were divinely instituted in the design of creation. "Savage" and "barbarian" described not a stage of society but the hereditary character of its inhabitants. Civilizational stasis, an incapacity for progress, was located in an original and unchanging human biology. This move bifurcated late eighteenth-century Scots anthropological thought, establishing the philosophical groundwork for a *physical* anthropology, as well as the scientific racism, that would emerge as dominant in the nineteenth century.

Chapter 6

The End(s) of Enlightenment Scottish Anthropology: James Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind*

One of the last major published works of late Scottish Enlightenment anthropological thought was James Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* (1780). Though often seen as derivative of the work of Smith, Ferguson, and Millar, the *Essays on the History of Mankind* was not only the most extensive distillation of anthropological theory, but also the most comprehensive elaboration of the relationship between human historical progress and the process of globalization to that time. The work reflects Dunbar's direct engagement with and intervention into British and European intellectual and geopolitical contexts of the 1760s, forcefully critiquing both polygenist theories of human origins and the abuses of European imperialism. Dunbar's iteration of a science of man offered the sustained theorization of human social development in its global dimensions. Offering perhaps the most sustained moral and historical arguments for the equality of all peoples, Dunbar's *History of Mankind* may be regarded as the culmination, and indeed arguably the terminus, of the anthropological perspectivism developed in the Scottish Enlightenment.

James Dunbar (1742-1798) graduated in 1761 from King's College, Aberdeen, and received a teaching appointment in 1766 at his alma mater, where he served as full regent for the next thirty years. In both his teaching and writing, he drew eclectically from modern British and European natural and moral philosophy, including Bacon,

Boyle, Newtown, Buffon, Locke, and Hume. His approach to the study of man reflected the educational reforms of the Aberdeen colleges in the application of methodologies from the natural to moral sciences. Like Hume, Dunbar viewed the foundations of theory in experience and observation.¹ As one of his moral philosophy students reported, Dunbar held that, natural history "in a large sense comprehends the history of all the Phenomena [sic] both in the natural and in the moral world, and is by consequence the basis of all sound Philosophy."² The structure of language, the course of human actions, and reflection upon these were the three sources for a natural historical approach to achieving knowledge of the mind and its faculties. In the "observation and experience" of these sources, Dunbar followed his predecessors in believing that much of this knowledge was accessible largely through the study of the peoples of tribal societies. Dunbar's unified treatment of the human mind and civilizational progress was not exceptional in Scottish Enlightenment philosophical anthropology, however, he far exceeded his predecessors in explicitly situating human development within a theory of globalization.³

Dunbar defended the Enlightenment assumption that it was possible for philosophy to reason about *Man* against countervailing interpretations within both the natural and human sciences that posited the existence of fundamentally different "races" or even of

¹ *Institutes of Moral Philosophy* Clark Memorial Library, MS.2007.003, 15. In his moral philosophy lectures, Dunbar was openly critical of the skeptical import of Hume's work. Hume was often the *bête noire* of Aberdonian moral philosophers. Nevertheless Dunbar cited his ideas in the *Essays on the History of Mankind*, often without naming him in citations.

² *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, UCLA Clark Memorial Library, MS 2007.003, 6.

³ On Scottish Enlightenment thinkers as global theorists, see Chapter 4.

separate "species" of human beings. Dunbar's global anthropology consistently undercut the notion that there was any essential difference between the peoples of "rude" and "polished" societies. For Dunbar the history of human progress was largely synonymous with the history of globalization. The moral imperative of the science of man Dunbar articulated in his *History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* (1780) was for Europeans to reassess their global, that is economic and imperial, interactions with the rest of the world in a recognition of universal human equality. Dunbar made a direct assertion of human equality that had existed mostly as an implied subtext and moral underpinning of the Scottish Enlightenment. Yet both internal and external changes and conditions perhaps militated against the embrace of liberal sentiments expressed in much of its science of man in the 1780s and beyond. That the Scottish Enlightenment produced no further such works of historical anthropology after the early 1780s, Dunbar's work may thus be seen not only the culmination, but also as perhaps portending the "end," of Enlightenment in Scotland.

Anthropology in Aberdeen: Natural History and Religion

The same anthropological interests of enlightened thinkers centered at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow were also shared by those in Aberdeen, home to Marischal and King's Colleges. As historian Paul Wood has noted, the philosophical style of enlightened Aberdonians was largely dependent upon the institutional structure of their universities. Whereas other universities in Scotland had long since switched to fixed chairs in the arts and sciences, throughout most of the eighteenth century both Marischal and King's Colleges

retained a regenting system in which one professor took a group of students through all four years of the academic curriculum. This system, Wood suggests, allowed for the close curricular conjunction of natural and moral philosophy that encouraged a more unified view of human knowledge.⁴ In 1753, Marischal and King's Colleges each undertook reforms that gave increased prominence in their curricula to the study of natural philosophy. These reforms, particularly at King's College, as Woods has noted, formally entrenched civil history and geography into the curriculum and reinvigorated the teaching of natural history, enshrining a Baconian view of knowledge.⁵ In this view all knowledge was ultimately to benefit practice. Logic, ethics, natural jurisprudence and politics formed the core of instruction in the moral sciences at both colleges from the early 1750s. At the same time, the Aberdeen Enlightenment was also marked by a preoccupation with religion and morality, and the utility of the teaching of natural history was thus perceived in religious terms. Natural knowledge was popularly seen as offering a weapon to combat atheism, deism, and other heterodox ideas. As Wood argues, lectures in the natural sciences were by the 1780s, if not before, given in an explicitly religious context.⁶

Significantly, as in Edinburgh and Glasgow, the human or moral sciences were substantively reworked as a result of the academic engagement with the natural sciences. Similarly, anthropological

⁴ Paul B. Wood, "Science and the Pursuit of Virtue in Aberdeen," in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed., M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 148-49.

⁵ Paul B. Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment: The Arts Curriculum in the Eighteenth Century* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press), 73.

⁶ Wood, *The Aberdeen Enlightenment*, 94.

thought played a formative role in the intellectual life of Aberdeen, which in large part was conducted in the Philosophical Society of Aberdeen, or the Wise Club as it was called. Its membership was composed primarily of a small group of regents from the city's two colleges, and included Thomas Reid, Alexander Gerard, James Beattie, and James Dunbar, among others. The Society was dedicated to the inductive method and cooperative character of the new sciences pursued through reading, observation, and reflection; orderly debate and discussion; and, a critical review of the evidence.⁷ The minutes of the Wise Club reveal a broad range of topics discussed over its decade and a half of existence: agronomy, astronomy, botany, chemistry, literature, law, language, historiography, religion, rhetoric, zoology, among others. Of the 133 papers delivered in the Society, seventeen of them dealt with natural history and five with natural philosophy. Underlying this broad range of topics was a focus on establishing the relationships among various phenomena, including those dealing with the moral and social history of humanity.

Enlightened Aberdonians had been quick to recognize the importance of the new natural philosophy epitomized by Buffon and the anthropological implications derived from it, particularly those of Rousseau. In the 1750s and 1760s a significant number of the topic questions posed to members of the Philosophical Society dealt with the nature and history of mankind and European attitudes towards other peoples of the world. In April 1758, shortly after the founding of the Society, Robert Traill, a minister in the Church of Scotland and later

⁷ The editor's introduction provides a general summary of the Aberdeen Wise Club, see H. Lewis Ulman, *The Minutes of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, 1758-1773* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1990), 1-59.

professor of oriental languages at Glasgow, gave a commentary on Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. Physician and naturalist, David Skene presented a series of twelve discourses to the Wise Club on the natural history of mankind, defending the use of a systematic classification from botany and other branches of the sciences to argue *against* Buffon.⁸ In November of 1765 William Ogilvie of King's College presented on the history of mankind, and three years later posed the question to its members, "What is that in the Manners of any Nation which entitles justly to the appellations Civilized or Barbarous? By what circumstances has slavery been so moderated as to become supportable to so many of Mankynd?" In 1767 James Beattie posed the question of "Whether that superiority of understanding, by which the inhabitants of Europe and of the nations/countries immediately adjoining imagine themselves to be distinguished, may not easily be accounted for, without supposing the rest of mankind of an inferior species?" The nexus of natural history and moral philosophy typical of the Aberdeen Enlightenment is evident in the prominence given in its Philosophical Society to the exploration of anthropological topics and their ethical import.

Although the content of the discourses and ensuing discussions of the Wise Club have not in most cases survived, the leading nature of the questions posed suggests the recognition of the essential humanity of non-Europeans among at least some of the members of the Aberdeen Enlightenment.⁹ While most of the surviving discourses presented in the

⁸ See Paul B. Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44: 169-90.

⁹ On enlightenment in Aberdeen, see Wood, *Aberdeen Enlightenment*; Catherine J. Carter and Joan H. Pittock, eds., *Aberdeen and Enlightenment* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987).

Society were never published, such as Skene's history of mankind, the Society offered its members the opportunity to exchange and work out ideas. It was the early and extensive dialogue of enlightened Aberdonians with Buffon and Rousseau, with whom they often disagreed, that in large part stimulated the anthropological direction of their efforts to bridge natural and moral philosophy.¹⁰ James Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* is perhaps one of the most significant contributions to the human sciences of the Aberdeen Enlightenment, notable not only for its unqualified defense of the character of "rude nations" and assertion of their equality, but also for its interpretation of the history of human progress as the history of globalization.

"Vindicating the character of the species:" Sociability and Sympathy

Dunbar's stated aim of his *Essays on the History of Mankind*, was, as he put in the preface, to "solve some of the appearances in civil life, and, by an appeal to the annals of mankind, to vindicate the character of the species" from both "vulgar prejudices, and those of philosophic theory."¹¹ Human nature, he observed, was in some respects "so various and fluctuating; so altered, or disguised by external

¹⁰ As Paul Wood has also observed, there were also a disproportionately large number of discourses and questions addressed by the Philosophical Society dealing with the philosophical works of David Hume. The skeptical implications of Hume's philosophy were seen by many in the Scottish Enlightenment as in need of refutation, particularly by writers such as Thomas Reid and James Beattie. Nonetheless, the engagement with Hume's work served as the impetus for the Scottish Enlightenment as a whole, and many, including Dunbar, often incorporated aspects of Hume's thought, while at the same time rejecting many of its conclusions and implications. Indeed, there was a similar dynamic involved with the thought of Rousseau and Buffon. See Wood, "Buffon's Reception in the Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 169-90.

¹¹ James Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* (Edinburgh, 1781), i.

things, that its independent character" had become "dark and problematical." Therefore, the examination of human nature in its "primeval form, would reflect a light upon moral and political science, which we endeavour in vain to collect in the annals of polished nations."¹² He acknowledged that in "some corners of the globe, if we may credit report, man and beast lead in the forest a sort of promiscuous life; and the boundary is scarce discernible which divides the rational from the animal world." While this fact had, he admitted, "some foundation," it had also been "no doubt magnified by travelers and historians, and tortured in the theories of philosophy."¹³ Although many might reduce some part of humanity to the level of animals, their accounts also provided a "vindication of the species." In the representations of the "South Sea isles, which the late voyages of discovery have tended to disclose," for example, Dunbar argued, "enables us to glance at society in some of its earlier forms" and to "mark, in some striking examples, the inviolable fidelity of social love."¹⁴ In short, the presence of sociability, rather than "reason" served to vindicate the human species, even in its "primeval form."

For as Dunbar famously noted, "man becomes sociable, long before he is a rational being." Society, he argued, had its origins not in mutual dependence and wants as the "sickly daughter of calamity, nor even the production of an aspiring understanding, but the free and

¹² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 3.

¹³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 15-16.

¹⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 26.

legitimate offspring of the human heart."¹⁵ Sociability, then, raised human beings above the beasts. The gradual unfolding of the rational faculties was only made their with the "appearance of [their] proper objects," and the inhabitants of these "earlier forms of society" exhibited the "fidelity of social love" that testified to their quintessential humanity. Manners of the "highest excellence," Dunbar argued, were neither a monopoly of civilized nations, nor entirely absent among "rude nations." His anthropological investigations into the history of both "rude and cultivated ages" convinced him that no nation possessed civilized manners in their "highest excellence, nor had any subsisted as a people...without a considerable degree of one or more." Therefore, he asked if it was not better to set aside from "correct reasoning the too general terms of *barbarous* and *civilized*, substituting in their room expressions of more definite censure and approbation?"¹⁶

The application of the term "barbarous" by Europeans to tribal peoples was made on pejorative and erroneously judgments that there was a total absence of cultivated manners among them. Dunbar set this "general supposition" of cultural superiority into historical perspective. For he observed that, "implied in that opinion of their own superiority over other nations, which Europeans are prone to entertain: a superiority which like that assumed by the Greeks, the Romans, and the Chinese, is supposed by those who claim it to be absolute and immense." If, however, Dunbar suggested, when judged by the "standard of virtue and felicity, it may appear very

¹⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 15-16.

¹⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 151. Emphasis in the original.

inconsiderable in respect" to the African nations, to Greenland, Guinea, or those on the banks of the Orinoco.¹⁷ In assessing the progress of modernity among a people, Dunbar advocated a middle position between the "opposite opinions" of Rousseau and his followers who decried "progress as the fertile source of corruption, debasement, and infelicity" and those "panegyrists of science and art" who represented progress as "enough to reward that continual pursuit which it solicits from every nation once engaged in this career."¹⁸ A more nuanced negotiation between vulgar and philosophical extremes was necessary for a proper assessment of a society regardless of its level of civilizational progress.

Dunbar vigorously argued against those anthropological theorists who asserted the inherent inferiority of "rude nations" and employed evidence and methods of natural philosophy to support that prejudice. Dunbar attacked the notion of biological inferiority as merely prejudicial belief, deconstructing the foundations of the *scientific racism* that would come to dominate anthropological discourse in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ He drew on the same principles of the natural world as illiberal theorists, both polygenist and monogenist, to argue against their assertions of inferiority. As with the lesser orders of beings, animal and vegetable, Dunbar noted that, "it seems to be a law

¹⁷ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 152-53.

¹⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 154-55. Although Rousseau was often charged with advocating a return of society to primitivism in his *Second Discourse*, he suggested, rather, that the ideal society was one occupying a *middle* position between a "state of nature" and the present modernity of Europe. It was this equipoise in which he perhaps viewed tribal peoples of the New World presently living.

¹⁹ On the rise of scientific racism in the late-eighteenth century, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), chap. 4.

of nature, that, wherever they cannot attain, in some very considerable degree, the honours...and emoluments of their existence, there they gradually decline, and at last cease to exist at all." "Is man," he asked, "an exception from the general law?" Hence, wherever the "tribes of mankind subsist" without tending "either to decay or extermination, may it not," he asked, "be judged that they have attained a measure of worth and of felicity not much inferior to that which the most admired nations have actually attained?"²⁰ Echoing Smith, Dunbar refused the absolute condemnation of a people whose moral practices did not lead to their self-destruction.²¹

Dunbar understood the moral or social world as operating according to principles not unlike those of the physical world. Drawing eclectically on his acquaintance with the natural sciences, he analogized the workings of sympathy, of human fellow-feeling, with those of gravity, equating the life force that vivified matter in the vitalist life sciences with the mechanical forces of Newtonian physics. For he argued that, the "love of the species" was the "grand principle of attraction, as essential to the rational, and, in some degree, to the animal, as gravitation to the material world."²² The "force of sympathy," he asserted, "is conspicuous thro' the whole animal creation, but in man, it is that transcendent power which forms an emolument essential to his existence, and he can hardly form a wish

²⁰ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 153-54.

²¹ See Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, V.ii.

²² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 30.

which has not some reference to social life."²³ Although sympathy was "mutual between man and man," and was "in human nature a foundation of general love," he also noted that it was "governed by circumstances," and hence produced "the various relations of life, and the corresponding modifications of social attachment." Again, Dunbar sought a middle path that navigated between oppositions of the determinant and the random in the social world. However, as he told his moral philosophy students at King's College, "The heart expands itself by degrees, and rises by a gradation of sentiment from the more confined to the more enlarged affections, until at length it embraces the whole species, and even the whole system of being."²⁴ Dunbar's global anthropological theory served to facilitate that sympathy and overcome those local "circumstances" that confined the universal enlargement of benevolent sentiments in an age of increasing contact among peoples.

Of particular concern for Dunbar was the rise of polygenist theories that posited the existence of physical differences as evidence of separate species of humans, which, though it had achieved limited currency in the 1770s, had been prominent in the work of his contemporary, Lord Kames.²⁵ The European, Dunbar objected, "affects to move in another orbit from the rest of the species," and was thus "offended with the idea of a common descent." Europe, rather than "acknowledge her ancestors to have been co-ordinate only to other

²³ James Dunbar, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy (1789-1794)/edited from the Aberdeen University MS 3107/5/2/6 with an introduction for Japanese readers by Hiroshi Mizuta* (Tokyo: Hitotsubashi Daigaku), 24.

²⁴ Dunbar, *Institutes of Moral Philosophy*, 20.

²⁵ On polygenism in the thought of Kames, see Chapter 5.

racess of Barbarians, and in parallel circumstances...breaks the unity of the system...by imagining specified differences among men, precludes or abrogates their common claims." The danger of accepting the idea of separate human species was that the "oppression or extermination of a meaner race, will no longer be so shocking to humanity." Breaking the "unity of the system" through the rejection of a common humanity restricted or localized sympathy. Dunbar asserted that the result would be that, "Their distresses will not call upon us so loudly for relief. And public morality, and the laws of nations, will be confined to a few regions peopled with this more exalted species of mankind."²⁶ The danger in the belief of the inherent inferiority of some peoples, a view which was often shared equally by monogenists, was the rationalization of an unequal application of natural and international law, and justification for a paternalistic imperialism, slavery, and even genocide.²⁷

Dunbar was critical not only of the Kamesian wing of Scottish anthropology, but also that of Lord Monboddo, who himself was a proponent of many of the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The debate over whether primates, such as orangutans, formed a species of humans, reignited in 1755 Rousseau continued to resonate in Dunbar's time, with Lord Monboddo being the sole thinker in Scotland to answer in the affirmative.²⁸ Dunbar noted that the European sense of superiority was evident in the Spanish conquest of the Americas when many "entertained whether the natives of that country ought not to be accounted a race

²⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 161-62.

²⁷ On Kames and the idea of race in Scottish anthropological thought, see Chapter 5.

²⁸ See Chapter 5.

of the Orang Outangs." However, he mockingly noted, that an "infallible edict of a Roman pontiff [Pope Paul III in 1537] soon established their doubtful pedigree; and our [European] right of dominion, in both hemispheres, was asserted...by the casuists of those days."²⁹ While both Catholic and Protestant Christianity embraced the humanity of indigenous Americans, their religious conversion largely accompanied, justified, or failed to prevent either the ruthless acquisition of land and exploitation of natural resources, or the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans.

Dunbar wryly noted that, "if the doctrine of some late publications had made an appearance in the sixteenth century, it might have superseded the necessity of this edict, by shewing that Orang-outangs are, in reality, the *aborigines* of all nations. Such is the *illustrious* pedigree of mankind!" Citing Peter Camper's *Account of the Organs of Speech of the Orang-Outang* in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* for January 1779, he remarked that, "Unfortunately, indeed, for this hypothesis, it has been demonstrated by an able anatomist, that the Orang outangs are, from the texture of their organs, incapable of forming speech."³⁰ Significantly, however, despite acknowledging Camper's demonstration of the incapability of speech in orangutans, he asked, "Yet might not the organ change with

²⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 162. On Camper, see Miriam Claude Meijer, *Race and Aesthetics in the Anthropology of Petrus Camper (1722-89)* (Studies in the History of the Low Countries) (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1999).

³⁰ On Monboddo and Camper's anatomical work on orangutan when he endorsed the possibility of its capacity for speech in the first edition *Of the Origin and Progress of Language* published in 1773, see Robert Wolker, "Apes and Races in the Scottish Enlightenment: Monboddo and Kames on the Nature of Man," in *Philosophy and Science in the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed., Peter Jones (Edinburgh: John McDonald, 1988), 147-52.

the exigencies of civil society? and is there not the more reason to admire this temporizing harmony of things!³¹ This seemed to run contrary to the main thrust in the body of the text wherein he maintained the human species as at once a unique creation. The possibility of adaptation within species in response to environmental conditions, however, was certainly consonant with Dunbar's theory of global history. In human affairs the harmony of things was to be understood as a process of interaction between nature and culture in which there was mutual adaptation.

Globalization and Human Progress

Although hegemony in international affairs was far from inevitable at the time, Europe's sense of superiority stemmed in part from its increasing social, economic, and intellectual advancements vis-vis much of the eighteenth-century world. Yet civilizational progress was, Dunbar argued, largely the product of historical fortunes, rather than innate or divine gifts. Europeans made a mistake if they assessed human moral excellence upon the outward superficialities of modernity. An obstacle in the "judging of nations, as well as individuals," he observed, was that, "our observations are more frequently directed to circumstance of pomp and outward splendor, than to intrinsic excellence." In those countries "where no such appearances are to be found," he observed, Europeans "too hastily conclude to be the mansions of people, who, from a natural inferiority of talent, are incapable of producing them." Frivolous or ornamental distinctions were mistaken for substantive differences. If "we survey

³¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 202-3.

the circle of human things," he suggested, "the illusions of vanity, and the insolence of pride, will be found most inherent to nations and to ages intoxicated with prosperity and affluence." Rather, it was the "actual possession of refinement and civil arts, not the efforts made towards acquiring them, which engenders extravagance and conceit."³² This belief in one's own superiority had been the conclusion successively drawn by the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, and now by eighteenth-century Europeans in their encounters with "rude nations."

Dunbar noted that those peoples who seemingly had not "emerged into distinction, or to have touched the nearest verge of science and the liberal arts," were view by most Europeans as having been constituted "so long in circumstances so far beneath the standard of our ideas, it may be deemed not unreasonable to impute to *them* an original inferiority of nature, or a degradation of rank, occasioned by the infallible operation of physical laws." He objected, however, that the causes of regular and well-constituted government were so various that, "no evidence decisive of the relative capacity of any people could be derived from the commencement of their civil æra." Yet the absence of civil society and constitutional government could in "no degree" be seen as "affecting the genius of a people." Indeed, even when consistent with the "full strength and vigour of the human powers, the reign of ignorance and simplicity may endure for ages" among a people. The "magnitude of genius or capacity, in individuals or in tribes, cannot be fully estimated by the success of its exertions." While he conceded that great attainments in the sciences

³² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 175-76.

and philosophy "indeed imply great talents, the want of talent is not implied in disappointment." For though the moderns had surpassed the ancients, "yet who," Dunbar asked, "upon this foundation, will arraign the genius of antiquity?"³³ Rather, the fortunes of genius, as well as their seeming absence, had to be placed in a global historical perspective.

The notion that all societies moved, or would, if left to their own devices, spontaneously through a nearly identical series of stages of development was foundational in Scottish Enlightenment social theory. Although acknowledging an inherent human capacity for progress, Dunbar regarded the existence of civilizational advancement largely as the product of global historical dynamics. Was it not, he asked, a wonder that so many nations had "already emerged from obscurity, within the compass of a few thousand years," rather than to find "so many others still hovering on the confines of a state of nature?" Recognizing that historically there had been a quick rise and extension of civility where there was intercourse between nations, Dunbar found that the prospects for development were bleak in some parts of the world. In proportion to the nations already possessing arts and sciences, he suggested, the "chance for the emerging of any new people must constantly decrease." For in the "sequestered corners of the globe, calculation determined that there was a growing chance against the appearance of a cultivated or polished nation." If one were to "reason from actual experience," he concluded, it was "more probable that in any barbarous land, the civil arts will owe their original to foreign operations, either hostile or commercial, than to

³³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 181-83.

interior efforts." Neither the Greeks nor the Romans were, for example, to be regarded as the "founders of their own policy." However, once acquired, these arts were further disseminated through intercourse with other nations. Rome had been "no less the legislators, than the conquerors of the world." While the Romans had spread desolation and violated the liberties of those they conquered, they were "anticipating, in every country, the progress of legislation, and the arts of government," leaving to "their barbarous conquerors the traces of a jurisprudence, to which Europe was principally indebted for its future progress."³⁴

Historically, civilizational development among what were considered the most polished nations had more likely been the result of transmission, emulation, and translation than of original genius. There were few or perhaps only a single people owing their rise to original efforts of genius, and progress had been dictated more by external contingencies than internal capacities. The fact that the initial introduction of the arts and sciences had often been imposed upon peoples from without, however, did not recommend empire as a vehicle of progress in present circumstances. This was precisely because despotism constituted an "additional principle to account for their late appearance or stagnation in so many parts of the earth." That is, political systems were part of a "concurrence" of various causes found requisite "if not to produce, at least to accelerate, the progress of refinement and the arts." For as a society was equally subject to a proportionate retardation by a "different contexture of events," Dunbar concluded that, the "transition from barbarism to

³⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 186-87.

civility [was] not more incident to mankind than the contrary transition."³⁵

As historian David Spadafora has noted, enlightened Scottish historical theorists were singular in eighteenth-century British thought in recognizing that, given its complexity, progress was neither inevitable nor irreversible.³⁶ Dunbar was, among the Scots social theorist, the most explicit in recognizing the possibility, perhaps even the probability, of the reversal of progress. For he saw in history that the world's greatest nations had "certainly fallen" from the importance they formerly possessed, and many more had "probably experienced as fatal a reverse." Conversely, he argued, as "rude nations" had been "exposed to our view only in their decline, a judgment has been formed of their general character, from what is peculiar to a certain age."³⁷ As the revolutions of time undergone by various nations remained largely unknown, a historical perspectivism was necessary in making anthropological assessments.

In an attempt to cultivate a proper anthropological perspectivism, Dunbar asked his readers to imagine with him "a modern traveller to perform the tour of the East." He guided his imaginary traveler, and his imagining readers, to the cradle of civilization where they would find there a country "under the gloom of barbarism, presenting no traces of erudition or civil arts, and, without all tradition or memorial of ancestors, superior to the rude inhabitants."

³⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 188-89.

³⁶ David Spadafora, "The Progress of Human Culture: Scotland," in *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), Chapter 7.

³⁷ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 189.

Nevertheless, history, he objected, would inform this traveler that the "natives of this country had once been as conspicuous and flourishing as their posterity are now obscure."³⁸ If the writings of ancients were to be believed, he noted, such was precisely the case of modern-day Babylon or Colchis, the latter had been in Greek mythology the destination of the Argonauts and historically a Bronze Age culture of the Black Sea region that had been successively conquered by the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

Dunbar then asked his readers to imagine their traveler arriving in a land "as barbarously peopled, and unmentioned, or undescribed, in the writings of any historian." The reader was further asked to suppose that there were in this land still "preserved some monuments of art and grandeur, far disproportioned to the general aspect of things, and to the actual posture of affairs."³⁹ He asked whether their imaginary traveler might not be unable to distinguish between a state of nature and a state of depression, between what might be supposed the very first and the last conditions of society. The undecidability between the two situations, Dunbar told his readers, was precisely the conundrum facing Westerners when they encountered "rude nations" in many parts of the world and attempted to assess their position on the arc of historical progress. Indeed, the "state of depression" evident in many areas of what had been the cradle of civilization suggested that regress or decline was common aspect of historical change, and Dunbar offered the contemporary examples of the "wilds of Tartary" and Cambodia, represented, respectively, in the *Histoire de l'Empire du*

³⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 190.

³⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 191.

Russie by Voltaire and *Les Voyages d'un Philosophe* by Poivre. Travelers' observances of the physical remnants of sophisticated architecture and engineering in remote parts of the world far exceeding the capabilities of their present inhabitants undermined the belief that progress was a unilinear phenomenon.

In the New World, for example, Dunbar claimed that, "though...more recently peopled than the old, there were indications" of monuments beyond the capabilities of the present inhabitants. Accounts of vast architectural works in North America had been given by travelers such as Pehr Kalm and Jonathan Carver. Kalm, a Swedish-Finnish explorer and student of Linnaeus, who had undertaken an expedition in North America (1752-61), had reportedly found amidst "the wilderness of nature" hundreds of miles from Montreal "relics of a former age." In an endnote to his *Essays*, Dunbar observed that besides other ancient monuments Kalm had found "pillars of stone, of great magnificence, manifestly erected by human hands, but of which remained no tradition among the Indian tribes." However, one large stone covered with "unknown characters" was discovered, and was later delivered to France where it was placed in the custody of Maurepas, then secretary of state. Similarly, the American-born Carver reported in his *Travels through North America* the existence of "works of great antiquity" in the interior of the continent. Carver's description of an extensive defensive bulwark constructed in the Mississippi territory evidenced "an acquaintance with military science, far above the capacity of rude and untutored tribes" then inhabiting the region.⁴⁰ Just as Dunbar's imaginary traveler, and imagining reader,

⁴⁰ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 193.

might encounter in Mesopotamia a condition of rudeness where once a great civilization had existed, so might a similar situation be found by present-day travelers in the Americas. Thus, judging the capacity of a people for cultural achievement could not be made based upon their current level of attainment.

The rise of polished nations from rude beginnings and their return to rudeness supported Dunbar's supposition that civilizational progress, if not strictly of a cyclical nature, was certainly subject to the vicissitudes of global forces or structures. The historical record of physical monuments served his aim to "vindicate the prerogatives of the species," including those peoples regarded by many of his contemporaries as "savage" and "barbarian." Indeed, "the wide differences which have subsisted, or subsist at present, in the actual condition of tribes and nations, are such as, without prejudice to our nature," Dunbar asserted, were to be "apprehended from the nice contexture of events, and the complicated operation of moral causes." Correct assessment of a people's capacity for progress must therefore attend to the interplay between physical and moral causes. Given the complex operation of factors in human affairs, he argued, the "local circumstances" of people "did not immediately affect genius, or capacity."⁴¹ There existed, Dunbar wrote, "corresponding points in the rise and decline of nations, which are liable to be confounded. And apparent motion may be as different from the real, in the political, as in the natural world." Europeans often made the facile judgments about other peoples on the perceived absence of technological attainment, and thereby "mistake the evening for the morning twilight;

⁴¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 195-6; 199.

and imagine a people to be just emerging from the shade, who have, long before, passed their meridian, and are hastening back within the limit of darkness."⁴² The complex interplay of internal and external factors and the difficulty of determining the present position of a society in its historical cycle thus required anthropological judgments to be set in the perspective of a *longue durée*.

Dunbar, who held that sociability proceeded rationality in human development, found social happiness to be a far better criterion for vindicating the humanity of tribal peoples. He found in the accounts given of the indigenous peoples of North America by Charlevoix and Lafitau, who had lived among them for years, testimony that "social felicity" was far more likely to be found in tribal than modern commercial societies. In an age of increased social flux and dislocation, understanding and promoting sociability was a central aspect of Enlightenment social philosophy. The social happiness experienced among "rude nations" revealed a degree of humanity often denied them by more "polished" nations. Dunbar contrasted the virtues characterizing the respective courts of the mythic Fingal represented in the *Ossian* poems by the Scot James Macpherson and the "highly civilized" court of Louis XIV. Who, Dunbar asked, "would not prefer the civilization of Fingal's court to that of the other, though embellished by all art and sciences." Though the authenticity of Macpherson's work was hotly contested in Britain at the time, as a purportedly ancient artifact, it was embraced as a source of national pride by many Scots as a high literary achievement and a historical

⁴² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 194.

portrait of ancient Gaelic culture.⁴³ The sociability exhibited in the court of the ancient Celtic clan mirrored that of the North American tribes, and perhaps exceeded that of the ancient Greeks. Though he did not follow Rousseau in his critique of modernity, Dunbar defended the "civilization" of "rude nations" where the virtues of "fidelity, generosity, true dignity of mind" were evident, and suggested that these virtues were better criteria than the accoutrement of developed societies for judging social happiness.

Dunbar made an even stronger defense of the peoples of tribal societies in the second edition of the *Essays on the History of Mankind* of 1781. In an endnote attendant to the passage comparing the ancient Celtic and modern French court cultures, he engaged in an extended dialogue with the Welsh churchman Dean Josiah Tucker who, in his *Treatise Concerning Civil Government* (1781), had attacked Dunbar's positive assessment of the character of "savages" and his egalitarianism towards them. Dunbar critiqued Tucker's specious division of the indigenous peoples of America into three classes: mere savages, half-savages, and almost savages, and for describing them in "all respects, as a blood-thirsty, unfeeling race, destitute of every human virtue." Tucker, who argued for a system of government in opposition to that of Locke, had, in Dunbar's view, misrepresented all tribal peoples in order "to support a new theory of government, which is founded on the total debasement of human nature." Contrary to fact, Tucker asserted that all historians had agreed "without one exception,

⁴³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 199. On the debates surrounding Macpherson's work, see Fiona J. Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1988) and Howard Gaskill, *Ossian Revisited* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1991).

that the savages, in general, are very cruel and vindictive, full of spite and malice; and that they have little or no fellow-feeling for the distresses even of a brother of the same tribe."⁴⁴ Dunbar rebuked Tucker for this characterization, objecting that the "original of this picture, is to be found only in the registers of the damned." He suggested that when the "benevolence of this writer is exalted into charity, when the spirit of his religion corrects the rancour of his philosophy, he will learn a little more reverence for the system to which he belongs, and acknowledge, in the most untutored tribes, some glimmerings of humanity, and some decisive indications of a moral nature."⁴⁵ Dunbar refuted Tucker's anthropology on both theological and scientific grounds, exposing the hypocrisy of an unchristian refusal of benevolence to his fellow creatures and willful misunderstanding of human nature that undergirded his religious and political positions, which were shared by many of his contemporaries.

What all the historians agreed upon, Dunbar argued, was rather that the "character of rude tribes is various and dissimilar, like that of more enlightened nations." If anything, he claimed, they "resembled, in genius and modes of life, the character of the antient Germans." Dunbar here echoed Adam Ferguson in his *Essays on the History of Civil Society* and the works of "the Jesuits" (presumably Lafitau and Charlevoix) in finding an affinity between the tribal peoples of the ancient and modern worlds. Rather, the "historians," who had firsthand acquaintance with Amerindians, characterized them as possessing the "benevolent instincts of nature" and "flourishing in

⁴⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 212-13.

⁴⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 217.

the virtues of peace and of humanity." As further evidence of their character, he suggested that Dean Tucker, "our learned Divine," attend to the first reception of "Columbus in the New World, to the more recent voyages of discovery in both hemispheres, and to the indelible character of the human species, which has fitted them for society and for government in every country under heaven." If Tucker would not accept these findings, Dunbar scathingly noted, "I might almost refer him to an authority he reveres: the authority of those Fathers who conduct their mission on the principles of deceit, who belie the Saviour of the world, and number submission to the domination of tyrants among the evangelical virtues."⁴⁶ Dunbar here condemned the self-serving denial of the true "character of rude tribes" made by state and church. For the denial of the humanity of tribal peoples, and hence a fitness for society and "government," justified the coordinated imposition of European political and religious hegemony over them. The importance of properly discerning what had been the "original" character of human nature, seen as embodied in the peoples of tribal societies, was viewed as key in the eighteenth century to the understanding the form of government most appropriate to that nature. In short, eighteenth-century social and political theorists, whether defenders of a more liberal or conservative order, argued from the position that there existed an integral link between the character of tribal peoples and Europeans governments. It is little wonder that the attempt of the Scottish Enlightenment to re-imagine broad areas of human life, including political life, made reasoning with savages central to the human sciences.

⁴⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 217-19.

The Equilibrium of Sentiments: Empire and Egalitarianism

Among the philosophical anthropologies of the Scottish Enlightenment, Dunbar's made the most sustained critique of empire as part of a general theory of global human development. He acknowledged that imperial ambitions had a constitutive role in human history and the existing geopolitical order. While empires had been instrumental in the transfer of peoples, materials, and ideas across great expanses, they had often done so by the paradoxical derailing of indigenous civilizing processes through violent force. Taking the case of Spain's conquest of the Americas as an example of the destruction inflicted on native societies, he argued that, in the ancient empires of Mexico and Peru the "sun of science arose there, as on our side of the globe." However, he reversed the usual pattern of eighteenth-century climatological theory, noting that, the science and the arts appeared "on the confines, or within the limit of the torrid zone. Civilization had begun, and even made some progress...while mankind in all the upper latitudes [temperate zone] were utter strangers to refinement, in the lowest stage of political union." Had the "Peruvian and Mexican art been transplanted into those regions of the new hemisphere," he suggested, "they would, in all probability, have flourished there, from the same combination of causes as in Europe, with a degree of vigour and success unknown in the more productive climates which gave them birth." The flourishing in the New World of indigenous arts and sciences in an otherwise inhospitable climate perhaps promised to equal or surpass those of Europe. However, Dunbar concluded that the "system to which they belonged was unhinged by

violence" of imperial dominion imposed by the Spanish.⁴⁷ Here Dunbar condemned not only actual genocide, but also the violent "unhinging" of system, that is, of "cultural genocide" or the systematic destruction of indigenous cultural practices.

Nature, Dunbar claimed, had set limits in both the physical and political worlds, and that it maintained a "due balance of power...to prevent the rapacity of sovereigns from transgressing those geographical limits which nature seems to have affixed to dominion, is an object of the first importance to the general liberties of Europe."⁴⁸ He observed that, "unhappily, the freest of those governments [Britain] was the first to be made sensible of its defects."⁴⁹ This was likely an allusion to the War for Independence launched by the American colonists, which he regarded as a harbinger of things to come if the policy of European imperial administrations was not reformed.⁵⁰ In an endnote, Dunbar observed that when *England*, significantly, rather than Britain, attempted to "imitate the examples of those imperious and arbitrary states, created discontents which were the immediate forerunners of revolt." *England*, he asserted, could "only claim the equivocal praise of being less tyrannical and oppressive than the rest of Europe."⁵¹ However, as European imperial competition was increasingly conducted in distant regions of the

⁴⁷ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 247-48.

⁴⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 279.

⁴⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 282.

⁵⁰ Dunbar had published a treatise on the conflict, *De Primordiis Civitatum oratio in qua agitur de Bello Civili inter M. Britanniam et Colonias nunc flagrante* (London: T. Cadell, 1779). See Christopher J. Berry, "James Dunbar and the American War of Independence," *Aberdeen University Review* 45 (1974): 255-66.

⁵¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 291-92.

world, maintaining a balance of power was also of importance to the liberties of non-Europeans.

Indeed, Dunbar found that, at present, the "fabric of *colonial* subordination in all the governments of Europe seems to stand in need of repair."⁵² Adopting a tone of modesty and self-deprecation, he wrote that it "becomes not, perhaps, a Briton, a private citizen, at such a crisis, to anticipate this order of things; to predict the revolutions of government, or the eventual glory of a future age." Nevertheless, presumably in the public role of moral philosopher, he recommended that, "This chapter of accidents," referring to the Spanish conquest in the Americas, "should be read in the cabinets of Europe."⁵³ Given the benefits to Europe derived from international trade, its abuses would only be ameliorated through an enlightened understanding of the unequal and shifting global distribution of wealth and its corresponding social and moral effects in provincial societies.

Much has been written about the role of international commerce as an engine for the universal expansion of benevolence in eighteenth-century thought, though many enlightened North Britons remained ambivalent about the unintended consequences of trade.⁵⁴ International trade had created conditions in which distant peoples might become aware both of their common humanity and superficial differences. For

⁵² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 282. Emphasis in the original.

⁵³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 248.

⁵⁴ For some of the more recent reconsiderations of the topic of trade in eighteenth-century thought, see Laurence Dickey, "Doux-Commerce and Humanitarian Values: Free Trade, Sociability, and Universal Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century Thinking," *Grotiana* 22: 271-317; Sankar Muthu, "Adam Smith's Critique of International Trading Companies: Theorizing 'Globalization' in the Age of Enlightenment," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 185-212; and, Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

these global exchange had united in "one prospect, its [the world's] most distant extremes." At the same time, they had also "heightened the insolence of nations, and rendered their original and natural equality, to a superficial observer, more incredible." Though a vehicle for promoting familiarity, and hence benevolence, international trade had provided Europeans with the opportunity to misjudge the merits both of themselves and their fellows. While expanding networks of exchange between distant points on the globe promised to enlarge the "sphere of observation and experience, promised to undeceive the world, and to diffuse more liberal and equal sentiments through the several parts of an extended system," he noted, in many instances, it had been "productive of the very contrary effects." Dunbar thus charged that commerce had become the "boast of modern policy."⁵⁵

Though citing and recommending Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, Dunbar's theory of globalization focused on the moral effects of large-scale economic forces and conditions upon indigenous peoples, and his critique of empire and trade was motivated primarily by humanitarian concerns. The history of unequal and unhappy exchanges between Europe and the Americas was well known, particularly the destruction inflicted upon the indigenous peoples through the transmission of disease. A similarly unhappy exchange, he noted, was becoming evident in the ravages of disease in the South Pacific where the "vices of Europe have already contaminated the Otaheitean blood."⁵⁶ By the late eighteenth century, it was increasingly accepted that

⁵⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 176.

⁵⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 372.

syphilis had not been an imported from Tahiti, and the other islands of the South Pacific, by English and French sailors, but rather had been borne there by them. However, worse yet was "the use of intoxicating liquors a practice derived to them from European commerce," which he asserted had contributed "in the new hemisphere, more, perhaps, than any other cause, to the destruction, and what is worse, to the debasement of the species." With this history in mind, Dunbar referenced the recent "voyages of discovery," such as those in the Pacific Oceans undertaken by Captain Cook for Great Britain, "which, in some respects, are so honourable, and calculated for noble ends," had, he concluded, "never yet been happy for any of the tribes of mankind visited by us."⁵⁷

Dunbar made the case that the "introduction of certain vegetables and animals" by Europeans to the island archipelago, however useful to human life, made "a poor recompense to the natives for the communication of disease, and the corruption of manners."⁵⁸ The strategic implantation of useful species into the Pacific islands by Cook, however, was undertaken by the British from a desire to form a supply network for future exploration and colonization as much as to benefit the indigenous peoples. It was the potential "unhinging," the systematic destruction, of indigenous life systems threatened by recent European voyages of discovery, at once scientific and military, such as those by Cook for Great Britain and Bougainville for France, that perhaps gave the *Essays* their moral urgency.

⁵⁷ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 372-74.

⁵⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 374.

Another subtext of the moral urgency evident in his *History of Mankind* was the growing debate surrounding British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and the growth of the abolition movement. Dunbar's egalitarianism and opposition to slavery stemmed from his conception of human nature, and his condemnation of the institution of slavery far exceeded that of previous Scottish philosophical anthropologists. The "pen drops from my hand," he wrote in a rhetorical flourish, "in reciting the enormities [of slavery] acted by Europeans in the new hemisphere." He began by distinguishing between slavery as it existed at present and its practice in the ancient world. Slavery in its ancient form, he suggested, "might almost excite envy, when compared with that severer destiny, to which the maxims of modern policy have condemned...a large proportion of the species."⁵⁹

Theoretically, the distinction between ancient and modern slavery, he argued, was to be found in the degree to which sympathies existed between master and slave. This sympathy was one, he suggested, that "the negroes do not so easily excite." Dunbar was highly critical of the notion that the superficialities of physical difference might limit the exercise of slave owners' sympathies. The "features and complexion" of African slaves, which many Europeans "regarded as natural badges of inferiority, seem to mark them out for servitude." Similarly, the "American features and complexion, scarce less offensive to the European than the African," allowed equal scope to their antipathies."⁶⁰ He objected that this furnished "an occasion for unreasonable contempt, or antipathy approaching to hatred" that

⁵⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 402-04.

⁶⁰ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 413.

should extinguish "that fellow-feeling with their sufferings, by which their grievances would often be lightened, and the hand of the oppressor disarmed."⁶¹ The prejudice that physical difference signified a natural inferiority was Dunbar's primary object of deconstruction in his anthropology.

He sought to overcome this prejudice as a primary obstacle to a universal extension of humane sentiments through bringing home to the imagination of readers the inhumane treatment inflicted upon enslaved peoples. In so doing, he echoed Adam Smith's observations concerning the relationship between the emotions and the body to highlight the detrimental effects of the slave system.⁶² He was careful to deny that he was "favouring those systems of materialism, which, however fashionable in the philosophy of the present age, seem to confound the most important distinctions of our being." Mind and body were not the same, yet he clearly found there to be an interrelationship between them. It was precisely in "the shocks which are felt in the transition from a free and happy state to that of slavery and dejection, may prove, to the last degree, injurious to the organization of man."⁶³ It was, he argued, not so much "any debasement or elevation of the mental powers, that we have supposed destructive, as the unnatural restraint, as the revolt of the spirit, and the intenseness of inward emotion."

⁶¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 407-8.

⁶² Adam Smith, "The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Oxford, 1980), 33-105.

⁶³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 415.

This "contagion of the mind," Dunbar concluded, "in a variety of ways, affects the whole animal œconomy."⁶⁴

This "contagion," Dunbar argued, could be seen in the extreme responses to enslavement among indigenous peoples in the New World. Had it been possible for "their ancestors at the conquest to have predicted so long a series of calamity," he claimed, "it might well have inspired, throughout the empires of Peru and Mexico, such a desperate resolution, as was actually executed at that æra by an Indian tribe in the island of Saint Domingo," which had "unanimously interdicted themselves the commerce of sex, that they might not entail their miseries on a posterity." Given the choice between extinction and degradation, who, Dunbar asked, "would not hesitate to prefer the first, when such alternatives alone are presented by fortune?" Large numbers of the native peoples in the Americas "when they found they were treated as slaves by the Spaniards, died of vexation, or destroyed themselves in the frenzy of despair."⁶⁵ Under the "rigour then of such discipline" of modern slavery," Dunbar warned, "we may expect the decline of the animal system, if not the total extinction of the degraded race."⁶⁶

Perhaps inspired in part by his reading of Raynal's *Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes*, to which Diderot had contributed a scathing anti-imperial critique, Dunbar reserved some of his harshest

⁶⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 415-16.

⁶⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 415-16.

⁶⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 414; 416.

criticism for Spain and its treatment of both Africans and Americans.⁶⁷ While he conceded that recent regulations of Spanish policy had improved the condition of the Indians, their treatment and that of Africans, remained destructive to the human system. Spain had imposed a system in the Americas that established itself at the top of a racial hierarchy that it also introduced among those it had enslaved. For in the Spanish colonies, he noted, the Native Americans "rank below the negroes; who, elevated by this distinction, treat them with insolence and scorn. And it is the insidious policy of the Spaniards, to sow the seeds of discord and animosity between the two races." Dunbar further warned that, these peoples would "one day perhaps lay aside their mutual rancour, in order to retaliate their common miseries on their imperious masters."⁶⁸ He thus offered the usual tandem of arguments in Scottish moral thought in appealing to both humanity and self-interest in the effort to change the consciousness of his readers, and, by extension, eventually change policy.

In deconstructing the idea of racial differences promulgated in the "scientific" racism of the theorists of both polygenesis and monogenesis, Dunbar viewed himself as addressing enlightened policymakers in Britain and Europe. Citing the work of Hume, Smith, Montesquieu, and Raynal, Dunbar refuted ideas of racial inferiority, and, their use in justifying, slavery, which were contradicted by reason, sentiment, and state interest. He ridiculed the "reduction of the negro tribes to perpetual servitude" because their skin "had the

⁶⁷ On Raynal, Diderot, and the critique of empire in the *Histoire Philosophique des deux Indes*, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 72-121.

⁶⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 413.

colour of the damned." This was, he argued, "equally repugnant to reason, to humanity, and to sound policy." However, he acknowledged the limits of enlightenment, noting that, "the conviction of men of science is not the conviction of the crowd, and has often but little weight with the rulers of nations; to whom alone it belongs, by prohibiting the importation of slaves under the severest penalties, to annihilate for ever a traffic which throws so great a stain on the political œconomy of the modern ages.⁶⁹ As noted earlier, *England* was to be distinguished only for being less tyrannical than its European neighbors. Dunbar's backhanded compliment was an indictment of the persistence of the British slave trade and a call for enlightened policy change in Westminster.

Dunbar appears to have shared the theoretical assumptions of spontaneous and self-organizing natural systems marking much of the thinking of the period, and these informed his historical as well as moral thought.⁷⁰ He saw the history of globalization as inevitably entailing a mixed and unequal series of gains and losses, yet the acceptance of "natural systems" did not imply an acquiescence to the moral evils existing within the present order of things. "If we are punished for the vices," he observed, "we are rewarded too for the virtues, of our fathers. These opposite principles of exaltation and debasement tend to the equilibrium of the system." Rather, moral ills produced equal and opposite forces or sentiments, which might counteract or balance out the other in a sort of moral economy. This

⁶⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 409-11.

⁷⁰ See Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

equilibrium, he suggested, would bring "closer the ties of humanity, to remind us of our duty, by reminding us of the relations of our being; and of those indissoluble connexions and dependencies which unite us with the past, and will unite us with all succeeding ages."⁷¹ Dunbar thus regarded moral process as a natural economy that was squarely within the Scottish Enlightenment conception of spontaneous social order that was nonetheless given form by human moral exertions.

Dunbar's own exertions involved articulating a natural system that framed the history of civilizational progress within the history of globalization. Moral progress thus involved integration and disintegration of networks or systems of interconnections over time. The trajectory of these networks suggested to many enlightened global theorists an emergent moral equilibrium. While he noted that the "intercourse, which navigation opens, though abundantly sufficient for the purposes of mercantile traffic and exchange," it could "seldom form between distant nations so intimate connexions as arise from vicinity of settlement." Geographical relation or proximity would "always be, in some degree, instrumental in retarding or accelerating, in every country, the progress of civil life." For civility and rudeness "being distributed like light and darkness in the natural world, contiguous nations are often contemporary in their progress and decline: and the more enlightened regions, though always shifting," he argued, "form at any one time a complete and undivided whole, situated around a common centre." Recognizing enlightenment and globalization as interrelated processes, Dunbar remained optimistic about the prospects for the eventual expansion of universal benevolence. For he

⁷¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 375.

observed that, "Communities, as well as private persons, are formed by example."⁷² Hence, increasing contact between "common centre" and remote peripheries characteristic of eighteenth-century network formations promised an acceleration and equalization of progress not through *imposition*, but rather through *emulation*, itself a form of sympathy. Ultimately, it was the unequal processes of globalization, he argued, that explained the disparities of civilizational progress, not an inherent inferiority of peoples of color occupying particular regions of the globe.

Although all peoples possessed an inherent capacity for progress, Dunbar acknowledged the incommensurability among life or cultural systems that produced a resistance among indigenous peoples to the imposition to various practices or institutions by Europeans. The "different ages of society, like the different ages of man," he noted, "require different discipline and culture. The maxims of policy applicable to one part of the world, are not always applicable to another; nor are the full advantages of any local æconomy reconcileable, perhaps, with subordination to a general system." Therefore, he concluded, "in order to improve its advantages it is necessary to circumscribe its dominion."⁷³ Dunbar again invoked the idea of natural limits, but he also attempted to theorize a space where the greatest advantage came from the coexistence of seemingly incommensurable local conditions in a larger economy or system. Given the formation of international networks linking distant regions that was developing during the last half of the eighteenth century, many

⁷² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 318.

⁷³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 267.

enlightened thinkers envisioned the possibility, as well as the necessity, of a more inclusive and liberal world order. As these networks expanded and shifted, Dunbar argued, riches or poverty were no longer to "be estimated by the position of a people on the globe." With this redistribution of wealth and material advantages, civilizational progress could no longer be estimated geographically. As a result, he found that, the "local advantages of mankind all over the globe seem to approach nearer to an equality."⁷⁴ The processes of globalization thus contained within themselves forces that might level the very economic disparities they produced, and promised to reach an eventual civilizational equilibrium.

In the future, what Edmund Burke referred to as the "great map of mankind," that is, an image of the world as divided into regions where the historical gradients or forms of social organization existed, Dunbar suggested would likely appear far different.⁷⁵ At present, he acknowledged, that there was "perhaps...an incompatibility in the contemporary civilization of different regions." Yet, as "every people is capable of progress" and as there was a "concurrence of various causes and events, some of which are hastening into light," he suggested that later generations "may perhaps contemplate the blessings of an equal and liberal intercourse, more widely disseminated." Indeed, Dunbar went to far as to predict that a future generation might soon "contemplate...the greater part, or even the whole habitable globe, divided among nations free and independent in all the interior functions of government, forming one political and

⁷⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 309-10.

⁷⁵ January 9, 1777 letter from Edmund Burke to William Robertson, Edinburgh University Library, MS. 3943, 17-18.

commercial system.”⁷⁶ In short, Dunbar foresaw the existence of a global civil society.

Deconstructing Racial Difference and Globalizing Civil Society

Dunbar made the most forceful and sustained, as well as explicit, arguments for universal human equality of any Scottish Enlightenment theorist in the human sciences. While the humanitarian ethos was clearly present in the work of his predecessors, Dunbar made an unequivocal defense of “rude nations” as equals of their “cultivated” counterparts, exposing the European sense of superiority as rooted in prejudice. He eagerly deconstructed polygenist theories that interpreted physical and cultural difference as evidence of separate species or races of humans beings. Historically, Dunbar observed, the “confined intercourse of the species tend, ultimately to the formation of a peculiar genius,” instances of which were the Jews, the ancient Germans, the modern Athenians, and the “Aborgines of Indostan.” These were exemplars of what may be “properly called national, as distinguishing a people long under the same physical and moral œconomy, from the rest of the world.”⁷⁷ Yet he objected that this “peculiar genius” implied neither inherent inferiority nor separate descents. “Much latitude,” he observed, was “allowed in the genius and character of every people, without violation of the general law.” Drawing an analogy between families and nations, Dunbar asked, “What variety among children of the same parents, do we observe to consist with a family resemblance?” In the same manner, he argued, consistent

⁷⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 287.

⁷⁷ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 447; 446-49; and, 452.

"with family characteristics, is a certain national uniformity; and consistent with national characteristics, are the essentials of a common nature, and a common descent."⁷⁸

How, then, to explain human cultural and physical differences? Dunbar began by reasserting unity within diversity among human beings. While acknowledging that, "in different regions of the globe, varying continually from a fixed standard; breathing at first, if I may use the expression, unequal proportions of the ætherial spirit," he argued, "we may observe mankind essentially the same." In contradistinction to those theorists attributing moral or cultural characteristics to hereditary or biological differences of a people, he argued it was that the "various circumstances" of a people "ought to be considered rather as occasions of prosperous or adverse fortune, than as direct causes of human perfection or debasement."⁷⁹ Human diversity was the result of the operation of complex, multicausal factors, and Dunbar insisted that,

all the capital distinctions in individuals, families, or tribes, flow from causes *subsequent* to birth; from education, example, forms of government; from the order of internal laws, from the maxims and genius of religion, from the lights of science and philosophy; in some degree, from the infallible operations of the *external* elements; but above all, from the free determinations of the will.⁸⁰

The invocation of free will indicated that change was possible and that these laws were not to be understood as working in a mechanistic or deterministic manner. Rather, individual and collective difference was the result of a complex interplay of internal and external causes.

⁷⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 451.

⁷⁹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 318-19.

⁸⁰ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 452-53. My emphasis.

However, Dunbar held that even the "order of internal laws," presumably social and cultural forms, exerted their force subsequent to birth. The formation of differences in national character or culture was attributable to the interaction of diachronic events and synchronic structures, rather than located in some hereditary transmission among particular peoples.

The extrapolation from the descent of hereditary characteristics in families to entire peoples was clearly an idea that concerned Dunbar. He conceded that, a "cultivated and polished nation may, in some respects, be regarded as a standing family." Yet he objected that, the "one is, relatively to the greater number of the communities of mankind, what the other is, relatively to the greater number of citizens under the same civil œconomy." The problem of such reasoning for him, however, was its anti-egalitarian implications. For he found that the "conduct of the one, and of the other, towards their supposed inferiors, is often exactly similar. Both carry themselves with equal insolence, and seem alike to forget or to deny the inherent and unalienable rights of the species."⁸¹ A misplaced sense of superiority contributed equally to a contemptuous disregard for the inherent rights of one's fellow human beings, both in domestic society and in the society of nations.

In a remarkable set of passages interwoven throughout the final essay of the *History of Mankind*, "Of the hereditary Genius of Nations," Dunbar seemingly promoted the means to achieving an equality among peoples and a future global civil society that most Europeans would have found subversive. A theoretical position characteristic of

⁸¹ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 439.

Buffon and other vitalist thinkers that proposed a middle space between polar oppositions wherein there was a mutual interaction and transformation of one another also provided the social model for a more egalitarian future.⁸² For Dunbar this epistemological model was confirmed in eighteenth-century British social reality of an emergent middle class, whose contributions in the Kirk, courts, and universities had made Scotland a hotbed of enlightenment. In a "flourishing and cultivated nation," he observed, social mixing had produced "the middling ranks of life." Those composing this mixed or intermediary rank, he suggested, "promise to transmit as fair an inheritance to posterity [as those of an exalted station]." The "access to refinement, to culture, and to civil honours, which is opened" to the middling classes allowed "them almost every advantage," elevating them above the lower classes, while at once exempting them from "corruptions which are fostered by superior rank."⁸³ Dunbar further argued that the "hereditary" advantages of this social mixing were attributable to the forces of modernity itself.

Without drawing invidious parallels, it may be affirmed, that the fluctuations of things, in our age and country, the rotation of employments, the mutual intercourses, inter-marriages, and alliances, so often formed, are sufficient to blend and unite different tempers and capacities, so as to prevent hereditary endowments from becoming characteristic of any one order of citizens.⁸⁴

⁸² See Peter H. Reill, "Buffon and Historical Thought in Germany and Great Britain," in *Buffon 88, Actes du Colloque international pour le becentenaire de la mort de Buffon (Paris, Montbard, Dijon 14-22 juin 1988)*, ed. Michel Delsol (Paris, 1992), 667-79.

⁸³ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 437.

⁸⁴ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 437.

It was precisely this "fluctuation of things" that was productive of an emergent global modernity and of much Enlightenment thought. It was also flux of a modernity with its attendant socioeconomic change that allowed for the creation of "middling ranks." Indeed, enlightened thought may be seen in large part as a self-reflexive negotiation of paradigmatic changes constitutive of modernity. Dunbar proposed a blending and uniting of the "tempers and capacities" among the world's nations. Given the variety within uniformity apparent in families, he objected, a similar variety might manifest itself across nations, without in neither case there being any violation of the laws of nature. In a particularly extraordinary passage, Dunbar defended such intermixing, claiming that,

Such varieties ought not to create antipathies, or unhinge, or even relax the social ties. On the contrary, if it hold in man, that crossing the brood tends occasionally to improvement, this consideration, which forms a natural argument against incest, so justly prohibited on political and moral grounds by all civilized and enlightened governments, authorises and invites all nations to form mutual connexions and alliances.⁸⁵

The use of sexual allusions in this passage, and the chapter as a whole, is striking. In arguing against European antipathy to "mutual connexions and alliances" with non-Europeans, Dunbar regarded it as a form of social and moral incestuousness. For he noted that, if "crossing the brood" has the tendency towards improvement, the intercourse of nations would be called for as a "civilized and enlightened policy." Equating the European reluctance towards social and political mixing on equal terms with other nations as tantamount

⁸⁵ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 451-52.

to sexual deviance, Dunbar subtly and provocatively recommended miscegenation as a means of advancing universal improvement.

Conclusion

James Dunbar's *History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages* represents perhaps the most extensive elaboration of the intersections between global and anthropological theory in Scottish Enlightenment human sciences. Against the increasing emphasis within natural historical discourse upon "racial" divisions of peoples and the interpretations of differences in physiognomy as signifying an essential biological, as well as moral, differences, Dunbar defended the genetic unity of the species and excoriated the notion that any nation was biologically inferior to another. It belonged to "reason and philosophy," he wrote, "to rejudge mankind." This entailed taking a view of human interests "on the largest scale," and, "under an endless variety of appearances, more or less equivocal, to observe and to fix the principles which affect, in every age and country, the proportion of human happiness, and of human perfection." From such a global historical study one would "learn, from the established order of second causes, to respect, to adorn, and to exalt the species."⁸⁶ Dunbar's work, in perhaps the most extensive integration of moral philosophy, anthropology, and global theory, represents a culmination of the human science peculiar to the Scottish Enlightenment.

Dunbar made the global historical patterns of civilizational development a correlate part of his anthropological theory. What these patterns revealed was a *common* and *inherent* human capacity for

⁸⁶ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 454-55.

progress that was nevertheless subject to local effects of "second causes," to the external operations of large-scale forces and structures. The study of these patterns rendered problematic the belief that the presence of certain moral practices or the absence of civilizational "refinements" indicted the *essential* character of a people.⁸⁷ For though a "long series of ages spent in rudeness or barbarity, may blunt and disfigure," Dunbar objected, "it can never obliterate, in any tribe, the great outlines of human nature." The seeming inability of peoples to "divest themselves of the habits of their ancestors," he noted, had been interpreted by many Europeans as an "unfitness to receive the graces and refinements of polished life." Rejecting this so-called "unfitness" that was "ascribed by some writers to a fixed and immutable diversity in the races of mankind," Dunbar argued that those regions of the earth pointed out as the "permanent and natural habitations of inferior mortals" and "scene of rudeness and barbarity" were understood to be so largely as a result of historical *accident*.⁸⁸

Dunbar argued that the global study of humanity undermined both the polygenists' claims for multiple human species and the antipathetic monogenists' assumption of hierarchy within a single species. The former theory had received renewed speculations following the late voyages of exploration by Cook and Bougainville, with their reports of the unaccountable diversity of the inhabitants of the South

⁸⁷ Compare with Adam Smith: "All these effects of custom and fashion, are inconsiderable, in comparison of those which they give occasion to in some other cases; and it is not concerning the general style of character and behaviour, that those principles produce the greatest perversion of judgment, but concerning the propriety or impropriety of particular usages." *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, V.II.12.

⁸⁸ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 440.

Pacific archipelago.⁸⁹ There was no such thing as separate species of humans, he objected, and neither nations nor individuals were to "regard themselves as single in the creation."⁹⁰ The moral urgency of the egalitarian thrust in Dunbar's work towards the peoples of the world was a recognition of a continued, intensifying degree of inequitable relationships between them and Europeans. At the same time, his defense of human dignity was part of a growing agitation in Scotland and elsewhere for the abolition of slavery and the British transatlantic slave trade. In the most trenchant critique of European imperial and commercial policy and the institution of slavery, Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind* was not only the culmination, but also perhaps the terminus, of Scottish Enlightenment philosophical anthropology.

By the end of the century, many of Scotland's leading lights had died or retired from active scholarship. A new generation favored quantification over the anthropological imagination, critical or otherwise. Moreover, reactionary politics in Britain opposed the liberal sentiments of Enlightenment, which were largely held responsible for the course of revolutionary events in France, especially the Terror. Despite the eventual abolition of the British slave trade, after the turn of the century, the vast and rapid expansion of British global hegemony followed precisely the trajectory inveighed against in the human sciences by many enlightened Scots. Still, from the perspective of Scottish intellectuals such as Dunbar, nonetheless held that globalization held within itself correctives to

⁸⁹ This general trajectory is mapped out by Harry Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World: Europe to the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁹⁰ Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 545.

the civilizational retardation it had in part created or perpetuated in underdeveloped peripheries of the world, and the unintended consequence of greater global integration would be an eventual moral equilibrium, a more equal distribution of modernity's advantages and a creation a citizenry of the world.

Dunbar's *Essays on the History of Mankind* may thus be seen as the culmination, as well as the last great exemplar, of the Smithian anthropological thought characteristic of the late eighteenth-century human sciences. Though an egalitarian impulse had long inflected Scottish moral thought, from the conclusions of anthropological investigations, which theorized human progress as the history of global processes, Dunbar made the most unequivocal assertion of universal human equality of any member of the Scottish Enlightenment.⁹¹ This assertion was directed against the prejudicial antipathies of Europeans, including some naturalists and moralists, who imagined the absence or underdevelopment of civilization of many quarters of the world a result of the biological or cultural inferiority of their inhabitants. What the global history of humanity revealed was not the existence of "innate and constitutional differences." Rather, human diversity was, Dunbar put it, "fluctuating and contingent; and therefore consistent with parity of rank, and one common origin of nations."⁹²

⁹¹ See Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Muthu argues that the existence of an anti-imperial strand of Enlightenment thought in Kant, Herder, and Diderot stemmed from their view of "primitive" peoples not as living in a "state of nature," but as cultural agents. Scottish anthropological theorists, however, Smith, Ferguson, and Dunbar in particular, emphasized *capacity* for progress, rather than actual cultural production, as indicative of their humanity, and hence recognition of their rights as human beings.

⁹² Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind*, 440-41.

Epilogue

Anthropology, Vitalism, Globalization & What was the Scottish Enlightenment?

The ubiquitousness of "savages" in so many of its philosophical works and the attempt to reason about them with a critical and self-reflexive perspectivism requires the reevaluation of conventional assumptions regarding the Scottish Enlightenment and its contributions to the human sciences. In response to midcentury development in the life sciences, the reconstruction of a science of man as a natural history of the human species contributed to an increasing displacement of natural law from enlightened moral and social philosophy over the course of the century. Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman have recently sketched out the intellectual and cultural history of the language of self-organization across various fields of thought in the eighteenth century as it attempted to imagine order beyond both a mechanical worldview and traditional ideas of providence.¹ While Scottish Enlightenment thought has long been recognized for its idea of spontaneous, self-organized order, its sources and extent in the revival of vitalist thought has only recently begun to be appreciated. The thought of Buffon was clearly seminal, along with that of Rousseau, for Smith's own moral or social philosophy, including his anthropology and its stadial underpinnings.

Yet, the work of both Buffon and Smith may in part be seen as much as a symptom as a cause of later eighteenth-century intellectual

¹ Sheehan and Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

currents. As Sheehan and Wahrman observe, self-organization in the eighteenth century was not a coherent theory with distinct rules governing the relation of parts or internally consistent, but was rather a "language that cohered analogically," the elasticity of which allowed it to flourish in multiple contexts. As these authors point out, the language of self-organization defied easy definition precisely because it flourished in such different contexts. They consider the most distinctive and far-reaching innovations of the period was the "notion that complex systems, left to their own devices, generated order immanently, without external direction." The language of self-organization gradually moved into the intellectual, cultural, and political mainstream over the course of the century. As Sheehan and Wahrman note, self-organization spoke directly to ontology, as things *do* organize themselves, and but also to epistemology, as things appeared as *if* they organized themselves.²

Nonetheless, many of the Scots literati when dealing with moral questions sought to understand the history of human nature and how in its interaction with its social and natural environment produced social progress. The problem that was to these theorists confronted was to delineate a body of moral or social thought adequate to understand the complexity of systems that possessed not only their own internal self-organization, but also developed in interactions with other systems. Adam Smith repeatedly stated that his work, both in moral philosophy and political economy, outlined a natural system of liberty. He was critical precisely of what distorted or blocked the *natural* course of these self-organizing processes. One of the most

² Sheehan and Wahrman, *Invisible Hands*, xi-xiii.

significant effects of Scottish philosophical anthropology was in undermining or radically altering the natural law tradition. There is increasingly scholarly debate as whether the Scottish Enlightenment extended or subverted the conventions of natural law. The body of thought designated as the natural law tradition, however, had always served as old bottles for new wine, that is, as an older vessel capable of containing new philosophical content. Duncan Forbes noted that, as Hume had been regarded as destroying its rational foundation, natural law in the Scottish Enlightenment had been put in "dry dock" and upstaged by the psychological, historical, sociology, and economic interpretations of history. Forbes concluded that, the new foundations were not so much innovations as a continuing process begun in the seventeenth century of making natural law secular, empirical, sociological, popular and practical.³ The thread running through the preceding chapters has been that anthropology must be added to the list of philosophical and political theories largely supplanting natural law in nineteenth-century European thought.

In the early eighteenth century, Scottish philosophers were deeply engaged with Continental thought, especially that of the Dutch and Germans. Pufendorf's attempt to reconcile human self-interest and sociability was important for later Enlightenment thought in its negotiation between the extremes proposed by Hobbes and Rousseau. Eighteenth-century French theorists idealized civil society as an alternative to the commercial liberty of Britain and a challenge to

³ Forbes, "Natural Law and the Scottish Enlightenment," in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Andrew S. Skinner (Edinburgh: John McDonald, 1982), 187; 202. For an opposing argument that sees the philosophy of Scottish Enlightenment as an attempt to overcome natural law, see James Livesey, *Civil Society and Empire: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 154-76.

the absolute state.⁴ The Scottish Enlightenment was concerned with delineating the conditions most likely to foster human freedom and civil progress. Enlightened Scots generally rejected many fundamentals of the natural law tradition, most notably the idea of contract theory and a "state of nature," which assumed human beings existed outside of society, an idea deployed in opposed ways by Hobbes and Rousseau. One common feature of the natural law tradition, excluding Rousseau, was the assumption that reason characterized mankind even in a state of nature. Scots anthropologists recognized in the numerous contemporary accounts of "rude societies" the presence of sociability as a function of essential human character or instinct, rather than of reason posited by Pufendorf.

Adam Smith was crucial in reconstructing natural law upon anthropological insights, rejecting, as Knud Haakonssen argues, existing systems of natural law and positivistic command theory of law. For Smith there could be no society without justice. Further, Smith rejected, what Haakonssen terms, "consequentialist" arguments, such as those of Hume making public utility the basis for morally binding force. Rather, public utility was the unintended result of people's judgments based upon situational propriety. Thus, ideal or natural law necessarily had to reference particular societies or particular epochs in their development. Haakonssen suggests that, in his attempt to link his idea of natural laws and history, sociology, and psychology of law and morality, Smith's descriptive and

⁴ Peter Schröder, *Natural Law and Enlightenment in France and Scotland - A Comparative Perspective* (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 299; 308. For more on the Franco-Scottish nexus, see also, Daniel Gordon, *Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 129-76.

explanatory work attempted reach the standpoint of the *impartial spectator* under various historical, sociological, and psychological circumstances.⁵ Natural law, deduced by means of reason based on the idea of the state of nature, was thus purely hypothetical and acquired reality only in political society. Thus, it follows that there no natural right existed in the natural condition.⁶ Rather, international law best seen as a combination of law, custom, and moral philosophy.⁷ Absent rules agreed upon by all nations or of a binding arbiter, the law of nations would not be applied by Europeans in their dealings with non-European nations, especially where relations of power between them were imbalanced. *He followed Hume in viewing the balance of power as maintaining stability in international relations.*⁸ Smith likely recognized that international law, as another species of natural law formulated to regulate behavior between European nations. *Smith put the natural liberty of all peoples regardless of where they lived, and did not support ideas of a European mission to civilize less-developed peoples.*⁹ Human rights thus had to be re-situated in something other than natural law. Philosophical anthropology met this need. That a

⁵ Haakonssen, "What Might Properly be Called Natural Jurisprudence," in *The Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, 212; 215. My emphasis.

⁶ Merlio Scattola, "Before and After Natural Law: Models of Natural Law in Ancient and Modern Times," in *Early Modern Natural Law Theories: Contexts and Strategies in the Early Enlightenment*, ed. T. Hochstrasser and P. Schröder, (New York: Springer, 2003), 20-1.

⁷ For an overview of Smith's ideas about international law, diplomacy, and balance of power, see Edwin Van de Haar, "Adam Smith on Empire and International Relations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, eds. Christopher J. Berry, Maria Pia Paganelli, and Craig Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 417-39.

⁸ *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, eds. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 355-6; 552-3.

⁹ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25-52.

philosophical anthropology occupied such significant portions of Scottish moral philosophy in the last third of the century testifies to my contention that one of its central aims was the creation of impartial European spectators capable of proprietary judgment of cultural situations foreign to them through the creation of an anthropological imagination.

The case of natural law being radically reworked by the anthropological imagination is emblematic of the integral relationship between Enlightenment thought and globalization. In his *Wealth of Nations*, Smith considered the "late war," that is, the Seven Years' War, to be "altogether a colony quarrel" among European nation-states both to attain sovereign power and secure the interest of the international trading companies with which they were bound.¹⁰ As Sankar Muthu has suggested, the term "globalization" is more conceptually accurate in understanding some Enlightenment theorizations of global interconnections than contemporary connotations of "commerce." Eighteenth-century commerce referred not only to market-oriented manufacture and the trade of goods but also to interaction, exchange, and communication. Muthu thus finds that, "globalization" better captures the "wide array of institutions, practices, and sense of flux" referred to by many Enlightenment intellectuals when they used the term "commerce."¹¹ Indeed, the "anthropological turn" of the Scottish human sciences was only possible through the processes of globalization, both in the questions it raised and the information it

¹⁰ Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), IV.vii.c. 64; 615.

¹¹ Sankar Muthu, "Adam Smith's Critique of International Trading Companies: Theorizing 'Globalization' in the Age of Enlightenment," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 4.

supplied to them. Philosophical anthropology was not only a product of Scottish literati's self-conscious contribution to the intellectual life of Britain and the empire, it was also a coherent elaboration of the historical and current processes of "globalization."¹² Of course, this is not to say that changes caused by globalizing forces and economic structures were entirely responsible for shaping the course of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought. Globalization provided, however, an expanded horizon of knowledge with which to rethink interlocking set of psychological, social, and political problems.

Globalization was not simply the context in which Enlightenment philosophical inquiries took place, but also the object of investigation among its more reflexive members.¹³ Scotland had become the beneficiary of globalization through its Union with England. Empire provided Scottish merchants with access to English international markets and the sons of the gentry with military and professional careers. By the second half of the century, one in four regimental officers was a Scot. British overseas commerce increased around 300% between 1750 and 1800. Scotland was central to this rapid economic expansion. Around 1760, 40% of British tobacco imports from North America passed through Scotland, more than London. Scotland's

¹² Emma Rothschild, "Globalization and the Return of History," *Foreign Policy* 15 (1999): 106-16; David Armitage, "Is There a Prehistory of Globalization?" in *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective*, ed. Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor (London: Routledge, 2004), 165-76; and, Duncan S. A. Bell, "History and Globalization: Reflections on Temporality," *International Affairs* 79, no. 4 (2003): 801-14.

¹³ Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2010), especially Chapters 3-6.

urban population doubled during this period.¹⁴ During the Seven Years' War, for example, one in four Scots highlanders served in the military.¹⁵ The integral connections between empire and international trade were thus highly evident to the enlightened thinkers from their social relations in Scotland with the families of those the increasing deployment of British military power in support of the East India Company on the Subcontinent.¹⁶ Yet, despite being ensconced within bourgeois institutions of the establishment, many Scots literati incorporated a critique, albeit often ambivalent, of empire, quite often detailed in the anthropological sections of their philosophical works.

Given their global orientation, enlightened Scots thinkers recognized the benefits of empire as well as the dangers it posed, potential at home and actual abroad, to free societies. Unbounded empire and universal monarchy clearly concerned many enlightened Scots. Equally important, though less noted in their writings, was their defense of "primitive" peoples against the European imposition of "progress" through imperial and commercial forces. Here a reworked understanding of natural laws had implications for the European treatment of "rude" nations. Paradoxically, most Europeans tended to view these peoples as living in a "state of nature," from which religion, laws, and property were commonly regarded as absent, yet

¹⁴ Neil Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 120; 92-94; and, 171-174; Jeremy Black and Donald M. MacRaild, *Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 200-203; and, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 122-123.

¹⁵ Neil Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*, 120.

¹⁶ Emma Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empire: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

were often unwilling to respect the rights ostensibly extended to them in the natural law tradition. For Scottish anthropological theorists the historical record offered no evidence that human beings had ever existed outside some form of society, and regarded sociability as an inherent characteristic of the human species. Another human characteristic was a proclivity towards barter and exchange as part of the drive to self-improvement. Global exchange, Smith and others believed, would eventually unite "in some measure, the most distant parts of the world."¹⁷ Yet these same processes had also driven the disastrous consequences of imperial and commercial policy for non-European peoples. Yet, for Smith and James Dunbar, as globalization was a spontaneous and self-perpetuating system, the corrective to the abuses produced by a global mercantile economy and the imperial policy supporting monopolistic trading companies was contained within the very same system. Global, like natural, systems would reach an equilibrium, and Smith and others believed that poor, non-European nations would eventually acquire greater political and economic power at the expense of Europe.¹⁸

The critical stance of the Scots literati towards empire stemmed not only from Scotland's own equivocal status within Britain, but also from the Enlightenment assumption of a unified human species. The mainstream of philosophical historians found this unity confirmed in their investigations of human nature and the societal forms emanating

¹⁷ *Wealth of Nations*, IV.vii.c.80; 626.

¹⁸ Smith in his work on political economy did call upon Britain to stop building great, but imaginary, empires. If "the project cannot be completed, it ought to be given up." Though he conceded that, only a "visionary enthusiast" would expect such an outcome. *Wealth of Nations*, V.iii.92; 947; IV.vii.c.66; 617.

from it. The same moral philosophy that aimed to produce sociability in civil society was similarly cast as part of a larger theorization of globalization. Natural history suggested that all organisms existed only within certain natural boundaries. Analogically, the nature of things set boundaries to social organisms in the same manner as natural organisms. This natural principle was evident in the historical precedent of the Roman Empire, the demise of which came to preoccupy eighteenth-century intellectuals.¹⁹ The imperial ascendancy of Britain in the last half of the century concerned many among the Scottish literati. They viewed unrestrained imperial ambitions as a threat to *British* liberties that had been embraced in Scotland.²⁰ It was evident from the history of great empires that civilizational progress was subject to reversal. The "rude nations," which were the objects of Scottish anthropological study, were in many cases the descendants of the builders of once great empires. Europeans had once lived as savage peoples; the decline and fall of empire might again render civil society savage.

This interpretation of the Scottish Enlightenment offered here emphasizes the importance of the new natural sciences as an impetus for naturalistic explanatory model for the moral or human sciences as a natural history of the human species and of society. Historians Roger Emerson and Paul Wood, in particular, have argued for an interpretative approach that focuses on the centrality of the sciences to eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy. Such an approach

¹⁹ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²⁰ James Livesey, *Civil Society and Empire: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

refocuses attention to the prevalence of vitalist thought in the reframing of Scottish moral philosophy from the 1750s to the 1780s. Wood has examined the ambivalent reception of Buffon in the Aberdeen Enlightenment. However, only more recently have historians recognized the scale of the Scottish Enlightenment's engagement with vitalist ideas through the work of Buffon and other natural philosophers.²¹ Despite this proliferation of vitalist ideas, many Scots literati, perceiving a heterodox reintroduction of occult forces into divine creation, rejected the theoretical underpinnings of the new life sciences as materialistic and atheistic.²²

Adam Smith was in the vanguard of intellectuals in Scotland introducing vitalist ideas from the new life sciences, which the medical sciences in Glasgow and Edinburgh had been a major conduit, into the moral or human sciences. Smith's genius was in translating new conceptions of the natural world as a system of general economy of self-directed and independent natural forces into a system of "natural liberty" in the social and moral world. He understood that any philosophical or scientific theory would neither gain general acceptance nor advance human understanding if it failed to satisfactorily represent correspondences between itself and external realities. Vitalist ideas, for example, such as that of sympathy, sympathies operating within parts of the human body, between peoples,

²¹ Catherine Packham, "The Physiology of Political Economy: Vitalism and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2002): 465-481. More generally, see Catherine Packham, *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Cultures, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) and Peter H. Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2005).

²² Paul B. Wood, "Buffon's Reception in Scotland: The Aberdeen Connection," *Annals of Science* 44 (1987): 169-90.

and peoples and the natural world, Smith located in the faculty of the imagination. This move permitted a naturalistic and historical discussion of the observable effects of vital energies operative in all humans, without the recourse to defining their source or introducing supernatural cause. Much late eighteenth-century Scottish thought aimed to provide theoretical understandings highly complex human social, moral, linguistic, economic activities that, at least in the contemporary imagination, corresponded to the external realities they described. Smith's argument that the success of philosophical or scientific theory was dependent upon its ability to provide a satisfactory linkage of natural events that assuaged the imagination troubled by inconsistencies of previous systems is exemplified in his own stadial theory of progress.²³

The new impetus for Smith's stadial theory of historical progress derived from the new life sciences, particularly, the ideas of vital life force common to matter and of epigenetic development in the biological organism that he analogically transferred to that of society. Just as humans developed through a series of stages in the generative process so society passed through a series of discrete, but holistic stages, wherein each was part of a single trajectory. He explained the historical differences across a society and the cultural differences between societies through their delineation into four stages that corresponded to perceived European ethnographic realities of the time. Though the change from one stage to the next was prompted by the confluence of multiple factors, Smith seemed to

²³ "The Principles which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, eds. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 33-53.

suggest that vital forces or drives within the humans was the ultimate mechanism of change.

Though literate Scots could and did engage with much of the wealth of information contained in works such as Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, its theoretical framework and philosophical implications were often contested or ignored.²⁴ The widespread acceptance among the Scottish literati of Smith's stadial framework was that it assuaged the Europeans' sense of wonder at the diversity of human difference through a unified theory of progress yet did so without explicit recourse to vitalist theories, which might generate resistance to widespread acceptance because of their supposed atheistic and materialist implications. I have argued that, despite the vitalist and epigenetic points of departure for stadial thought, the theoretical underpinning of Smith's thought was easily calved off from its descriptive features. Indeed, over the course of the century, the elision of dynamic, vitalist forces in the history of human progress made the four stages susceptible to interpretation as a typology of essentially static societies. For those disinclined to accept the parity of all peoples, "savagery" or "barbarism" was not a *stage*, but rather the inherent *state* of particular peoples.

Following Smith, Adam Ferguson, John Millar, and James Dunbar wrote against the view that history was the province only of Western

²⁴ As Linnaeus had supporters in Britain, and since Buffon derisively attacked Linnaeus, as well as his system, in the "Preliminary Discourse," is the likely reason that it was excluded from English translations of the *Histoire*. The early reception of Buffon in Scotland among the literati was in the French original, though ideas challenging biblical accounts of nature were to be found throughout the work. Buffon had numerous Scottish correspondents besides Hume, such as John McGouan, William Smellie, Colin McLaurin, Patrick Murdoch, James Cummyng. See W. T. Johnston, *Buffon and Scotland: Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707-1788), renowned French naturalist and his Scottish friends and correspondents* (Livingston: Officina, n.d.).

European societies. They attempted to situate all peoples upon a common historical and civilizational trajectory, and were at pains in their work to show that the present situation of "savage tribes" was precisely that of their own European ancestors. What I have argued in the preceding pages is that these thinkers' attempt to understand humanity in universal terms required the exercise of sympathy that produced a cultural and historical perspectivism. This process permitted the recognition of a shared humanity and laid the groundwork for cultural anthropology as an academic discipline. This anthropological turn constituted the major strand of the Scottish science of man.

The liberal sentiments of the unity and parity of the human species cultivated among academic moral theorists were not universally shared by all the literati in Scotland. There developed simultaneously an alternative strand in Scottish anthropological discourse lead by the philosophical jurists Kames and Monboddo, who, though they drew upon the same sources as Smith and Ferguson, and with whom they closely associated in the intellectual societies of Edinburgh and Glasgow, dissented from the view that civilizational or cultural differences were to be explained largely as the result of global, historical accident. Kame and Monboddo were part of a shift prominent in 1770s Europe towards the study of comparative anatomy, facial

characteristics, and phrenology.²⁵ Unlike vitalists in the medical sciences such as Blumenbach in Germany or John Hunter in Britain who studied comparative anatomy, Kames and Monboddo interpreted physical variety as indicating essential divisions, rather than a variety within unity, in the human species. Furthermore, they explained the seeming stasis of much of the world's peoples in the "earliest" stages of development as the result not of historical processes, but of innate causes, that is, biological race. Absent the progressive impulse of vital life forces, the perceived sociocultural stasis of the four-stage theory was again refigured as an unchanging racial typology.

The Scottish Enlightenment science of man reflected the nascent developments of British globalization in the decades following the end of the Seven Years' War. From the late 1750s to the early 1780s, Scottish philosophical works often reflected the course of European, and especially British, empire, attempting to incorporate into the anthropological imagination first the inhabitants of North America, then those of the South Pacific, and, late in the century, of the Indian Subcontinent, which to that point tended to figure only marginally in the anthropological discourse. The twin strands of

²⁵ This shift can be seen in the respective British, German, and Dutch contexts in the following works of the military physician and later Royal Society member, John Hunter, "Inaugural Disputation on the Varieties of Man," in *The Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Inaugural Dissertation of John Hunter on the Varieties of Man*, trans. and ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London: Longman for the Anthropological Society, 1865); the German physician Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (Göttingen: Typis Frid. Andr. Rosenbuschii, 1775) and *Über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte* (Leipzig: Bey Breitkopf and Härtel, 1789). Both of these works are contained in Bendyshe's *Anthropological Treatises*. On racial identification through facial angles, see *The Works of the Late Professor Camper, on the Connexion between the Science of Anatomy and the Arts of Drawing, Painting, Statuary, &c &c in Two Books...Translated from the Dutch by T. Cogan, M.D.* (London: C. Dilly, 1794).

"cultural" and "physical" anthropological discourse developed by Scottish theorists were bequeathed to nineteenth century European and American thought as Britain took a "turn toward empire."²⁶ In British and European attempts to consolidate imperial hegemony self-interest largely trumped human sympathy. As Noah Porter, President of Yale, observed that, a "strong current of thinking" in the nineteenth century "sets in the direction of deriving all moral relations from social forces, substantially after the theory of Adam Smith, which he identified in the work of Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, Leslie Stephen, and others." Smith's legacy, Knud Haakonssen and Donald Winch suggest, came to play a role in the concern of nineteenth century social evolutionism with "environmentalist" explanations of morality.²⁷ The legacy of that other strand, of physical anthropology, was transmitted to the British founders of race theory such as James Cowles Pritchard, George Combe, and Robert Knox.²⁸

The Turn toward Empire and the Scottish Human Sciences

The Scottish human sciences from midcentury were deeply implicated in the course of British Empire. Empire in large part was a conduit for information from the global peripheries to provincial centers for their attempt to develop new reasoning with and about humanity. Information about Native Americans continued to preoccupy

²⁶ See Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn Toward Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Noah Porter, *The Elements of Moral Sciences, Theoretical and Practical* (1884) (New York, 1890); quoted in Knud Haakonssen and Donald Winch, "The Legacy of Adam Smith," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 382.

²⁸ George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

the imagination of Scottish and European thinkers. In the wake of the voyages of James Cook, Bougainville, and others, however, the societies of the South Pacific acquired a larger role in the British and European imagination, which was reflected in philosophical anthropologies. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, there was an increasing awareness of and interest in the society and history of India. This interest had been marginal in Scottish anthropology until after the loss of the American colonies. In the 1780s British imperial interests, prompted by the activities of the East India Company and, again, competition with the French, shifted to the Indian Subcontinent. By that time, however, a majority of Scottish anthropological works had already been published. The notable exception in devoting attention to Indian civilization among the literati was the Presbyterian minister, Principal of Edinburgh University, and Royal Historiographer, William Robertson (1721-1793). Robertson's *Historical Disquisition concerning the knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791) appeared near the end of his own life and of the Enlightenment in Scotland.

Robertson's anthropological antipathies or prejudices towards tribal peoples had been on full display in his *History of America* (1771). Whereas most Scots philosophical anthropologists had interpreted the condition of "savage" society as the "infancy of society, Robertson's interpretation was not figurative. He viewed the condition of hunting societies as the outcome of the limited cognitive capacity of the *individuals* of which it was comprised. In "simple and rude" conditions, he assumed, reason and desire had little scope for exercise, and thus the intellectual powers of the human mind are

"extremely limited; its emotions and efforts are few and languid," and were "conspicuous among the rudest and most unimproved of the American tribes." Unlike many of his contemporaries who differentiated present attainment from capacity, Robertson characterized the peoples of the "early ages of society," especially those of the Americas, as having intellectual and emotional faculties similar to children.²⁹ He was certainly acquainted with Smith's 1748-50 lectures in Edinburgh laying out the basis of stadial theory.³⁰ Yet Robertson was dismissive of the comparison between the current condition of American tribes and those of ancient Europe, and reductively assessed the intellectual abilities of indigenous Americans as not much better than that of "a mere animal."³¹ Though monogenist, a believer in a common origin of all peoples consistent with biblical scripture, Robertson attributed the persistence of "savage societies" to the lack of their inhabitants' cognitive abilities, a position that did not set him that far apart from both polygenetic and monogenetic theorists of racial difference.

Robertson did not, however, attribute a cognitive, emotive, or moral deficiency to the individual inhabitants of all non-European societies. He did, after all, acknowledge the existence of advanced social and political structures of the Mexican and Peruvian "empires," and was far more charitable to those non-European societies where recognizable institutional and technological features of

²⁹ William Robertson, *History of America* (London: A. Strahan, 1803), II.88.

³⁰ Smith had accused Robertson of plagiarizing his philosophical history in the latter's *History of Charles V* (1769), especially in the first section on "View of the Progress of Society in Europe, with reference to Interior Government, Laws and Manners." See Roy H. Campbell and Andrew S. Skinner, *Adam Smith* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), 32-35.

³¹ Robertson, *History of America*, 89.

"civilization" were present. In striking contrast to the attitude displayed in his earlier *History of America*, the *Historical Disquisition* exhibited what Stewart Brown has called Robertson's growing "cultural sensitivity and toleration."³² Significantly, the *Historical Disquisition* was written and published in the midst of the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the former Governor-General of India. The prosecution of Hastings by Edmund Burke from 1788 to 1795 stimulated a wider discussion in Britain concerning imperial expansion, its socioeconomic and political ramifications at home, and oversight of the actions of the East India Company in Asia.

Whatever the source of his expanded cultural perspectivism and sympathies, Robertson was critical of the European sense of moral and cultural superiority in the case of India. The *Historical Disquisition* consists of two parts, an opening narrative, in the historical form Robertson had previously developed as Royal Historiographer, and, a lengthy appendix, where he argued that the "genius, manners, and institutions" of India indicated that it had been a highly advanced society from the earliest times, as was attested to by the ancient Greeks and Romans.³³ He remarked positively upon the sophistication of Indian jurisprudence; the magnificence of Indian architecture; their "genius in fine arts," including poetry and drama, and manufactures; "polished manners and delicate sentiments;" and, the achievement in

³² Stewart J. Brown, "Introduction," to *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997),

³³ Geoffrey Carnall has proposed that, based on analysis of the manuscript, the appendix may have been written before the narrative portion. See Carnall, "Robertson and Contemporary Images of India," *Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, 211.

Indian science, logic, metaphysics, astronomy and mathematics.³⁴ Still, this assessment did not escape the Eurocentrism evident in his early works, for Robertson measured each aspect of Indian civilization against its European counterpart.³⁵ Though he attributed the abundance and quality of Indian manufactures to the caste system and the "immutability in the manners of India's inhabitants," he did not rely on a thesis that the intellectual capacities of individuals explained the cultural practices and social institutions of Indian civilization.

Robertson's interpretation, or perhaps misunderstanding, of Smith's theory of stadial progress shaped his conception not only of non-European peoples, but also of empire. He appears not to have been interested in the historical anthropology grounding the philosophy of so many of his fellow literati. Despite his greater cultural sensitivity, Robertson's work must be understood in "light of the concept of the historian as moral legislator." This conception assumed a bifurcated position towards European imperialism as an agent of "progress" in the Americas and India. For, as Bruce Lenman has noted, he viewed there being "only one way forward for North American Indians. It was a path of unconditional assimilation conceived as stadial progression, and if they did not take it the fault was their."³⁶ The situation in India was, in Robertson's view, entirely different. Whereas it had been necessary to colonize the Americas before its riches could be exploited, it was unnecessary for Europeans

³⁴ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, 217, 220-21; 231; 240.

³⁵ Karen O'Brien, *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165.

³⁶ Bruce Lenman, "'From Savage to Scot' Via the French and the Spaniards: Principal Robertson's Spanish Sources," *Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, 207-9.

to be involved in the development of agriculture or manufacturing in India, other "than to settle a few skilful agents in proper places, to prepare a proper assortment of goods for completing the cargoes on ships as soon as they arrived from Europe, or at the utmost to acquire the command of a few fortified stations."³⁷

Robertson's moral legislation in the *Historical Disquisition* needs to be understood in the context of the impeachment of Warren Hastings and the accompanying debates about British aims in India. Robertson contended that British and European conquest of the Subcontinent had been misguided because of the failure to understand Indian society as highly advanced and complex. As a Christian minister, Robertson was critical of the Hindu religion, but he regarded it as paralleling that of any "enlightened nation" in comprising a mix of virtue and error. He warned that Christians were "extremely apt to err" in judging religious practices and beliefs that "differ widely from our own."³⁸ Although polytheism had given rise to what he viewed as grotesque practices such as *sati*, widow burning, and the caste system, it had also been instrumental in the creation of a jurisprudence and morals that in many ways rivaled those of Europe. In writing the *Disquisition*, Robertson admitted that, he had "kept in view an object more interesting [than a description of Indian society]...and entertain[ed] hopes" that his account of "the early and high civilization of India, and of the wonderful progress of its

³⁷ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, 217.

³⁸ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, 269.

inhabitants in elegant arts and useful science...may have some influence upon the behaviour of Europeans towards that people."³⁹

Although, as the representation of Amerindians in his *History of America* indicated, Robertson's sympathies were selective rather than universal. Yet, in his final work he began to reflect upon the necessity of cross-cultural concordances in an increasingly interconnected world, which formed the subtext of Scottish moral philosophy from Smith to James Dunbar. As Nicholas Phillipson has suggested, Robertson may have found in India a possible model of an ecumenicalism, a "tolerant world, in which monotheism and polytheism could coexist," one that perhaps carried the "seeds of a new world religion, pluralistic, united by a common stoic ethic and a belief in toleration." It was no wonder, Phillipson further noted, that many Christians criticized Robertson's work on India as a book discouraging the "subjection of the subcontinent to a new invasion of Christian missionaries."⁴⁰ Whatever the cause of his increased cultural sensitivities, Robertson refused to explain Indian civilization as simply an expression of individual intellectual capacities.

Nevertheless, aspects of Robertson's cognitive model of civilization stasis would later be taken up in the nineteenth century by James and J.S. Mill, who would both explain the particular legal institutions and cultural practices of India as largely a result of the barbarian "mind." James Mill's *History of British India* (1817), as Geoffrey Carnall had noted, was a "remorselessly detailed demolition

³⁹ Robertson, *Historical Disquisition*, 285.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Phillipson, "Providence and Progress: An Introduction to the Historical Thought of William Robertson," *Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, 73.

of everything Robertson claimed in the *Disquisition*," and cited the very arguments made by Robertson about the "rude nations" in America against his positive claims for Indian civilization.⁴¹ While James Mill borrowed the language from the Scots historical anthropologists, he collapsed the earliest stages into one and set barbarous and civilized into a stark dichotomy. Knud Haakonssen distinguishes the pluralist approach of thinkers such as Smith and John Millar from that of James Mill, whose approach attempted to explain historical change through individual actions and lacked any theoretical conception of social and institutional change.⁴²

Nineteenth-century British liberals tended to share a broader European sense of civilizational superiority and viewed fundamental differences between the mental and moral character of themselves and the rest of the world. Mill extended his antipathetic prejudice regarding the "barbarous mind" of hunter-gather societies to all Asian civilizations. In the *History of British India*, a work that informed a generation of policymakers regarding intervention on the Subcontinent, he contemptuously assessed Indian society as barbaric and its inhabitants as incapable of self-governance. Mill reduced the diverse thought and culture of Asia to a product of a collective, and infantilized, Asian mind, which, he claimed, was marked by an enslavement to caprice or passion that rendered the Indians and

⁴¹ Carnall, "Contemporary Images of India," 221.

⁴² Knud Haakonssen, "James Mill and Scottish Moral Philosophy," *Political Studies* 33 (1985): 628-36.

Chinese unable to realize their own best interests.⁴³ A barbarous or semi-civilized government, such as that of India, Mill argued, would, exhibiting such a character, always be at war. Hence, he concluded, control of India was "not to be preserved with less than a perpetual war expenditure."⁴⁴ He could not imagine that their resistance was due to the attempted conquest and control exerted by other nations, but could only be explained by the intellectual backwardness of the Indians. Mill regarded himself as heir to the Scottish moral philosophical tradition, however, his fundamental assumptions set him quite apart from its cultural pluralism and perspectivism. Indeed, Mill's reductive ideas about Asia exhibited what Edward Said termed "orientalism," the West's construction of Asia and its inhabitants as *other*.⁴⁵

J.S. Mill largely accepted his father's views regarding Indian society, locating the differences between barbarous and civilized societies in the mental character or capacity of their respective inhabitants. He linked these supposed deficits to a justification for the exercise of military and political power by European nations, arguing that they possessed the authority to gauge the best interests of backward peoples. He conceded that such conduct towards a "barbarous people" might be a violation of morality, but he did not

⁴³ "Among children, and among rude people, little accustomed to take their decisions upon full and mature consideration, nothing is more common than to repent of their bargains, and wish to revoke them," Mill, *History of British India*, I.161.

⁴⁴ Mill, "Affairs of India," *The Edinburgh Review* XVI (1810): 147-48.

⁴⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979). Orientalism, which Said located in large part in eighteenth-century Enlightenment, may more appropriately be found as characteristic of the thought of the nineteenth century.

consider it a violation of the law of nations. For in Mill's view, a "barbarous" people had "no rights as a *nation*, except a right to such treatment as may, at the earliest possible period, fit them for becoming one."⁴⁶ The case for limited intervention by the state into the lives of a people that he proposed in *On Liberty* did not apply to children, or societies he regarded as lacking the maturity and rational capacity for autonomy. Rather, European states had a moral obligation to bring, whether through persuasion or coercion, backward peoples into modernity.

Mill attempted to revivify and justify a paternalistic despotism that John Millar had deconstructed in his 1771 *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*. In the extension of civilizational immaturity to virtually all non-European individuals, James and J.S. Mill denied the inclusivity and reciprocity found in the complex developmental models of global human societies derived from a natural history of the species. The thrust of Scottish Enlightenment's human sciences from Adam Smith in the 1750s to James Dunbar in the 1780s was to lay the intellectual and imaginative groundwork for a conception of a universal civil society marked by an egalitarian ethos and formed through globalizing processes in which civilizational progress would eventually reach a natural equilibrium. Most Scottish global anthropological theorists considered it highly dubious that progress would result from the imperial imposition of European social and economic norms in underdeveloped parts of the world. Indeed, the history of European hegemony in many parts of the world has shown that

⁴⁶ John Stuart Mill, "Non-intervention," *Collected Works*, ed. J.M. Robson and R.F. McRae (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), XXI: 118.

establishment of such norms has often retarded, rather than fostered, the economic and political backwardness of these regions.

The contributions to and decline of philosophical history in the early nineteenth century has been sketched out by Jane Rendell in her analysis of the Scottish orientalists, a later generation educated at Edinburgh between 1784 and 1803.⁴⁷ Exposed to the philosophical history at Edinburgh, this generation variously offered alternatives to Mill's utilitarian and evangelical approaches to Asia that dominated British thought from 1800 to 1830. Rendell notes that the history of the Scottish orientalists may largely have been that of their projects rather than achievements, but nevertheless their work was relevant to the development of comparative philology in Britain, the historiography of India, and Victorian racial theory.⁴⁸ With firsthand knowledge of the Indian archipelago, Southeast Asia, and acquaintance with several of its languages, Alexander Hamilton, William Erskine, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Vans Kennedy attempted to refute Mill and the ideas he posited in the *History of British India*. While most of Mill's critics likely accepted European society as being the most advanced, the Scots orientalists attempted to genuinely understand Indian society in its complexity, unlike Mill who saw it as a guide to only one stage in the early history of society.⁴⁹

The Scottish Enlightenment has, Rendell argues, been underestimated in offering a conceptual framework for the understanding of complex and alien societies such as those of Asia.

⁴⁷ Jane Rendell, "Scottish Orientalism: From Robertson to Mill," *The Historical Journal* (March 1982): 43-69.

⁴⁸ Rendell, "Scottish Orientalism," 69.

⁴⁹ Rendell, "Scottish Orientalism," 61.

The views of Mill and the orientalist both circulated among the public through the *Edinburgh Review* and *Monthly Review*. The editor of the former publication, Jeffrey Francis, had been particularly supportive in publishing the work of Alexander Hamilton and others. Over time, however, Francis began to question the usefulness of "philosophical principles" to explain the "stationary, or most probably retrograde" condition of Asia.⁵⁰ Francis, like many others, suspected that the explanation of this condition was to be found in inherent differences between the European and Asian races.⁵¹ The reception of cultural perspectivism among the university students of Smith, Ferguson, Millar, and Dunbar is a topic in need of further investigation. The move in British thought from history to race in explaining cultural difference became increasingly common among subsequent generations educated at Edinburgh and elsewhere without exposure to an anthropologically-informed moral philosophy and jurisprudence of the middle to late Scottish Enlightenment. This was most likely further exacerbated after the retirement of Dugald Stewart in 1810 and the assumption of Alexander Fraser Tytler, whose ideas about Asia followed those of Mill, to the professorship of civil and universal history after 1786.⁵² Indeed, by the last decade of the

⁵⁰ Jeffrey, "Memoirs of the Emperor Babar" *Edinburgh Review* XLVI (June, 1827), 39-44; quoted in Rendell, "Scottish Orientalism," 69. See also, Anthony Pagden, "The Immobility of China: Orientalism and Occidentalism in the Enlightenment," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment* ed. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 50-64.

⁵¹ On the history of race in the making of nineteenth-century anthropology, see George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

⁵² Alexander Fraser Tytler, *Considerations on the present political state of India; embracing observations on the character of the natives, on the civil and criminal courts, the administration of justice, the state of land-tenure, the condition of the peasantry, and the internal policy of our Eastern dominions; intended chiefly as a manual of instruction in their duties, for the younger servants of the Company* (London, 1815).

eighteenth century several of the leading lights of the Scottish Enlightenment were of a generation that had either died or retired from teaching or publication.

Further, during a period of reaction in Britain, the social and political implications of the enlightened Scottish human sciences were viewed in many quarters with great suspicion. It was in the dialectic between world events and British and European thought that in large part brought the Enlightenment to an "end" in Scotland and elsewhere, most significantly, the French Revolution. Political revolution in France was initially greeted positively, but cautiously, among the literati and others in Britain. The Terror and subsequent wars with France provoked reaction in Britain and Europe towards Enlightenment thought, which was widely regarded retrospectively as the cause of the moral and social disorder playing out on the Continent. Enlightenment ideas and the thinkers who espoused them were viewed with suspicion in much of Britain. Within the religious establishment, the Moderates, who had done so much to promote enlightened thinking, had begun to lose dominance with the rise of conservative reaction within the Kirk. Historians debate the when and how of the "end" of Enlightenment. Richard Sher has argued that intellectual life in Scotland at the turn of the century involved not so much a decline as a "reorientation," marked by a passion for science and its practical application. Sher argues that this passion for science was turned upon the moral philosophy of earlier thinkers. What came to be called "Scottish Philosophy" in the nineteenth century was not the "broad, humanistic, normative moral philosophy...but the highly analytical study of

psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics associated chiefly with Reid and Stewart."⁵³

Though the Scottish Enlightenment has been viewed as socially and politically conservative, the egalitarian impulse in much of its moral thought, which was prominently displayed towards the inhabitants of "rude nations," underlines its philosophical radicalism. In any event, much of "Modern Philosophy," whether of the French or Scottish variety, was increasingly viewed as suspect in a revolutionary context.⁵⁴ Following the final defeat of Napoleon, the early nineteenth century saw attempts to reverse the egalitarianism and atheism that many contemporaries considered to have been instigated by Enlightenment thought. Though there could be no restoration of the old regime, the concerted thrust of European nations was to reestablish the authority of throne and altar, both of which were attendant with

⁵³ Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 308-14.

⁵⁴ In the Scottish case, this is emblematic in the advice given by Donald McCleod to his sons. In a January 13, 1791 letter to his son, Hugh, who was stationed in Calcutta, McCleod wrote that, "The Jacobin Faction in France have prevailed Since the Beginning of August...since which time they have Involved that Kingdom in the most Extraordinary State of Anarchy, that the Human Fancy can Suppose." He recounted the detention, trial, and execution of the French royal family by the Jacobins, which he believed served "over all Europe to Invite the lower ranks to Sedition & Revolt, & wind so far in this Country as to Excite the most General Apprehension for our Safety." In a subsequent letter to his younger son, Peter, on the proper course of study, the elder McCleod wrote, "With Respect to Modern Philosophy, I advise you rather to avoid Books on that Subject, until your Judgement is more Matured...The Philosophers of this last Age have done much Mischief in the World Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, Hume in our own Language, Voltaire Rousseau Raynal Many others in the French Language have by their Fascinating & Dangerous Writings, loosened all the Bounds of Society." He further advised Peter to avoid their books "as you would Poison, until you can be Supplied with the Proper Antidote [George Campbell, James Beattie, and Wilberforce, among others]." McCleod concluded, "I am fully Satisfied that all the [?] of the French Revolution can be Attributed to the Doctrines of these Philosophers" through the weakening of the "Moral Sense" of their countrymen. National Library of Scotland, MS. 19298.40-44.

an authoritarian economic order that was part of an accelerated competition between and expansion of Western imperial powers for hegemony across the globe.⁵⁵

A Contemporary Significance of Scottish Enlightenment Anthropology?

Despite the vast change that has occurred in the world over the last two centuries, there remain affinities or parallels between eighteenth-century Enlightenment anthropological concerns and those of the present. The Enlightenment in large part was an inquiry into what had been the natural history of the human species in the context of society. In the attempt to link the present with the past to better understand the social condition of humanity through understanding its essential nature and place in the world, the most prominent members of the Scots literati developed what we would today think of as an anthropological orientation to the human sciences. The general thrust of both the moral and natural sciences aimed to achieve a universal understanding, which the expansion of international networks linking distant points of the globe increasingly made possible.

It was the information resulting from these network formations of early modern globalization that allowed for significant shifts of thought in both the natural and human sciences. The late eighteenth-century science of man in Scotland, which since Hume was predicated on an understanding of human nature, and in more self-reflexive moments acknowledged as informing all the sciences or modes of investigations. The extensive and systematic deployment by enlightened Scots of

⁵⁵ Christopher A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

ethnographic information concerning non-European cultures aimed at the rethinking of broad areas of human moral relations and social institutions by setting them in historical and cross-cultural perspective. In the last half of the century, some of the most prominent members of the Scottish literati sought to reframe moral philosophy as the natural history of progress. While the human sciences of the late Scottish Enlightenment bore many of the imperatives of an older moral philosophy, the interpretations of the empirical evidence and the social implications drawn from it were largely consistent with principles posited in the biological or life sciences.

This study has attempted to recuperate the presence of intellectual currents circulating contemporaneously on the Continent and in Scotland in middle to late eighteenth-century. While the sciences have long been viewed as important to the Scottish Enlightenment, the depth to which the ideas in the vitalist life sciences informed its moral or human sciences is perhaps still not fully acknowledged in the historiography. I have argued that Adam Smith's theories of human and social historical development received their initial impetus from Buffon's theory of generation, a theory of epigenetic reproduction in which an organisms passed through a series of stages in its development. The progress of human society through a series of increasingly complex forms was imagined in Smith's stadial theory of history as the moral or social analogue of the unfolding development of biological species through the exertions of vital forces.

This contextualization goes some way in opening insights into the origins and history of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially its hallmark idea of spontaneously generated order. A more satisfying model of cause and effect suggested in the vitalist thought of the life sciences offered more satisfying models of understanding in the moral or social world than the mechanistic model of the physical sciences. As vital life forces were understood as common to the entire human species, Scottish philosophical anthropology assumed the unity of the human species. Though scholarly attention has focused on the means of subsistence in social change, most Scottish stadial theorists assumed that essential character of human nature itself was the true engine of historical progress. Thus, the forms of any human society, whether "savage" tribal or "civilized" commercial, were to be located at simply different points upon a common historical trajectory.

The developmental trajectory of human societies was thus understood as a spontaneously generated and largely self-ordering organism. Societies, like nature, were seen as composed of numerous independent, but symbiotically operating, organisms forming a larger system or natural economy. The aggregate actions of individuals over time produced evermore complex, but often unintended, social systems. Enlightened Scottish anthropology sought to elucidate a comprehensive system of understanding world history as the natural developmental process of a progressive interplay between human nature and societal structures, in which the two mutually formed and modified the other. The legacy of the idea of spontaneous, self-organizing systems prominent in, but not exclusive, to Scottish Enlightenment theory can

be seen as a commonplace in contemporary science in fields as diverse as biology, chemistry, physics, cybernetics, and systems theory.⁵⁶

Though their anthropological theories were not entirely uniform, differing in many particularities, the Scottish science of man diverged with Smith, Ferguson, Millar, and Dunbar on one side and Monboddo, Kames, and, to a certain degree, Robertson on the other, presaging a later bifurcation of the anthropological discipline into sociocultural and sociobiological branches. Following Smith, the mainstream of Scots literati sought to create models of historical change that moved well beyond climatological theories to account for human diversity and to foster cross-cultural understanding. From their global anthropological investigations, the leading Scottish literati concluded that the cultural or moral practices of "savages" and "barbarians" were to be judge not from the standpoint of modern European commercial society and its norms. Rather, the practices of these peoples were entirely appropriate to their mode of living or stage of socio-historical development. Europeans early in their own history had lived in the very same manner as present-day tribal peoples. Enlightened anthropology cultivated a cultural and historical perspectivism in which the unity of the humankind was a founding

⁵⁶ The literature is vast, but the following works have been useful for an understanding "self-organization" in a contemporary science: Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe: Scientific and Human Implications of the Emerging Paradigm of Evolution* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980); Ilya Prigogine, *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature* (New York: Free Press, 1997); Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980); and, Niklas Luhmann, "The Autopoiesis of Social Systems," in *Sociocybernetic Paradoxes: Observation, Control and Evolution of Self-Steering Systems*, eds. Felix Geyer and Johannes van der Zouwen (London: Sage, 1986).

assumption and confirmed in the empirical evidence.⁵⁷ The Scottish science of man was thus marked by an egalitarian ethos towards the subjects of its study and a critical attitude towards empire, international commerce, and the slave trade. Not all anthropological theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, however, were willing to acknowledge unity or equality of all people.

Indeed, Kames, Monboddo, and Robertson, though their theoretical assumptions often differed radically, developed contemporaneous anthropological theories explaining human diversity as a result of internal causes. Physical difference was a signifier of essential moral or intellectual difference. The empirical evidence collected in the natural sciences was interpreted in conformity with unexamined prejudice. Their works became prominent exemplars in the late eighteenth century of an emergent scientific racism, which would dominate nineteenth-century European and American thought about the inhabitants of much of the world. Kames divided humanity into distinct "races," that is, separate and unrelated biological species; Monboddo separated humanity into a racialized hierarchy within nations, which was easily interpreted as a racial hierarchy of nations. Similarly, Robertson saw the seeming deficit of civilizational accoutrement as indicative of the moral or intellectual deficit of a race of people.

The idea of race as the source of cultural difference initiated in the late eighteenth century continues to inform contemporary social and political discourse, despite science having shown it to be an intellectual, not a biological, construct. The "scientific racism"

⁵⁷ Larry Wolff, "Discovering Cultural Perspectivism: The Intellectual History of Anthropological Thought in the Age of Enlightenment," in *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, eds. Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 3-34.

developed in support of prejudice is not a relic confined to less enlightened ages. Indeed, a recent edition of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* has been devoted to the return of scientific racism and its implications for social policy.⁵⁸ The collected essays examine the return of racial essentialism and biological determinism. The former concept posits that people of different racial and ethnic groups possess specific traits or behaviors unique to their group; the latter is the belief that race is a genetic reality that regulates how we behave. Inequality is a genetic reality. Clearly, the idea of race continues to exercise a power over the human imagination that has yet to exhaust itself.

Ideas of racial difference in their late eighteenth-century guise, however, were soundly rejected by the mainstream of Scottish Enlightenment theorists of philosophical anthropology. Their work suggested that inequality was the result not of biology, but of long-term political forces and economic patterns within fluid, interacting, and shifting global systems. Though racism, sexism, and classism were certainly elements of eighteenth-century culture, which were impossible to fully transcend, a small group of self-reflexive thinkers dedicated themselves to working out a theory of global human historical development. In most of its iterations, the science of man was informed by a cultural and historical perspectivism that sought to understand the myriad social and cultural forms as manifestations of

⁵⁸ On the contemporary return of scientific racism, see the essays collected in W. Carson Byrd and Matthew W. Hughey, Special Issue on "Race, Racial Inequality, and Biological Determinism in the Genetic and Genomic Era," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* September (2015).

the interplay between human nature and environmental context. This re-imagining of humanity past implicitly provided the space to re-imagine the human society in the present and future. Enlightened Scottish anthropological theorists, a group entirely composed of white, bourgeois men in the north of the British Isles, argued against the racist division of the human species. Smith and his successors created a body of philosophical thought that might, as Silvia Sebastiani has put it, contain the possibility of overcoming its own limitations.⁵⁹

Many of the subtexts of the Scottish Enlightenment remain surprisingly relevant in the twenty-first century. The moral imperative of many literati was to theorize the history of globalization and its concomitant social and cultural changes. As the anthropological component of their work makes clear, their moral commitments were directed not only upon the effects of globalization on European societies, but also on "rude nations," who had suffered so greatly from their interactions with the West. Over the last several decades, the push to exploit rich, untapped natural resources in various hinterlands by national and multinational corporations has increasingly encroached into isolated parts of the world that have been the home to "uncontacted tribes," that is, small groups of peoples with little desire for contact with the mainstream or dominant society. At present, there are around 70 to 100 uncontacted peoples living in some 60 countries, with a majority located in remote parts of Africa, Asia, Australasia, and especially South America. The

⁵⁹ Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 167.

February 2011 release of BBC aerial footage of an uncontacted tribe living on the Brazil-Peru border made stunningly clear that the continued existence of "primitive peoples" remains a reality of modernity even of the twenty-first century. The confrontation between "savage" and "civilized" remains as much a question of ethical import today as to eighteenth-century moral and anthropological theorists.

Indeed, the increased awareness of the existence of uncontacted peoples, particularly in South America, is a reminder that the tragic consequences of the encounters of traditional cultures with modernity are not an artifact of early modern history. The destabilization, and often destruction, of indigenous cultures involved in earlier periods of globalization continues to play out in the present. In the Brazilian Amazon, for example, where extensive deforestation is being undertaken to create large-scale cattle ranches to produce beef for the rising demand of international markets has increasingly encroached upon the homelands of small, tribal groups. These groups have also been brought into contact and conflict with large corporations in the search for precious metals and petroleum have penetrated deeper into the Amazon. Indigenous and uncontacted peoples have often been caught in the crossfire between governments and drug cartels, which have set up plantations in remote locations within the rain forests. Ranchers and loggers routinely employ armed gunmen to displace or murder tribal peoples who stand in the way of development and profit. Contact with the outside often results in the decimation of a large percentage of a tribe as these modern-day conquistadores and Christian missionaries inadvertently introduce diseases to which these peoples have no immunity. The critical moral imperative to ameliorate the effects of

globalization on tribal peoples underlying much enlightened Scottish anthropology continues to resonate in the ethical deliberations of the present.

Since the eighteenth century, there has been an enlarged understanding of human rights in the West and a general recognition that the inherent rights of indigenous and uncontacted peoples should be respected. In recent years, an argument has been put forward that cultural diversity is as necessary for human beings as biodiversity for the natural world. This was the claim asserted by the 2001 General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in which cultural diversity was considered as the "common heritage of humanity" and its safeguarding was inseparable from the respect of human dignity.⁶⁰ These rights have, however, as in earlier times, often been ignored likewise by governments and private interests in the imposition of economic "progress" on indigenous peoples at the expense of their cultural and social integrity. Those rejecting the cultural diversity argument oppose it upon two primary bases. The first is that the necessity of cultural diversity is an untestable hypothesis that can neither be proven or disproven. Second, they argue that it is unethical to preserve "underdeveloped societies" as it denies them the benefits of modern medicine and technology. Further, critics argue that preservation of some cultural practices simply for the sake of diversity may be unethical. Indeed, the United Nations and the World Health Organization regard the persistence in many cultures of child brides, polygamy, or female genital mutilation

⁶⁰ UNESCO, "2001 Universal Declaration On Cultural Diversity," accessed February 4, 2016, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

as instances of unethical practices in need of reform.⁶¹ As in the past, globalizing modernity remains a process of cultural accommodation, (re)appropriation, and homogenization. It also provokes contestation. Among the most "advanced" nations in the West certain cultural or social practices are regarded as incommensurable with modernity; among less "underdeveloped" nations many aspects of modernity are regarded as incommensurate with traditional cultural values.

Globalizing modernity has always been a double-edged process involving both gains and losses, with the negotiation of the former perhaps as fraught as that of the latter. Still, it may be argued that its most pernicious effects have been disproportionately felt among those farthest behind the curve of modernization. The philosophical question posed by Rousseau of whether modernity had made human beings more or less happy remains relevant in contemporary debates concerning the status and future of uncontacted tribes vis-à-vis globalization. It was, of course, precisely this question that initiated the response from enlightened Scots in philosophical anthropology. Unlike in the eighteenth century, there are today several prominent nongovernmental organizations such as the London-based Survival International and the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Cultural Survival, dedicated to protecting the rights of indigenous and uncontacted peoples. Survival International, in an echo of Rousseau, notes on its website that "progress can kill," and the imposition of modernity on tribal groups makes them neither happier nor healthier. These advocacy groups argue

⁶¹ Amory Starr and Jason Adams, "Anti-globalization: The Global Fight for Local Autonomy," *New Political Science* Vol. 25, No. 1 (2003): 20-42.

that uncontacted tribes do not live statically as hunters-gatherers, rather they simply live "differently" from us, adapting as all peoples do to changes in their environment. The advocacy groups argue that it must ultimately be their choice whether to "join" the "modern world."

Though "uncontacted," many of these tribes are nevertheless aware that there is an outside world. The aggressive responses of the tribes to aerial observation by anthropologists or to intrusions of developers, the advocacy groups argue, indicate their choice against making contact. Although many governments have enforced, albeit unevenly, a no contact policy, the introduction by miners, loggers, and missionaries of pathogens that routinely result in the deaths of half the members of a single tribe, may in part explain their reticence establish contact. In many cases where individual members of tribe have opted to "join" society, many have ended up in the cities as beggars or prostitutes. In the meantime, Survival International and other organizations argue that the rights of tribal peoples be respected and call upon governments to conserve uncontacted peoples by protecting their traditional homelands from encroaching development and regulating interactions with outsiders.

There is, however, no consensus among the academic anthropological community regarding the preservation of uncontacted peoples. In an 2015 editorial in *Science*, "Protecting Isolated Tribes," Robert S. Walker and Kim R. Hill, anthropologists based in the United States, argued against the current "leave them alone" policy adopted by the governments of Brazil and Peru towards their isolated indigenous groups, and supported by the United Nations. Walker and Hill suggest that the governmental protection of the areas

inhabited by these peoples would have to be dramatically increased to ensure their survival. Further, they argue that not only development, but also epidemics, compounded by demographic viability and inbreeding effects make the disappearance of these small, isolated groups probable. Given what their view of the long-term unviability of uncontacted peoples, the two anthropologists propose "well-organized" and "controlled" contacts as being more humane and ethical than leaving them exposed to accidental, and often lethal, interactions with those from the outside.

It remains unclear, however, whether governments of nation-states containing groups of uncontacted peoples have sufficient political will or financial resources either to maintain conservation or to implement a sustained, safe and ethical program of contact and integration. Moreover, the imperative to "progress," to participate in and benefit from a global economy, may prove irresistible to national governments. Faced with the choice in a truly global economy between expansion or stagnation, national governments, such as those of Brazil and Peru that regard the Amazon as a storehouse of resources, rich in gold, oil, and timber, will be under significant economic and political pressure to accelerate the exploitation of natural and human resources. The history of globalization has always been of a dual nature, involving positive and negative aspects, gains and losses, as an ongoing process of engagement and exchange between centers and peripheries. If past is prologue, the existing ways of life, if not the lives themselves, of many tribal peoples will inevitably face peril.

The relevance of Scottish Enlightenment thought perhaps exists less in the answers than in the questions it posed to the nature and history of human beings and of society. The present study has attempted to highlight the centrality of globalization to the development of late eighteenth-century Enlightenment anthropological theory in Scotland. Given their country's ambiguous political and social status within the United Kingdom, as a province managed from London and a beneficiary of empire and international trade, many Scottish literati perhaps developed a heightened degree of self-reflexivity and ambivalence towards world-historical processes in the creation of modernity. The interconnection of peoples through the networks of international trade and communication did not become truly global until the nineteenth century.⁶² Still, many enlightened Scots were aware that the construction of global networks of interconnection was underway, and attempted as part of a science of man to sketch out not only its economic and political, but also social and moral, implications for the present and future.

Underemphasized in the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment is the seriousness and humanity with which it approached the examination of "savages." Though they viewed tribal societies as offering insights into the prehistory of all modern, commercial societies otherwise inaccessible to study, the most prominent anthropological theorists dealt with "primitive" non-European peoples not only as objects of historical investigation, but also as subjects of humanitarian concern. The mainstream of the "anthropologically"

⁶² Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Peter Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

oriented Scottish literati assumed, and found confirmed in their inquiries, a shared humanity of all peoples. The creation of a general science of man necessarily required incorporating of known information about the human species as it existed in every corner of the globe. As a result of their harmonization of the seeming diversities of and the apparent disparities between peoples, Scottish anthropological thinkers underpinned their science of man with a theory of globalization. Such a theory set human society into historical and cultural perspective in which the state of historical progress was recognized as a result not of the genius of individual peoples but of world-historical forces.

The interconnectedness of the world is taken as a commonplace in the twenty-first century, yet because of the complexity of globalization, the local effects from global causes often remains illegible for a majority of first-world inhabitants. Globalizing forces unabatedly make and unmake networks of interconnection. For the historical engine of globalizing forces had been the self-interested impulses of individuals, trading companies, and nation-states, which promised to generate not only wealth, but also conflict as globalization created profound, often disruptive, changes to peoples' ways of living. Recognizing this as a condition of modernity, Scottish global theorists thus expressed an ambivalence toward many aspects of early modern globalization, foremost among them empire and international trade. The morphology of empire and international trade in the twenty-first century are vastly different from their eighteenth-century incarnations. Modern technologies had increasingly brought peoples and cultures "closer," reducing both the literal and

figurative "distance" between distant points on the globe. Yet, Western imperial and commercial hegemony often produced or maintained disparities between rich and poor countries. Transnational capital flows now largely regulated through first-world organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank continue to create or maintain systemic inequities or underdevelopment in many areas.

While today there is, at least ostensibly, a greater of a sense of equality among the world's peoples and the existence of their human rights, the first world-third world, or in eighteenth-century terms, "rich country-poor country" debate, remains a feature of contemporary globalization discourse.⁶³ In a historical perspective, it was the dynamism of the global system that had largely determined the distribution of world civilizations. The first step in negotiating the flux of modernity involved understanding, or at least recognizing the complexities, of globalization as a natural system that operated according beyond direct control of human beings. Globalization, like other complex systems such as society, was the product of progressive and aggregate human actions, but not of intentional design.

In the intervening two centuries global modernity has grown evermore complex. As new forms of empire and commerce have arisen that present challenges both at home and abroad, these remain, as Scottish Enlightenment theorists realized, a matter of the moral or ethical concern. Unconstrained, these were seen as posing threats to the liberties of societies both provincial and peripheral. Not unlike the eighteenth century, though perhaps at a heightened level, the present

⁶³ Istvan Hont, "The 'Rich Country-Poor Country' Debate in the Scottish Enlightenment," in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 267-322.

conditions of global modernity promise heightened cross-cultural tensions and conflicts exacerbated by the unequal flows of global capital, the rise of multinational corporations diminishing the sovereignty of nation-states, growing disparities of wealth and income, civil war and large-scale migration, and geopolitical conflicts and competition for scarce or near-exhausted natural resources. Given the degree of interconnectedness presently existing, the challenges collectively confronting humanity is perhaps unprecedented. The insufficiency of eighteenth-century answers to these problems, however, is supplemented by the intellectual modesty and critical self-reflexivity of much Enlightenment epistemology.

With the increasing anthropological turn of Scottish thinkers, theories of globalization were increasingly incorporated into a science of man. Globalizing processes, as part of the human drive towards interaction and exchange had been, and would continue to be, the engine of historical progress. Aware that Scotland's level of progress had been due to international trade and participation in empire, and anxious to understand the conditions for its continuance, Scottish thinkers examined the dual nature of globalization at home and abroad. As moralists, the literati highlighted the ills inflicted upon indigenous peoples of the New World by the quest of Europeans for imperial and economic hegemony. Paradoxically, they concluded that the cure for such ills was more, not less, globalization. International relations were marked by inequity and imbalance. Yet, as patterns of the world system were ever in flux, so was the balance of powers. Globalization thus promised, at least in the long run, a moral or

social equilibrium among the world's nations analogous to that occurring among natural elements in the physical realm.

The self-reflexive investigations of enlightened Scottish theorists into the economic, social, and moral implications of the shifting pattern of networks connecting the world remains instructive. The increased juxtaposition of civil society and empire in the Scottish science of man indicates a growing awareness of their intimate connection. Though it is a commonplace in the early twenty-first century that we inhabit a global world interconnected by transportation and communication technologies, the ubiquity of these interconnections paradoxically obscure the degree to which large-scale processes and conditions inform, and often misinform, our ideas about ourselves and others, as well as about our relationships with the rest of the world.⁶⁴ The self-reflexivity with which Scottish Enlightenment philosophical anthropologists approached study of human society remains useful to contemporary human understanding. For the historical and cultural perspectivism of Enlightenment anthropologists deconstructed the basis for dividing the world's inhabitants into "rude" and "civilized" as a matter of custom and prejudice, which often persists among many in political and economic centers that continues to shape policy towards underdeveloped peripheries.

⁶⁴ Globalization exhibited, as Osterhammel and Petersson argue, a "quantitatively and qualitatively new type of globality" in becoming a central feature of history and of many human experiences during the "early modern period of discovery, slave trade, and 'ecological imperialism,' not the twentieth century." As the authors note, globalization influenced the lives of the majority of humanity by the end of the nineteenth century, with economic exchange reaching a peak in 1913. In the postwar period, that level of exchange was not achieved again until the 1970s, and in some areas that 1913 zenith remains unsurpassed. With its acceleration in the 1980s and 1990s, they conclude, "globality no longer was anything particularly special." Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 146.

In the anthropological theorizations of the Scottish Enlightenment, its preeminent theorists in the moral sciences sought to establish what was natural to the species, and hence what constituted the social conditions best for human flourishing. Significantly, much of the science of man was concerned with the flourishing of humanity in an emergent, though distant, global civil society, which many enlightened Scots saw presaged in the commercial and imperial developments of the late eighteenth century. Though an extension of civil society through the world was an unintended consequence of globalizing impulses rather than a long-term project, the eighteenth century saw a figurative reduction of time and space. The increasing proximity between distant points on the globe and the contacts among seemingly incommensurate cultural systems or ways of being required the theorization globalization and universal benevolence as a fundamental part of the human and moral sciences. As Adam Smith indicated, the possibility of human flourishing was predicated upon the idea of sympathy through the exercise of the faculty of imagination, which allowed for the recognition or creation of concordances between peoples in a society. The creation of human sympathies through imagination perhaps remain the best means to eliding what are only perceived differences dividing the self from other. Many members of the Scottish Enlightenment attempted to transcend the prejudices of their age through a philosophical anthropology that critically reasoned through the natural history of the species to re-imagine the present and future of a humanity subject to a perpetual and asymmetrical transit of globality.

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