

# The Savage Smith and the Temporal Walls of Capitalism<sup>1</sup>

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Indian kinship economics, which, I...understand not as pre-capitalist but as anticapitalist, constitute a powerful *and continuing* critique of the waste of an expansive, acquisitive capitalism that... [Europe] could not *afford* to entertain. The loss in social vision was, and is, incalculable.

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Working as a touchstone for standard literature in IPE, Smith serves as a marker for a “classical liberal school of economics.” This ‘economics’ derives from Smith a “shared and coherent set of assumptions” about the drive to truck and barter as the impetus to inevitable and inexorable human material improvement and the existence of “inviolable laws” of economic life that mandate free markets internally and free trade internationally.<sup>3</sup> Others within IPE and IR have complicated this view<sup>4</sup> even if their efforts have failed to dislodge the standard reading. We do not expect our reading of Smith to alter routines for which the canonical Smith is sufficient if not required. Nevertheless, additional readings may be useful for those who look to treat economics

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter represents the beginnings of a larger project on Smith, the Scottish Enlightenment, and International Political Economy. We thank Chuck Green, Xavier Guillaume, Sandra Halperin, Beate Jahn, David P. Levine, Khaldoun Samman, and Robbie Shilliam for helpful comments and suggestions. We have tried to respond to their concerns here, but some must await later editions of this project.

<sup>2</sup> “Savage Law,” in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke, 1993), p. 118. Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Isaak, *Managing World Economic Change: International Political Economy* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), p. 4, makes the claim about the existence of a liberal “school.” Most texts begin with this same assumption. See George T. Crane and Abla Amawi, eds., *The Theoretical Structure of International Political Economy: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 6-8; Jeffrey A. Frieden and David A. Lake, eds., *International Political Economy: Perspectives on Global Power and Wealth* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 70; and Robert O’Brien and Marc Williams, *Global Political Economy: Evolution and Dynamics* (London: Palgrave, 2004), pp. 5, 18-21. The account of liberalism as possessing “shared and coherent” assumptions can be found in Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 26-31, 44, 81. It is worth noting that Gilpin’s later book, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), gives Smith much less space, but this may be attributed to the fact that Gilpin no longer treats IPE as a domain of debate among schools. Apparently, the major issues have been decided.

<sup>4</sup> See especially Craig N. Murphy’s interesting use of Smith in *Industrial Organization and Industrial Change: Global Governance Since 1950* (New York: Oxford, 1994). See also Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso,

as based in a richly debated history. In this chapter, we emphasize the role the Amerindians play in Smith's work. Reading Smith against the theme of "savagery" allows us: (1) to focus on an often neglected intellectual influence on Smith—the Jesuit Father Lafitau; (2) to critically examine the comparative ethnological strategy that Smith uses to develop a theory of human progress and insulate a commercial society from moral critique; and, perhaps most fruitfully, (3) to recover potential ethical resources that help us assess the present state of global capitalism.

Linking comparative ethnology and Adam Smith may seem surprising, since neither Smith nor any of the key Scottish social thinkers made the voyage to the New World.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, their encounters with the Indians were no less profound than those of earlier adventurers, missionaries, and scholars whose reports they inherited. It was in and through these reports that the Scots journeyed. Their travels were, as Anthony Padgen has put it, "cognitive," a "travel in the mind's eye."<sup>6</sup> And, in their constructions of the Indian's place in human history, the Scots identified the Indians as travelers on a common human path. In the minds of Smith and his fellow Scots, the Indians were embarked on a great journey towards Europe – that is, towards Europe's present.

The need to chart the location of the Indians had a long prior history. Since the 'discovery' of the Americas, Europeans had struggled to make sense of continents and peoples both unfamiliar and difficult to digest within the confines of scriptural and classical authority.<sup>7</sup> Many viewed the physical and social distance of the peoples of the New World from the singular moment of creation as a correlate of the extent of their degeneration from Christian faith and civilized behavior. Reports of unnatural behavior—e.g. cannibalism and human sacrifice—and low levels of development of the arts and sciences confirmed the distance of the Amerindians from the norms of

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1994) and Andrew Wyatt-Walter, "Adam Smith and the Liberal Tradition in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 22:1 (1996), pp. 5-28.

<sup>5</sup>The partial exception is Adam Ferguson who visited the American colonies in the Spring of 1778 as an emissary to the rebel forces. He was not allowed behind the American lines. See Fania Oz-Salzberger, *Translating the Enlightenment: Scottish Civic Discourse in Eighteenth Century Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 101-2.

<sup>6</sup>Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 30.

<sup>7</sup>We draw on our earlier work here: Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 2004), chapter 2.

human (i.e. European) practice. Numerous thinkers sought ways to contain the disorder the Indians represented: they were placed below the threshold of humanity and justly enslaved or extinguished; or, where their humanity was accepted, the differences the Indians exhibited were translated into a form of infancy or childhood that might be corrected and guided by European tutelage. The pedagogical component of imperialism was thus put into place quite early. Over the next century or more, others would build on this understanding by locating the North American natives as examples of the earliest state of human existence.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the novelty of the Amerindians had worn off and the moral threat of cannibalism and human sacrifice had receded. In addition, for most Enlightened thinkers, the imperative to preserve scriptural and/or classical authority was replaced by the demands of a scientific history of humankind. The Indians continued to represent difference, but the remaining important marker of the Amerindians—low levels of development of the arts and sciences—would need to be incorporated into emerging theories of moral or civic philosophy. The temporal separation of the Indians and Europeans became, in the hands of Smith and the Frenchman Baron de Turgot, a theory of historical development with four ages or stages: from hunting and gathering, shepherding, and agriculture, to commerce.<sup>8</sup> The movement from one stage to another appears internal or immanent to processes at each stage, as, in Smith's words, "a great, an immense machine, whose regular and harmonious movements produce a thousand agreeable effects."<sup>9</sup> The temporal distance between Indians and Europeans, previously bridgeable only by the activities of the missionary, could now be understood within an "abstract and philosophical" scheme that locates the American Indian at the very beginnings of human society.<sup>10</sup> The differences suggested by the Indians are rendered benign as superceded ways of life.

But the past need not appear so agreeably relinquished. Smith was well aware of Rousseau's treatment of "savagery" as a source of critical reflection on the emerging

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<sup>8</sup> See Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>9</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, edited by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1976), p. 316.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

commercial society.<sup>11</sup> Thus, ‘cognitive travel’ could involve serious reflection on the meanings and purposes constitutive of contemporary societies. “The past,” as Ashis Nandy suggests, is available as “an open-ended record of the predicaments of our time.” What is required, and perhaps exemplified by Rousseau’s civic humanist critique, is “an attempt to read the past as an essay on human prospects, and . . . the ability to live with one’s constructions of the past and deploy them creatively.”<sup>12</sup> “[T]ime-travel,” thus, potentially “reshapes the past and the future” by holding “them up as mirrors to the present.”<sup>13</sup>

Smith drew much of his knowledge of the Amerindians from Father Joseph François Lafitau’s *Customs of the American Indians*. Ronald Meek notes that Lafitau’s work was given a “special role” by Smith and others because it was seen to have “provided a convincing demonstration of the fact that contemporary American society could be regarded as a living model—conveniently laid out for study, as if in a laboratory—of human society in the ‘first’ or ‘earliest’ stage of its development.”<sup>14</sup> The decisiveness of the impact might be thought surprising since Lafitau’s principal aim—to reassert a Christian eschatology—was far from the minds of Smith and other Scottish Enlightenment figures. Nonetheless, his work was recognizably scientific by Enlightenment standards and it provided an opportunity for the kind of cognitive travel necessary to the Scots’ comparative historical method. And, as we will note, Lafitau’s translation of his travels to the Americas as travels in time foreshadow Smith’s protective encasement of commercial society behind temporal walls. We examine Lafitau’s work in the first section of this chapter.

In the second section, we examine in greater detail the shape of Scottish Enlightenment historiography and the role that encounters with the Indians play in Smith’s formulation of a ‘conjectural history’ and the ‘four-stages theory.’ If Lafitau is anxious to assert a uniform source of religiosity in the face of religious difference, the Scots manage the amazing diversity of forms of human society, both historically and contemporaneously, with the assertion of a uniform and progressive human nature.

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<sup>11</sup> See Smith, “A Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*,” *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1980), pp. 250-4.

<sup>12</sup> Ashis Nandy, *Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Progress in Smith's hands takes on the form of a stadial theory, of movement through four ascending stages of social and human development. The Amerindians play a crucial role in establishing the content of the earliest stages of humankind, since they are associated with the very infancy of human history. The consequences of this move are that ways of life that differ from Smith's commercial society are relegated to the past. As Smith travels cognitively, not only across space, but also across time, he denies the 'co-evalness' of others, eliminating alternative ways of life as a source of critical reflection on the present. The theory of development involves, thereby, a process of discriminating between contemporary (and thereby relevant) political and ethical concerns and those rendered irrelevant by their association with savagery or barbarism.

Despite the teleological weight of the notion of development in Smith, we follow Ashis Nandy in suggesting the potentially critical implications of time travel. This understanding of the role of the 'past' in the construction of the future suggests that, while our cognitive travels need to differ markedly from the dominant practices of the Scottish Enlightenment, we argue, in a third section, that Smith's own work reveals these possibilities. Though Smith works vigorously to mute the voices of the savage past, echoes remain that provide resources for contemporary deliberations on global capitalism.

### ***Lafitau: To the Indians and Back***

Like many that came before, Father Joseph François Lafitau's most famous work, *Moeurs des sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* [*Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*] (1724), struggled with the problem of reconciling an understanding of the origins of the Americans with scriptural authority on the singular origins of the human species.<sup>15</sup> What distinguishes Lafitau (1681-1746) from others, at least for us, is that he is

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<sup>14</sup> Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 57.

<sup>15</sup> In previous work, we have been criticized for ignoring the duality of the initial creation, in its male and female moments. Lafitau would not have seen it this way, since he imagined the first family as the key unit of creation. Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times, Volumes I and II*, edited and translated by Fenton and Moore (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974), pp. 33-34, 327-330. See also Michel de Certeau, "Writing vs. Time: History and Anthropology in the Works of Lafitau," *Yale French Studies* Issues 59-60 (1980), p. 54.

recognizably an Enlightenment thinker, helping to explain his considerable influence on Scottish Enlightenment figures.<sup>16</sup>

Consistent with this picture of Lafitau as an Enlightenment figure, Fenton and Moore speculate that his early life in the busy port of Bordeaux stimulated his “dreams of the New World” and spurred interest in missions in North America as well as his later scholarly vocation.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Lafitau is easily associated with a spirit of scientific curiosity akin to that embraced by the Enlightenment. Others, however, paint a much different picture, highlighting Lafitau’s own description of his book as an attempt to refute the work of skeptics, like Pierre Bayle, who asserted the mere conventionality of religious belief—a view that seems to associate Lafitau more with an earlier period of defense of dogma.<sup>18</sup> Such ambiguity allows us to paint Lafitau as a liminal figure, occupying a pivotal space between religious debate and secular and scientific history. While this characterization accurately captures something about Lafitau, it perhaps anachronistically overdraws the distinction between religious authority and scientific history. Lafitau regards science and religion as overlapping categories so that a move towards a scientifically precise history serves and enhances religious authority.

By the eighteenth century, questions over the status and origins of the Amerindians were far from over, though these controversies flowed along now familiar contours. Deliberations on the origins of the peoples of the Americas usually supported the idea of a single creation and necessarily referred to a migration from Asia to the Americas that had been firmly established in the work of the Jesuit José de Acosta (1540-1600).<sup>19</sup> Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590) had additionally shaped the debate by insisting that barbarism existed in multiple forms, that comparisons among peoples be given a firm empirical basis, and “that all the peoples

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<sup>16</sup>Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, chapter 4, makes the strongest case for this influence; See also Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indians and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 205, and references later in the text.

<sup>17</sup>William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore, “Introduction,” Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, edited and translated by Fenton and Moore (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974), p. xxxi.

<sup>18</sup>See Pagden, *Fall*, pp. 200-5; Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 58; and Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1964), p. 491.

<sup>19</sup>This is not to ignore the continued existence of various polygenist theories of dual or multiple creations well into the eighteenth century. See George W. Stocking, “Scotland as the Model of

of the world could be graded for civility.”<sup>20</sup> This final claim merely spurred argument, including the important late-seventeenth/early eighteenth-century “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns.” Does the ancient world represent a ‘golden age’ in relation to which the rest of human history appears degenerate? Or, does the modern era promise social and scientific advance beyond all other forms of human society, including the ancients? This dispute was at its height when Joseph François Lafitau studied at seminaries in Pau and Paris.<sup>21</sup> The crucial impact of this controversy for his work was the practice of casting “‘Antiquity’ as a single category”<sup>22</sup> applicable to both Amerindians and ancient peoples. By Lafitau’s time, the practice of drawing extensive parallels between ancient and contemporary paganism was well established, preparing the ground for his effort to locate “conformities” across various “heathen” peoples.<sup>23</sup>

Lafitau’s main claims in *Customs of the American Indians* place him at the center of the monogenist tradition, defending the scriptural account of the unity of creation in the face of the discovery of new and different lands and peoples. For Lafitau, such a defense required translating the myriad differences offered by the peoples of the New World into a recognizable register of similarities and differences.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, similarities are explained via the process of migratory diffusion, by tracing “the origins of these peoples in the dark ages of antiquity.”<sup>25</sup> As Pagden puts it, “new and troubling peoples” can be assimilated to European understanding by treating them as descendents of Eurasian peoples of whom they had knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Identifiable similarities between the Amerindians and ancient peoples could be seen, then, as the product of diffusion—of social and linguistic practices moving around the globe along established migratory paths. Thus, the contemporary Huron and Iroquois reflect, in Lafitau’s text, vestiges of their origins as Lycians or Spartans. More generally, the various parallels between ancient religiosity, government, and marriage practices

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Mankind: Lord Kames’ Philosophical View of Civilization,” in Timothy H. H. Thoresen, ed., *Toward a Science of Man: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 85-6

<sup>20</sup> Pagden, *Fall*, p. 198.

<sup>21</sup> Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” pp. xxxi and xliii.

<sup>22</sup> Pagden, *European Encounters*, p. 92-3. See also Certeau, “‘Writing vs. Time,” pp. 45-6, on the creation of ‘antiquity’ as a category.

<sup>23</sup> Frank E. Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 19; Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 345-6.

<sup>24</sup> See Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” p. xlvii, and Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, p. 268.

<sup>25</sup> Lafitau, *Customs I*, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Pagden, *Encounters*, p. 29.

vindicate the picture of the Old World origins of the Americans.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, differences are explained with a familiar claim about decay or degeneration.<sup>28</sup> Movement across time and space (and thereby away from the perfection of creation and the continuing revelation available to some peoples) produces a degeneration of religious practice, moral belief, and linguistic structures. Thus, the decayed state of the Amerindians is verified principally in relation to Christian moral and religious truths and Eurasian languages. Common origins explain the similarities between Amerindians and the ancients; the dispersal of humans across space accounts for their differences.

Lafitau struggled with a second issue that profoundly shaped his text. More than simply establishing a singular creative episode, Lafitau aimed to make the case for a singular basis for all religious experience in an original revelatory act.<sup>29</sup> His main targets were skeptics who argued that religious belief emerged simply from social convention or perhaps from fear of the unknown.<sup>30</sup> Lafitau's effort to place the universality of religious sentiment on a more secure foundation—one based on God's creation and his acts of revelation—led him to insist on the primitive monotheism of the first human social unit: the family formed by Adam and Eve—as the generative moment for human religiosity.<sup>31</sup> Though many ancient and contemporary peoples, who, without the benefit of the continuing revelations given to Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, and, finally, with Christ, have strayed far from the original path, a careful examination of their religiosity will expose vestiges of that original monotheism imparted to the human species at creation. Here, Lafitau emphasizes less common customs or practices, which are particularly vulnerable to degeneration across time and space, and more the commonalities of imagery and myth. He locates the deepest commonalities among peoples—ancient and contemporary, barbarous and civil—in the realm of “symbolic representation,” and uses this realm to demonstrate the single and

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<sup>27</sup>On the Hurons and Iroquois, see Lafitau, *Customs I*, pp. 67-9. The entire text is designed to draw “conjectures” based on comparisons of ancient and Indian practices. The chapter headings give a sense of the range of the comparisons across religion, government, marriage and education, occupations of both men and women, warfare, trade, diplomacy, games, medicine, mourning and burial practices.

<sup>28</sup>Lafitau, *Customs I*, pp. 30-1, 34-5. On this general theme, see Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 50-7.

<sup>29</sup>The account in Pagden, *Fall*, chapter 8, is especially good. See also Certeau, “Writing vs. Time,” pp. 54-5.

<sup>30</sup>Lafitau, *Customs I*, p. 29. See also Pagden, *Fall*, p. 200, and Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century*, p. 146.

original inspiration for religious faith.<sup>32</sup> In this way, Lafitau places the human experience in its great variety, across both space and time, within what he calls a “symbolic theology.”<sup>33</sup>

Enlightenment figures dismissed precisely such “anti-rationalist” conclusions. Voltaire’s tone is especially mocking but Adam Smith also finds many of Lafitau’s major conclusions unsound. Though they deride some elements of his method and ignore the sections on religion, Lafitau still inspires the Scots.<sup>34</sup> Lafitau is noteworthy, if for no other reason, than the near exhaustiveness of his sources. He epitomizes the emerging view, as Certeau explains,<sup>35</sup> that far-flung times and places might be available for the contemporary thinker in the form of collections of material artifacts and archives of written reports. Exhaustiveness alone, however, is insufficient to recommend Lafitau to Smith and others. These collections and archives remain silent unless their secrets are voiced. The meaning of the accumulated vestiges of ancient times and reports of contemporary peoples is revealed only by systematic comparison of the one with the other. But Lafitau was not the only thinker who works to establish similarities between the Ancients and the North American Indians. What distinguishes him from contemporaries is the “wide-ranging character” of the comparisons,<sup>36</sup> his “scrupulously factual account of the evidence,”<sup>37</sup> the “tabularization of ethnographic knowledge into a systematic and comprehensive form,”<sup>38</sup> and that he is the “most sophisticated and explicit as to his method.”<sup>39</sup>

As Lafitau describes it, he wishes to avoid the errors of previous authors who rely on “imperfect and superficial records only,” resort to “conjectures [that] are so vague and uncertain that they rather give rise to more doubts than clarifying the existing ones,” and claim linguistic connections based on a poor knowledge of the languages

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<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that this is also the generative moment of human sociality. See Lafitau, *Customs I*, chapter VI. See also Certeau, “Writing vs. Time,” pp. 54-5.

<sup>32</sup> The quoted phrase is from Pagden, *Fall*, p. 204. See also Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” pp. lxxvi-lxxvii.

<sup>33</sup> Lafitau, *Customs I*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>34</sup> Pagden, *Fall*, pp. 205 and 246 (fn. 29).

<sup>35</sup> Certeau, “Writing vs. Time,” pp. 43-5.

<sup>36</sup> Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> Pagden, *Fall*, p. 201.

<sup>38</sup> Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” p. xlvi.

involved.<sup>40</sup> He reports his study of the languages of the Amerindians and his sources—personal experience and reliable eye-witness accounts—of their customs.<sup>41</sup> But, most importantly, he explains the way a comparison of the Ancients and the Indians allows us to understand both much better:

I have not limited myself to learning the characteristics of the Indian and informing myself about their customs and practices, I have sought in these practices and customs, vestiges of the most remote antiquity. I have read carefully [the works] of the earliest writers who treated the customs, laws and usages of the peoples of whom they had some knowledge. I have made a comparison of these customs with the other. I confess that, if the ancient authors have given me information on which to base happy conjectures about the Indians, the customs of the Indians have given me information on the basis of which I can understand more easily and explain more readily many things in the ancient authors.<sup>42</sup>

The scientific power of this process of comparison comes from the capacity to move back and forth across time. As Anthony Pagden describes it:

The reflective, informed and ‘sensible’ being possesses the ability to be, in this [imaginative] way, literally in more places than one. And it is precisely this capacity for cognitive travel which constitutes his power of scientific understanding. For all scientific knowledge, and the power that that knowledge brings with it, demands just such movement. And all movement follows the same trajectory. It begins as going out and ends as coming back.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, Ter Ellingson explains that Lafitau’s method of comparison involves a form of “time-shifting” that overcomes geographical distance in order to establish a “common kinship” among peoples.<sup>44</sup> That is, the collections and archives used to document the practices of the Ancients and the Indians (and establish common origins) are understood “without recourse to dates or places.”<sup>45</sup> Questions about the historical distance between forms of paganism or barbarism can be set aside where time is

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<sup>40</sup>Lafitau, *Customs I*, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-7.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 27. See also the description in Pagden, *Fall*, pp. 198-9.

<sup>43</sup>Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters*, p. 30.

<sup>44</sup>Ellingson, *Myth*, p. 77.

apparently erased. Thus, as Certeau explains, “The historical question receives a formalist treatment.” Lafitau draws from a “stock of monuments, piled up without chronological order, elements which are susceptible of being *formally* compared and which fit together *symbolically* as general categories.”<sup>46</sup>

By placing antiquity and contemporary barbarism within a common “symbolic theology,” Lafitau provides a picture of the Amerindians as full members of the human species, “[m]en being everywhere born with the same good or bad qualities.”<sup>47</sup> In this move, he follows in the footsteps of earlier Catholic thinkers, Francisco de Vitoria and Bartolomé de las Casas.<sup>48</sup> He rejects as fanciful or prejudiced descriptions of the Indians as devoid of common features of human society:

I have seen, with extreme distress, in most of the travel narratives, that those who have written of the customs of primitive peoples have depicted them to us as people without any sentiment of religion, knowledge of a divinity or object to which they rendered any cult, as people without law, social control or any form of government; in a word, as people who have scarcely anything except the appearance of men. This is a mistake made even by missionaries and honest men who, on the one hand, have written too hastily of things with which they were not sufficiently familiar and, on the other, did not foresee the disastrous consequences which could be drawn from the expression of an opinion so unfavourable to religion. For, although these authors have contradicted themselves in their works and, at the same time that they say that these barbarians have neither cult nor a divinity whom they worship, they also say things, as Mr. Bayle himself has observed, which presuppose a divinity and a regulated cult. It results, nevertheless, (from this), that we are prejudiced by the first statement and become accustomed to forming a conception of these Indian and barbarians which scarcely differentiates them from beasts.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” p. xlviii.

<sup>46</sup> Certeau, “Writing vs. Time,” p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> Lafitau, *Customs II*, p. 299. See also *Customs I*, pp. 89-91. See our discussion of the debate about the humanity of the Indians in Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 50-7. Associating the Indians with beasts or construing them as members of some monstrous races were certainly not unknown to the enlightened eighteenth century.

<sup>48</sup> See our discussion of Vitoria in Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 58-65, 81-2. On las Casas see Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), chapter 3 and pp.185-93.

<sup>49</sup> Lafitau, *Customs I*, pp. 28-9.

Here, Lafitau is far from locating the Amerindians in a golden age, placing them in some privileged place in relation to a natural state of humankind; nor does he characterize the Indians as degenerated or beastly. Indeed, at times Lafitau compares the Indians quite favorably with his contemporary Europeans, especially in regard to manly virtues.<sup>50</sup> Lafitau instead achieves a series of careful observations about the Indian societies. Some of Lafitau's reports—on age-grades, kinship relations and the position of women in Indian societies—are considered quite acute and unsurpassed by professional anthropologists until the nineteenth, or perhaps even twentieth, centuries.<sup>51</sup> However, because Lafitau's project clearly revolves around restoring the original unity of all religious experience and a defense of the possibility of missionary activity, it remains at some distance from the central concerns of his Enlightenment contemporaries, like Smith, as we shall see.

A second implication of his method extends well beyond his explicit project and better explains Lafitau's role in Enlightenment historiography. Certeau's revealing claim, that Lafitau replaces the Bible with his historical system, gives us an initial hint of that importance.<sup>52</sup> In the Christian worldview, time is given meaning only via the actions of an "external agent"—God the creator and mover of history towards its final end. Temporal events or secular history necessarily gain meaning only via "subordination to eschatology."<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, this "millenarian formula" lacks the "means of explicating the succession of particulars in social and political time" and the emerging imperative is to fill that gap with a natural philosophy rooted in careful observation of human experience.<sup>54</sup> Lafitau might be seen as a transitional figure in relation to that imperative. Despite his ostensive religious motivations, he makes a "scientific gesture," setting himself apart from "his social ties and attachments" and placing himself in the position of an autonomous observer and producer of a system of knowledge.<sup>55</sup> In this, Lafitau represents an "enticing" image of scientific practice,

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<sup>50</sup>See also Pagden, *Fall*, p. 202; Ellingson, *Myth*, pp. 78-9

<sup>51</sup> Fenton and Moore, "Introduction," pp. cvii-cxix; Martha Haroun Foster, "Lost Women of the Matriarchy: Iroquois Women in the Historical Literature," *American Indians Culture and Research Journal* 19:3 (1999): 122-4.

<sup>52</sup>Certeau, "Writing vs. Time," p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 31-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>55</sup>Certeau, "Writing vs. Time," pp. 53-4.

seducing us with its claim to overcome the diversities and discontinuities of time in order thereby “to produce the formal system of an absolute knowledge.”<sup>56</sup> It is this aspect of Lafitau’s work that appeals to the Scots. Though they were likely to distance themselves from his “immediate polemical intention,” they were drawn to the notion that locating the ancients and contemporary primitives at the beginning of time could help explain the patterns of human behavior, namely, by suggesting “that all human cultures could be interpreted as the workings out in time of certain known and stable characteristics of the human mind.”<sup>57</sup> Or, as Fenton and Moore explain, though Lafitau “was neither historical nor evolutionary in the strictest sense of these terms,” he contributed “documentation to substantiate the ‘law’ of progress.”<sup>58</sup>

Though treated as a substantial achievement by the Scots, our reaction to his work foreshadows our response to the historiography of the Scottish Enlightenment. His practice of ‘time-shifting’ forces an understanding of the Amerindians (and the Ancients) into terms that are his, not theirs.<sup>59</sup> Travel outward to the Indians and the Ancients requires travel back to the self, with considerable damage to his understanding of the particular and distinct histories of both.<sup>60</sup> Or, as Certeau evocatively puts it: Lafitau’s comparison “silences” both the ancients and the savages.<sup>61</sup> If, as Pagden indicates, Lafitau travels out and then back, then we would add, he spoils the goods—the vestiges of antiquity and the reports of the new world—on the way home. More hopefully, we might say, he brings home collections and archives whose secrets wait to be sufficiently voiced.

### ***Smith and the Indians: Time, Space and Moral Science***

The Scottish Enlightenment is noted for its distinctive variant of the doctrine of progress: Smith’s ‘conjectural history’ and the ‘four-stages theory.’<sup>62</sup> Though ‘conjectural history’ builds on Lafitau’s work, Smith’s use of this technique diverges in a crucial respect. Where Lafitau embraces a scientific method to give credibility to

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60. See also Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” pp. lxiv-lxv.

<sup>57</sup> Pagden, *Fall*, p. 208.

<sup>58</sup> Fenton and Moore, “Introduction,” p. xliv. See also Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, pp. 54 and 61.

<sup>59</sup> Pagden, *European Encounters*, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, pp. 348-9.

<sup>61</sup> Certeau, “Writing vs. Time,” p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Ronald Meek’s *Ignoble Savages* is a key text in this claim about Smith’s invention of the ‘four-stages theory.’ It is worth noting that Meek finds a similar notion emerging in Turgot’s work at roughly the same time, the early 1750s.

a particular eschatological scheme, Smith embraces science as a modern calling that sets the modern apart from the superstitions of the past. If God remained a concern, it was as the rather distant “author” of creation, constructing a natural order the laws of which humankind might discern.<sup>63</sup> In that quest to comprehend the natural order human beings assumed a central place in the creation (if not quite authorship) of their own world.<sup>64</sup> However, Smith and Lafitau converge at another point. For both, the new peoples and continents ‘discovered’ and ‘explored’ by Europeans were sources of some anxiety. The Scots, like Lafitau, needed to make the amazing diversity of peoples and societies consistent with the principles of, in this case, a natural order.<sup>65</sup> In their minds, managing this diversity required the kinds of travel associated with the scientific practice of comparative or ‘conjectural history.’

The Scots imagined themselves living in a scientific age. Newton’s knowledge of a world of bodies subject to laws inspired a search for similar laws governing human behavior and institutions. Francis Bacon, perhaps more than any other, articulated what was also Newton’s intuition—that natural and moral science might advance in step. Bacon’s mapping of knowledge—rooted in “the three faculties of Memory, Imagination, and Reason, to which corresponded the three divisions of human learning,” namely “history, poetry and philosophy”—inspired the Scots to create a moral science or a natural philosophy with human beings at its center.<sup>66</sup>

For the Scots, as for Enlightenment thinking more generally, a “science of man” was necessarily an empirical science, rooted in experience and evidence.<sup>67</sup> Since the Scots began with the assumption that humans are social beings, the evidence on which to

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<sup>63</sup>Adam Smith, “The History of Astronomy,” *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by W. P. D. Wightman (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1980), 48-53. On the Scots’, especially Smith’s, placement of religion and science, see D. D. Raphael, “Adam Smith: Philosophy, Science and Social Science,” in Stuart C. Brown, ed., *Philosophers of the Enlightenment* (NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 77-93, and Andrew Skinner, “Economics and History—The Scottish Enlightenment,” *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 12:1 (1965): 22.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Wokler, “Anthropology and Conjectural History in the Enlightenment,” in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 33-4.

<sup>65</sup> The importance of the problem of diversity for the Scots is discussed especially well by Christopher J. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), chapter 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>67</sup> An especially good collection on the Enlightenment creation of a “science of man” can be found in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth Century Domains* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995).

base a science of man might be drawn from numerous sources, reflecting societies far-flung in time and space. The evidence available might be personal, rooted in the thinkers' own contemporary, European experience or it might come to them via Bacon's 'Memory.' The latter made available vast amounts of "indirect and secondary" material about "the contemporary 'savage' world of the Americas, Asia and Polynesia and the world described by ancient authors."<sup>68</sup>

What the Scots saw in the recorded evidence of human societies was a complex picture of amazing diversity, but this very diversity potentially stood in opposition to a moral or civic science on a Newtonian plan.<sup>69</sup> Part of the solution was to locate recurring patterns in human societies. Following the example of Montesquieu perhaps, the social thinker would identify the common chains of causes and effects that explained these patterns.<sup>70</sup> The assumption, as we noted above, "was that everything in society and history, just like everything in the physical realm, was bound together by an intricate concatenation of causes and effects which it is the main task of the student of man and society—i.e. the social scientist—to unravel."<sup>71</sup>

Thus, for the Scots a science of man required the telling of tales—the writing of historical narratives and articulating a "project" of profound "philosophical speculation, so as to incorporate all this disparate material into a truly philosophical account."<sup>72</sup> Travel narratives, including perhaps Lafitau's, could serve as no more than "raw material" or, perhaps, inspiration. Even the noted chains of causes and effects do not alone produce a moral science of the kind Smith and the other Scot's envisioned. Rather, the social thinker must turn these causal chains to the purpose of telling a historical story with a clear moral point. Minimally, this requires finding a kind of cause that will explain the great uniformity they see (or seek) in human societies. As Andrew Skinner notes: "The key to this problem was found, as Hume had insisted it

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<sup>68</sup> We draw here on Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 52-4, 61; the quotation is from p. 61.

<sup>69</sup> Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading 'Adam Smith': Desire, History, and Value* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 48 and Berry, pp. 74-5 remark on the potentially paradoxical relationship of the evidence and the scientific ambition.

<sup>70</sup> See Berry, *Social Theory*, Chapter 3; David Carrithers, "The Enlightenment Science of Society," in Fox, Porter, and Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>71</sup> Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Pagden, *European Encounters*, pp. 84-5. The narrative character of the Scottish 'science of man' is noted by Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 54-5; Roger Smith, "The Language of Human Nature," in Fox, Porter, and Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science*, p. 102; and Shapiro, *Reading "Adam Smith"*, p. 48.

must be, in the constant and universal principles of human nature.”<sup>73</sup> With a given set of characteristics of human nature—“Hume lists ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity and public spirit”—the Scots could identify patterns that operate regardless of context. In this way, “[a]ll human behavior, even if it has a ‘local’ character, is explicable because it is governed by regular springs which have uniform effects.”<sup>74</sup>

However, the evidence still suggested a great variation in forms of human society. Though these might be *explained* as the consequence of placing a fixed human nature in varying physical settings (i.e., variations in climate and fertility of the soil), the Scots resisted the potentially relativistic implications of such an approach—that the social theorist can say little beyond that differences in geography produce different forms of society.<sup>75</sup> For Smith and the Scots, a moral science produces practical guidance about the direction of human society; about where, reflecting the Scottish Enlightenment’s teleological moment, human society must *necessarily* and *appropriately* go.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the Scots add a crucial second element to their thinking—the idea that human nature itself contains an impetus to progress. Human beings, as distinct from (other) animals, seek to improve their condition and capabilities—a condition Smith believes

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<sup>73</sup> Skinner, “Natural History,” p. 41.

<sup>74</sup> Berry, *Social Theory*, p. 69.

<sup>75</sup> Montesquieu’s employment of physical causes—climate, geography—might well reduce the clutter of empirical evidence, identifying and explaining the persistence of a small number of forms of society and government, but they are thought to be too simplistic to support a fully developed natural philosophy. That is, the Scots believed that Montesquieu’s scheme failed to provide a basis for making clear enough moral distinctions among forms of society. On Montesquieu, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon, 1951), pp. 210-5. For the Scots’s reaction, see Fania Oz-Salzberger, “The Political Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment,” in Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 170-1; Murray G. H. Pittrock, “Historiography,” in Broadie, ed., *The Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 260-1; Andrew Skinner, “Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith,” *Political Studies* XV:1 (1967), p. 38.

<sup>76</sup> On Smith as moralist and practical commentator, see Donald Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Richard E. Teichgraber, III, *‘Free Trade’ and Moral Philosophy: Rethinking the Sources of Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986); Jerry A. Muller, *Adam Smith, in His Time and Ours* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Charles L. Griswold, Jr., *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

“comes with us from the womb.”<sup>77</sup> The interaction between a common human nature and varying circumstances came to be seen, then, in a much different way. Though variable climate and geography may be of some importance, the key differences in the environment are those humans themselves create. The Scots argued that

man, following his natural propensities, inevitably produces results well beyond his original intentions; that man, in reacting to a particular situation, must ultimately produce a qualitative change thus creating a new situation within which the same forces must operate.<sup>78</sup>

History takes on a decisively progressive direction and the diversity of social forms can be understood as variations in degrees of progress. In this move, difference is read along a temporal register. Historical and contemporary diversity is no longer understood principally in terms of differences in the character of the spaces they occupy. Rather, differences across societies in the ancient or contemporary world may be thought of as products of uneven development.<sup>79</sup> History is given a new moral reading—as “a repository of exemplars, for good or for evil.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, barbarism and superstition, whether contemporary or past, may be put safely behind, as superceded time. And Smith, as we will see, regards this temporal register as stadial, involving movement though clearly discernable and ascending stages.

Adam Smith famously describes those stages in his lectures of 1762-3. He identifies four stages—“1<sup>st</sup>, the Age of Hunters; 2<sup>dly</sup>, the Age of Shepherds; 3<sup>rdly</sup>, the Age of Agriculture; and 4<sup>thly</sup>, the Age of Commerce.”<sup>81</sup> The occasion for outlining these stages is Smith’s understanding of property rights. He rejects the idea that property is

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<sup>77</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of Wealth of Nations*, edited by Edwin Cannan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 362 [II.iii]. See Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 69-70; Skinner, “Natural History,” pp. 42-4; Arthur Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), p. 63.

<sup>78</sup> Skinner, “Economics and History,” p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> See Paul Smith, “Conjecture, Acquiescence, and John Millar’s History of Ireland,” *The European Legacy* 1:8 (1996), p. 2233. J. G. A. Pocock (*Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 486-7) also notes that this move translates the components of cyclical theories of history into theories of progress.

<sup>80</sup> Knud, Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 6

<sup>81</sup> Adam Smith, “Report of 1762-3,” in R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein, *Lectures on Jurisprudence* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), p. 14 (para 27). Though stage theories of varying systematicity were available to thinkers, Meek attributes the formulation of the ‘four-stages theory’ to Smith (though possibly formulated independently by Turgot), placing its origins around 1750. Others, like Herman (in *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*, p. 98), appear to attribute the idea to Lord Kames (Henry Homes) and his *Historical Law Tracts* (1758).

among those things considered as “naturall rights.” Rather, the most powerful of the “causes from which property may have its occasion,” namely “Occupation, by which we get any thing into our power that was not the property of one before,” varies in its importance depending on the form of society.<sup>82</sup> Smith explains this principle at some length:

In Tartary, where as we said the support of the inhabitants consist(s) in herds and flocks, *theft* is punished with immediate death; in North America, again, where the age of hunters subsists, theft is not much regarded. As there is almost no property amongst them, the only injury that can be done them is depriving them of their game. Few laws or regulations will (be) requisite in such an age of society, and these will not extend to any length, or be very rigorous in the punishments annexed to any infringements of property. . . . In the age of agriculture, they are not so much exposed to theft and open robbery [as are herds and flocks], but then there are many ways added in which property may be interrupted as the subjects of it are considerably extended. The laws therefore tho perhaps not so rigorous will be of a far greater number than amongst a nation of shepherds. In the age of commerce, as the subjects of property are greatly increased the laws must be proportionately multiplied. The more improved any society is and the greater length the severall means of supporting the inhabitants are carried, the greater will be the number of their laws and regulations necessary to maintain justice, and prevent infringement of the right to property.<sup>83</sup>

In addition, variations in the rules governing occupation of land, ownership of houses, forms of exchange, and inheritance practices correspond to the modes of subsistence that characterize the successive ‘Ages’ of man.<sup>84</sup>

The Scots are hardly the first to deploy the idea of ‘ages’ of human progress,<sup>85</sup> but what is seen as distinctive about Smith’s ‘four-stages theory’ is worth emphasizing. First, the stages of human society are defined by the respective mode of acquiring

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<sup>82</sup> Smith, “Report of 1762-3,” p. 13 (paras. 25-6).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 16 (paras. 33-5).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, pp. 14-49 (paras, 27-115).

<sup>85</sup> Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, chapters 1 and 2, gives a good account of the influences on the Scots. See also our *International Relations*, pp. 85-91.

subsistence or, perhaps, to use a later language, by the mode of production. Second, as human societies advance through these successive modes of acquiring subsistence, we can expect corresponding changes (or, generally, improvements) in institutions, laws, and manners.<sup>86</sup> Human society gradually loses its rudeness; as the arts and industry advance so are the individuals in society refined.<sup>87</sup> Some, like Ronald Meek, see in this formulation a precursor of Marx's historical materialism,<sup>88</sup> but our purpose, at this point, is less to trace out such influences than to examine the logic of 'conjectural history.'

'Conjectural history' rests on a combination of methodological principles: (1) the use of systematic comparison; (2) conjectures, premised on assimilating ancient peoples and contemporary savages as a single category; and (3) the equation of human infancy and the category of savagery. We have already noted that careful employment of historical comparisons gave eighteenth century social thinkers' work the status of science: comparison reveals patterns of commonality and difference that serve as the building blocks in the isolation of causal chains that capture the orderly character of human society. For Smith and the Scots, human history is a series of social experiments that might be compared.<sup>89</sup> Though comparison might, thereby, facilitate ranking of the relative achievements of societies in various areas of human endeavor, it does not yet justify the claims of a *stage* theory. Elaborating human history as a series of stages requires recourse to the second and third principles, allowing a series of carefully constructed, albeit "a priori conjectures."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>See Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 2; Skinner, "Natural History," pp. 42-5; Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 93-9.

<sup>87</sup>See David Hume, "Of Refinement in the Arts," in *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985), pp. 268-80. This language is characteristic of the Scots more generally. See Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 180-1; Andrew Skinner, "Economic Theory," in Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 183-4.

<sup>88</sup>Ronald L. Meek, "The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology," in J. Saville, ed., *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), pp. 84-102.

<sup>89</sup>Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 62-3 attributes this idea to Hume but notes its influence also on Smith, John Millar, Lord Kames, and William Robertson. See also Stocking, "Scotland and the Model of Mankind," pp. 65-89.

<sup>90</sup>See Aaron Garrett, "Anthropology: the 'Original' of Human Nature," in Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 81.

The claim that Scottish Enlightenment thinkers deployed ‘conjectures’ has a long history. It is found first in Dugald Stewart’s short biography of Adam Smith (1793).<sup>91</sup> For Stewart, the challenge faced by Smith was to trace the entire history of human progress from its origins to the present. However, the historian faces a seemingly insurmountable constraint: the lack of any direct evidence of the early times of human society. This lack must be filled by conjecture. As Stewart explains:

In this want of direct evidence, we are under a direct necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture; and when we are unable to ascertain how men have actually conducted themselves upon particular occasions, of considering in what manner they are likely to have proceeded, from the principles of their nature, and the circumstances of their external situation. In such inquiries, the detached facts which travels and voyages afford us, may frequently serve as land-marks to our speculations; and sometimes our conclusions *a priori*, may tend to confirm the credibility of facts, which, on a superficial view, appeared to be doubtful or incredible.

Nor are such theoretical views of human affairs subservient merely to the gratification of curiosity. In examining the history of mankind, . . . when we cannot trace the process by which an event *has been* produced, it is often of importance to show how it *may have been* produced by natural causes.<sup>92</sup>

Stewart referred to “this species of philosophical investigation” as “*Theoretical or Conjectural History*.”<sup>93</sup>

This is not to disparage Smith for a cavalier attitude toward evidence. Rather, the point is to examine how Smith was able to translate the amazing diversity of ‘facts’ available to him into a stadial theory of history. We have suggested parts of the answer in our discussion of Lafitau above. Lafitau’s assimilation of the contemporary Indians and the ancients allowed ‘facts’ about each to inform an understanding of the other. His example was crucial for Smith in his efforts to discern the nature of early human societies, and Smith turned directly to Lafitau for evidence about the

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<sup>91</sup> Dugald Stewart, “An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, L.L.D.” in *Essays on Philosophical Topics*, edited by W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), pp. 269-351.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Amerindians.<sup>94</sup> If the peoples of the ancient world, particularly the various barbarous groups, and the contemporary savages could be placed on the same temporal register, then Smith could begin to delineate a common stage of human progress (or lack thereof) exhibited by barbarians/savages. Thus, the Amerindians became exemplary of the category ‘savage’ and works, like Lafitau’s, became definitive sources on that category of human society.

Of course, Lafitau’s project, like the Scots’, involved a search for origins; his work seemed to hint at the possibility that various ancient peoples and current North American Indians might be similarly placed at the very beginnings of human history. There was certainly a precedent for such a move in a time where Locke had declared: “in the beginning all the World was America.”<sup>95</sup> Smith himself, as Dugald Stewart noted, provided a philosophical basis for this claim.<sup>96</sup> In “Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages,” Smith begins with a thought experiment meant to illustrate the origins of language. Imagine two “savages,” he asks, somehow isolated from society and without language. The savages “would naturally begin to form that language by which they would endeavor to make their mutual wants intelligible to each other, by uttering certain sounds, whenever they meant to denote certain objects.” Smith prods the reader to follow his surmise (conjecture) that, as is the case with infants, the beginnings of language would be restricted to a process of nomination, a stream of proper names for “concrete” objects. Only later would our savages begin to learn and apply “a considerable degree of abstraction and generalization.”<sup>97</sup> The analogy of childhood and savagery was a powerful one; it allowed Smith and his fellow Scots to treat materials about the Indians as evidence of the “infancy of society.”<sup>98</sup> Combined with the historical optimism built into the idea of a progressive

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<sup>94</sup> See Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 62-4; Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, pp. 69-70; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, p. 501. The most famous account of Lafitau’s influence on Smith is in Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, Chapter 4.

<sup>95</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. II, 301. See Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 85-8.

<sup>96</sup> Stewart, “An Account,” pp. 292-3. The role of conjectural theories of language in placing the Amerindians within Enlightenment historical schemes is discussed by Pagden, *European Encounters*, pp. 129-40.

<sup>97</sup> Adam Smith, “Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages,” in Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, edited by J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985), pp. 203-6.

<sup>98</sup> Berry, *Social Theory*, p. 92. See also Murray G. H. Pittrock, “Historiography,” in Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to The Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 274.

human nature, barbarism/savagery could be seen as the initial stage in human societies' development from infancy to maturity. Where England, France, and, potentially, Scotland serve as exemplary of human maturity, human progress also may be read backwards—from a commercial society to its earlier origins.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, it is the savage that operates as a sort of 'mirror' for the Scots, against which they assessed the progress of their own and other commercial societies. In *The Wealth of Nations*, it is the paltry livelihood of the savage that serves as the basis of comparison when assessing the distributional consequences of a developed division of labor:

Among the savage nations of hunters and fishers, every individual who is able to work, is more or less employed in useful labour, and endeavors to provide, as well as he can, the necessaries and conveniences of life, for himself, or such of his family or tribe as are either too old, or too young, or too infirm to go a hunting and fishing. Such nations, however, are so miserably poor, that from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or, at least, think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those inflicted with lingering disease, to perish with hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts. Among civilized and thriving nations, on the contrary, though a great number of people do not labor at all, many of whom consume the produce of ten times, frequently of a hundred times more labour than the greater part of those who work; yet the produce of the whole labour of the society is so great, that all are often abundantly supplied, and a workman, even of the lowest and poorest order, if he is frugal and industrious, may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire.<sup>100</sup>

Where the division of labor is a marker of civilized society, savage society becomes conceived as “the *absence* of division of labor.”<sup>101</sup> And, as Smith suggests above, the

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<sup>99</sup> Meek, *Ignoble Savage*, p. 222.

<sup>100</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 2 [Introduction]; See also Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 16 [I,I] and “Report of 1762-3,” *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, p. 338 [VI, 19]. Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 59, comments on this consistent pattern of comparison.

<sup>101</sup> David P. Levine, *Economic Studies: Contributions to the Critique of Economic Theory* (London, Henley, and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 37.

savage society is consequently characterized by a lack of refined manners—a lack of humanity—only possible in a civilized society where we find the advances associated with commerce and a complex division of labor.<sup>102</sup> The rude, the savage, the barbarous stand in almost polar opposition to the commercial—the civilized. And, we would assert, a stadial account of human development becomes possible because filling in the intermediate steps is easier once one ‘knows’ the beginnings and the end.<sup>103</sup>

In this way, Smith and the Scots develop ‘conjectural history’ as a moral science. Human improvement, though the product of individual action (within the bounds set by human nature), produces social, including moral advance. Not only are patterns of social and moral advance visible to scientific inquiry, but scientific inquiry itself is seen to be a product of this process of human development, superseding “superstition, ignorance and dogma.”<sup>104</sup> At once, a human science diagnoses the mysteries of the past and provides an account of its own power to discern those mysteries. And this is done without asserting the role of some external agent in history. All that is required is the gradual, but persistent, operation of human nature: Moral advance is produced without plan or conscious design.<sup>105</sup> The order that social inquiry is empowered to discern is spontaneously generated—the “harmonious movements” of an “immense machine.”<sup>106</sup>

The difficulties we find in Smith’s moral science partly parallel those we locate in Lafitau. Like Lafitau, Smith shifts time, so that the Indians, though contemporary, appear only as exemplary of some initial age of human society. Understood only in contradistinction to modern, civilized society, the Indians do not speak in their own terms; their histories are submerged in the historical constructions of the

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<sup>102</sup> See also Teichgraber, ‘Free Trade’, p. 144 and Muller, *Adam Smith*, pp. 8, 30.

<sup>103</sup> Perhaps this explains why we find the ‘four stages theory’ less of a mystery than does Pocock, though he does argue that the “concept of barbarism” was crucial to the formation of that theory. See J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 115-6.

<sup>104</sup> Roger Smith, “Human Nature,” pp. 100-1.

<sup>105</sup> See Wokler, “Anthropology,” pp. 39-40.

<sup>106</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 316 [VII.iii.I.2]. That the Scots embrace an idea of spontaneous order is much noted. See especially Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); and Naeem Inayatullah, “Theories of Spontaneous Order,” *Review of International Political Economy* 4:2 (1997), pp. 319-348.

Enlightenment scientist. More strongly, perhaps, the Indians do not speak at all. Their views of their own societies or of other, including European societies, are silenced. Thus, Smith's 'conjectural history' extends beyond the fundamental religious uniformity posited by Lafitau to incorporate the whole of human social life. That is, in Smith, comparison works to subordinate the diversity of human experience and possible human viewpoints to the universal moral story he wishes to tell.

Ernst Cassirer suggests that all Enlightenment thinking struggled with the perennial problem of the relationship between the general and the particular.<sup>107</sup> And we have already described the Scots as searching for principles that would allow the diversity of experience to be captured by (reduced to) general patterns. Indeed, as Christopher Berry notes, for the Scottish Enlightenment, "the reduction of the diversity of institutions to some intelligible pattern" is precisely "the hallmark of successful social science." This reduction serves an essential moral purpose in that the ethical weight is placed on the side of the universal, not the particular.<sup>108</sup> The universal pattern of human history captured in Smith's 'four-stages theory' provides a basis for moral evaluation and a practical guide for action for one's own society and in that society's encounters with others. Diversity is managed within this system; the "vista of secular progress" it offers allows diversity to be located along the prescribed temporal register—as a variant of contemporary civilization or some backward form. As Michael Shapiro notes, in Smith the rich diversity of "the ordinary" is obscured by the emphasis on the "exemplary."<sup>109</sup> In this way, the 'exemplary' is given the power to drown out the examples and voices of the diverse particularities of human existence.

In addition, Smith's 'four-stages theory' translates the diversity associated with a geo-cultural mapping of space into developmental time. Smith normally maps these geo-cultural spaces onto what he calls 'nations'—a term describing any social unit from tribes to empires. Adjacent nations in Europe may exist in the same advanced temporal stage or may be separated in time by uneven processes of development. Nations far in physical distance from Europe might lay quite near to Europe temporally (e.g. China), though most of the rest of the world was seen as far-flung both spatially

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<sup>107</sup> Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 197.

<sup>108</sup> Berry, *Social Theory*, pp. 76, 88.

<sup>109</sup> Shapiro, *Reading "Adam Smith"*, p. 57.

and temporally. However, the paradigmatic case, as seen above, opposes the social space of a developed, civilized Europe to savage or barbarous spaces in Africa, Asia, or the Americas. Smith's primary project in *The Wealth of Nations* is none other than to explain the differences in wealth associated with this temporal distance between savage and civilized nations (and, secondarily, those falling in between). What he does not allow, at least not explicitly (see the next section), is for an overlap of temporal boundaries. In this way, Smith effects a compartmentalization of time into distinct national units, a Westphalianization of developmental time.<sup>110</sup>

Combining the previous two points, we can begin to understand how it is that Smith encases the modern commercial society within a temporal/ethical fortress. Both time and space operate as a set of boundaries that demarcate 'nations' by developmental level. Where moral judgment is informed by a stage-theory of history, the institutions and practices of the civilized serve as the basis for evaluating those of temporally backward nations. And, by implication, the present, as the height of human historical achievement, is protected from potentially critical values and visions of now past forms of society. As long as the boundary between the civilized and the savage remains clearly in place, the values of a commercial society automatically will take precedence: its values—wealth, social refinement—are thereby the basis for assessing other (superceded) forms of society as well as for assessing its own successes and failures. That is, a commercial society can only be evaluated as failing or succeeding *in its own terms*—by failing to provide wealth or refinement. Thus, even a critique of the present nevertheless validates that those societies occupy a superior temporal position.<sup>111</sup>

Like Lafitau, Smith “believed that traveling in space also meant traveling in time.”<sup>112</sup> This equation of time and space makes sense where the ‘four-stages theory’ ruled the understanding of history. The social theorist moved through the ages of man as he consulted contemporary narratives of far-away places. This is conceptual movement, since, as we have noted, Smith did not travel physically to the array of places he

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<sup>110</sup> We have discussed the mutual constitution of international relations and modernization theory in Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, chapter 3.

<sup>111</sup> Shapiro, *Reading “Adam Smith”*, p. 52; See also Oz-Salzberger, “Political Theory,” pp. 169-70.

located along a temporal register. As Pagden evocatively puts it: the Enlightenment historians traveled from “text to text,” searching for truthful witnesses whose evidence might prove exemplary of the patterns of history.<sup>113</sup> In this move, Smith places other contemporary societies into a different time from his own. We see this practice as exemplary of the dominant patterns of Enlightenment Modernity, infusing a temporocentrism into much of contemporary social theory and practice.<sup>114</sup> This denial of the “co-presence” of others serves to shield modern society from external criticism. It also purges all versions of global democracy that resist assimilation to a distinctly modern pattern.<sup>115</sup> Those who exemplify the most advanced societies, the pinnacle of human history, comprise a chronocratic elite, whose travels, whether real or conceptual, serve to confirm their status as scientists and purveyors of practical wisdom. However, this is only one aspect of the story, since, as we suggest in the next section, “co-presence” is the ‘real’ of travel—something that the traveler both avoids and desires. Travel anxiety produces a double effect: it is what the traveler avoids in order to contain co-presence’s potential criticism; and it is what the traveler seeks so that co-presence can catalyze critical self-consciousness.<sup>116</sup>

### *The Savage Within the Walls of Political Economy*

Such critical consciousness hardly seems germane for Smith for whom history tends to assume a “providentialist” guise.<sup>117</sup> In part, Smith’s quietism is due to the influence of the Stoics, who Smith describes approvingly:

The Stoics were of the opinion, that as the world was governed by the all-ruling providence of a wise, powerful, and good God, every single event ought to be

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<sup>112</sup> Christopher Fox, “Introduction. How to Prepare a Noble Savage: The Spectacle of Human Science,” in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth Century Dramas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Pagden, *European Encounters*, p. 86

<sup>114</sup> See Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 99-102. Our argument owes much to Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>115</sup> See Inayatullah and Blaney, *International Relations*, pp. 116-23.

<sup>116</sup> We draw on Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 24-5; William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 247-9, 320-2; Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 31; and Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992), pp. 6-7.

<sup>117</sup> Skinner, “Economics and History,” p. 22; Wokler, “Anthropology,” pp. 34-5; Shapiro, *Reading ‘Adam Smith’*, pp. xix-xxx, 50. But also see the contrary view of Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations*, pp. 44-5.

regarded, as making a necessary part of the plan of the universe, and as tending to promote the general order and happiness of the whole: that the vices and follies of mankind, therefore, made as necessary a part of this plan as their wisdom or their virtue; and by that eternal art which educes good from ill, were made to tend equally to the prosperity and perfection of the great system of nature.<sup>118</sup>

As Smith moves from the events of the cosmos to those of society, the theological hue of this passage shifts to a kind of mystic science. Smith attests that “[h]uman society, when we contemplate it in a certain abstract and philosophical light, appears like a great, an immense machine, whose regular and harmonious movements produce a thousand agreeable effects.”<sup>119</sup> Despite this confidence in the beneficial effects of history, Smith’s relative quietism is “haunted,” as Richard Teichgraeber describes it, by the “moral shortcomings in commercial society.”<sup>120</sup>

Haunted as he might be, and despite the fact that Smith gives substantial play to the moral failings of commercial society, we see Smith working to restore the dominance of the salutary historical narrative after every notably critical discussion. We encounter this pattern again and again in Smith’s work. The transition from savagery to civilization is not always a complete progression; at numerous points, the time of the other disturbs the temporal confidence and security of commercial society, but commercial society is consistently vindicated in direct comparison. In particular, Smith recognizes that it is in its impact on the great masses of common laborers that commercial society is at its weakest. Nonetheless, he goes to great lengths to establish that a commercial society improves the lives of common people; in the end, simple reforms will readily meliorate the weakness. Commercial society is always vindicated. Yet, as we shall see, some of Smith’s comparisons may leave open greater space for a

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<sup>118</sup>Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 36 [I,ii,3,4]. Smith’s view has been described as a kind of Christian stoicism by Ingrid A. Merikoski, “The Challenge of Material Progress: The Scottish Enlightenment and Christian Stoicism,” *The Journal of the Historical Society* II:1 (Winter 2002), pp. 60-65. Such influence did not mean that Smith uncritically incorporated stoic views. In fact, stoicism came under serious criticism in the final edition of *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. On Smith’s relationship to the Stoics, see Muller, *Adam Smith*, 96-98 and Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations*, pp. 138-140

<sup>119</sup>Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 316 [VII.iii.1.2].

<sup>120</sup>Teichgraeber, ‘*Free Trade*’, p. 128.

critical treatment of modern capitalism than he admits. The rather serious cracks in, and secret passages into, his temporal fortress are necessarily present.

If a benign God rules the world, and human society runs like a beneficial machine, then even the sinful and unnatural are parts of a grand design. The difficulty associated with the Amerindians becomes not so much that they sin against God and conscience, as was the case for many prominent thinkers of the prior two centuries, but rather how to account for their appearance within the historical machine. The problem is not what to do about the Indians in an immediate and practical sense, but how to account for them abstractly and philosophically. Smith verges on tautology here. If even folly and vice produce prosperity, perfection, and agreeable effects, can there be anything that does not somehow produce order? Are there events that not only appear external but whose difference stands in opposition to the movement of the machine? Are there any real differences or have they all been internalized and de-menaced? Verging on tautology, as we shall see, is not the same as producing a tautological system; despite our intentions, something always escapes our desire and capacity to tame.<sup>121</sup> Thus, Smith falls short of meeting the full expectations of his Stoic philosophy. His time travel highlights not only advantages held by the savages and barbarians, but also implies that the past and the future are under-specified and therefore more open-ended than suggested by Smith's explicit commitments.

Though Smith's work presumes that nations may be placed easily along a temporal hierarchy of development, the overlap of spatial and temporal boundaries disallows an easily manageable and predictable moral cartography. The simplest example is that of the Scottish Highlanders who are European spatially but can be equated with the Amerindians temporally. Lacking in division of labor, wealth and refinement,<sup>122</sup> the Highlands appear as an "ethnological hinterland"<sup>123</sup> or "sociological museum."<sup>124</sup> Though seemingly incorporated within the schema of 'conjectural history,' the 'backwardness' of the Scottish Highlands is more troubling because of its spatial and psychological closeness. Scottish universities had flourished for a century or more and

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<sup>121</sup>This is the 'real.' See footnote 116.

<sup>122</sup> Smith, "Report of 1762-3," *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, pp. 107, 146, 380; "Report Dated 1766," pp. 540-41; *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 21-2 [I, iii], 88-9 [I, viii].

<sup>123</sup> Muller, *Adam Smith*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>124</sup> Skinner, "Natural History," p. 37.

the union with England helped spur economic advancement in lowland cities to the extent that the figures of the Scottish Enlightenment would think of lowland Scotland as a commercial society. And, most important, Scottish thought likely had surpassed that of England in its importance. Nevertheless, speaking an odd English and living among a less than refined populace, the Scots could not quite shake the sense of themselves as provincial.<sup>125</sup> If the Highlanders could be equated with a savage state of mankind, they were an other painfully near.<sup>126</sup> These perhaps internal others also offered examples of the kind of generosity, martial spirit, and sense of honor that seemed eclipsed by commercial society.

The overlapping of temporal boundaries is seen most forcefully when Smith blurs the analogy that informs his own stage theory, namely, the distinction between infancy and adulthood. Despite his tendency to oppose the sentiments and understanding of the savage on the one hand, and the civilized natural or moral philosopher on the other, as we saw above, Smith, in that same essay, suggests their overlap:

A Child caresses the fruit that is agreeable to it, as it beats the stone that hurts it. The notions of a savage are not very different. The ancient Athenians, who solemnly punished the axe which had accidentally been the cause of the death of a man, erected altars, and offered sacrifices to the rainbow. 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 the reflection, that the things are not their proper objects.<sup>127</sup> (emphasis added)

We can observe in this passage a duplication of Lafitau's method of equating savages and the ancients as well as a reinforcement of the analogy to infancy. Simultaneously, however, Smith provides a moment where the sentiments of the child, the savage, and the ancient are seen to be co-present "in the breasts of the most civilized." The irrational sentiments of children and savages—hurting stones, punishing axes, erecting

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<sup>125</sup> We draw on Berry, *Social Theory*, chapter 1; Muller, *Adam Smith*, chapter 1; Broadie, *Scottish Enlightenment*, chapter 2; and Roger Emerson, "The Contexts of the Scottish Enlightenment," in Alexander Broadie, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 9-30. This equation of Highlanders and Indians has deep and long resonance for the Scots. See Arthur H. Williamson, "Scots, Indians and Empire: The Scottish Politics of Civilization 1519-1609," *Past and Present* no. 150 (Feb 1996), pp. 46-83.

<sup>126</sup> Robbie Shillam refers to this as a "psychology of backwardness." See his chapter in this book.

<sup>127</sup> Smith, "History of Astronomy," pp. 48-9 [III.2].

alters, and offering sacrifices—co-exist within even the most civilized of people. Overlaps between self and other, inside and outside space, developed and developing ages/stages intrude upon Westphalianized time. Here we have a problem that engages Smith’s energies; he seems anxious about whether such trespassing sentiments will be eradicated or smoothed by the social machine.

Despite this disclosure, Smith’s anxiety is equivocal; he claims that a refinement of manners naturally accompanies the advance of human society. More precisely, via its normal operations a commercial society should promote a balance among the passions thereby generating the calm qualities of self-command: moderation, generosity, humility, and frugality.<sup>128</sup> And yet, because he seems less than confident that the smoothing effect of the social machine will extend to all within society, Smith devotes considerable energy to making sure that the passions will indeed be balanced and that his preferred virtues will in fact emerge.

He worries, for example, about religious zealotry and political factionalism along religious lines. For societies in the lower stage of development there is little opportunity for factions to consolidate because religions are divided into hundreds and thousands of sects. In modern societies, however, the state must consider that

[t]he interested and active zeal of religious teachers can be dangerous and troublesome only where there is, either but one sect tolerated in the society, or where the whole of a larger society is divided into two or three great sects; the teachers of each acting by concert, and under regular discipline and subordination.<sup>129</sup>

To ameliorate the problems of “faction and fanaticism,” which “have always been by far the greatest corrupters,”<sup>130</sup> Smith turns to the *visible hand* of political intervention in the natural social order. He pins his hopes on public education and public entertainment. The most important intervention is the promotion of “the study of science and philosophy.” For Smith, “[s]cience is the great antidote to the poison of

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<sup>128</sup> Muller, *Adam Smith*, p. 95 and Teichgraeber, *Free Trade*, pp. 13-4. A related point is made by Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 100-13, though Hirschman exaggerates the extent to which Smith embraces ‘interest’ as the sole motivation for human beings.

<sup>129</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 314 [V.I.iii].

enthusiasm and superstition.” Where the cool and abstract light of philosophical reflection fails, which it will for many, Smith turns to a less studious remedy: “the frequency and gaiety of the publick diversions.” The state should encourage those, “who for their own interest would attempt, without scandal or indecency, to amuse and divert the people by painting and poetry, musick, dancing.”<sup>131</sup> While, by Smith’s time, the religious wars of the reformation were somewhat in the past, their effect, namely the fear of religious zeal, fanaticism, and factionalism, still seem apparent.<sup>132</sup>

Despite this moment of doubt, Smith is quick to restore civilized society to its position on the summit of human achievement. Savages and barbarians, though not without some desirable traits, lack much that we associate with humanity:

Barbarians...being obliged to smother and conceal the appearance of every passion, necessarily acquire the habits of falsehood and dissimulation. It is observed by all those who have been conversant with savage nations, whether in Asia, Africa, or America, that they are all equally impenetrable, and that, when they have a mind to conceal the truth, no examination is capable of drawing it from them...The torture itself is incapable of making them confess....The passions of the savage...are...mounted to the highest pitch of fury. Though he seldom shows any symptoms of anger, yet his vengeance, when he comes to give way to it, is always sanguinary and dreadful. The least affront drives him to despair. His countenance and discourse indeed are still sober and composed, and express nothing but the most perfect tranquility of mind: but his actions are often the most furious and violent.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 156 [III, 3, 43].

<sup>131</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 318 [V.I iii]

<sup>132</sup> Smith’s solution to the problem of unruly passions is, paradoxically, anachronistic. The idea of self-command draws on a set of virtues characteristic of a pre-commercial civic humanism. We might expect, contra Smith, that commercial society, though calling for calculation, will not necessarily inspire frugality and moderation in wants and desires. Rather, the continuing success of commercial society seems to require the expansion of wants and desires—a consumerist frenzy far from the cool prescription for self-command. Smith seems vaguely aware of this paradox. He notes that the material situation of savage society creates in its members the very set of characteristics that Smith so admires—self-denial, self command, magnanimity—claiming that these are “almost beyond the conception of Europeans.” Indeed, “the delicate sensibility required in civilized nations sometimes destroys the masculine firmness of the character” (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 205-9 [V.2.9-13]; see also Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues*, pp. 16-7 and Teichgraeber, ‘Free Trade’, pp. 136-7). It seems, then, that Smith is calling upon the virtues proper to earlier “ages” to buttress the fortress of civilized society. In formulating this point, we draw on Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 444-6. See also Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 115.

<sup>133</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 208 [V.2.11]

So ‘ignoble’ does the savage appear that we cannot but appreciate the great changes that history has wrought.

Nevertheless two issues in particular, namely the corrupting effect of specialization and the problem of poverty, demonstrate how Smith’s ambiguity may be productive for contemporary debates in political economy. First in Smith’s mind are the problems associated with specialization. In *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, we find a powerful set of passages concerning what Smith calls the “inconveniences” of the division of labor.<sup>134</sup> These concerns are largely replicated quite famously in book V of *Wealth of Nations*. The key excerpt is worth quoting at length:

In the progress of the division of labor, the employment of the far greater part of those who live by labour, that is, of the great body of the people, comes to be confined to a few very simple operations, frequently to one or two. But the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, the effects of which too are, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him, not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part of any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life. Of the great and extensive interests of his country, he is altogether incapable of judging; and unless very particular pains have been taken to render him otherwise, he is equally incapable of defending his country in war. The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind, and makes him regard with abhorrence the irregular, uncertain, and adventurous life of a soldier. It corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his

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<sup>134</sup> Smith, “Report Dated 1766,” pp. 539-41.

strength with vigor and perseverance, in any other employment than that to which he has been bred.<sup>135</sup>

Turning the common laborer into a specialist has a number of negative consequences: it makes him “stupid,” incapable of “rational conversation,” unable to “conceive any generous, noble, or tender sentiment,” and therefore inept at forming judgments concerning the “duties of private life,” unqualified to ascertain the “interests of his country,” and powerless in “defending his country in war.” In direct contrast, the absence of a division of labor in savage and barbarous societies means that: there exist “varied occupations;” inventiveness is “kept alive;” “every man is a warrior;” every man is a “statesman” and each is able to “form judgment concerning the interest of society.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, while specialization provides a material plenty unavailable to savage and barbarous societies, this advantage is “acquired at the expense of [the laborer’s] intellectual, social, and martial virtues.” The sober consequence is that, “in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the laboring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall.” It is hard to tell from these passages if Smith believes, as he asserted earlier, that the working classes are better off than savages. Indeed, so worried is Smith about the fate of the workers that he once again invokes the visible hand of the state. If the state does not provide counter-measures, warns Smith, “all the nobler parts of the human character may be, in a great measure, obliterated and extinguished in the great body of the people.”<sup>137</sup>

In stark contrast to his quietist sensibilities, Smith advocates government intervention, lest commercial society destroy the very thing it advances—namely, ennobling and civilizing wealth.<sup>138</sup> Here, savage society seems to provide a mirror reflecting the moral failings of a commercial society. However, lest we think that Smith has become a romantic, he re-asserts his dominant theme: a more limited division of labor is not an alternative for the present; savage and barbarous societies, though useful as a foil, are superceded temporally and do not offer additional insight about how we might live today. Instead, a reformed commercial society—one that combines wealth creation with a state sponsored program of character refinement—must extend itself to “the

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<sup>135</sup>Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 302-3 [V.i. iii.i].

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., pp. 303-4 [V.i.iii.ii]

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 303 [V.i.ii.ii].

greater part of men.” Smith is arguing for a commercial society, but one in which the state must act to reverse the morally degrading effects of wealth creation. How much state reform of capitalism is necessary is, of course, a question that continues to spark debate. Thus, Smith opens and sustains a tension precisely where his name is often summoned to close debate on claims associated with the Washington Consensus that free markets and free trade guarantee a ticket to a future Eden.

Beyond this gesture towards liberal reform, Smith’s treatment of poverty suggests a more radical direction. In line with his dominant theme, Smith asserts again and again that a commercial society produces greater material well being for common people than previous forms of society. Indeed, Smith sets this increased wealth of the lowest ranks as a key criterion by which to assess contemporary society:

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labour as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged.<sup>139</sup>

He promises earlier in the text that, in a “well-governed society,” the “universal opulence extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people.”<sup>140</sup> Recall, additionally, his claim that the poorest in commercial were far wealthier than savage kings. As it turns out, however, such relative comparisons are not entirely favorable to commercial society. Smith admits to the presence of “indigence” in commercial society. As he puts it: “Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many.”<sup>141</sup>

Not surprisingly, Smith, in his Stoic fashion, turns this gap into one of the major advantages of a commercial society. The relative well being of the “ordinary day-labourer” is linked to the role of law in maintaining “the rich in the possession of their wealth against the violence and rapacity of the poor, and by that means preserve that

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<sup>138</sup> See Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 119.

<sup>139</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 88 [I. viii].

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15 [I.i].

usefull inequality in the fortunes of mankind which naturally and necessarily arises from the various degrees of capacity, industry, and diligence in the different individuals.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Smith, in his parable of the “unfeeling landlord,” explains that the wealth of the landlord, though spent only on his selfish desires, employs vast numbers of people, spreading subsistence to many. Thus the “vain and insatiable desires” of the rich lead them, as if “led by an invisible hand,” to “divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements” and “without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society.”<sup>143</sup> Inequality, even where opulence and indigence stand in striking opposition, proves not the stark weakness that Smith seemed to indicate. Nonetheless, as our discussion below of the damage done by relative poverty will indicate, Smith himself provides resources for challenging this sanguine conclusion.

A deeper tension may be read from the juxtaposition of rather puzzling comments about savage society. Smith suggests that “extremities of hunger” impose on the savage a kind of “Spartan discipline.”<sup>144</sup> It is precisely this condition of scarcity that Smith believes a commercial society brings to an end. However, Smith also presents savages as possessed of the leisure to pursue music and dancing:

It seems even to be amongst the most barbarous nations that the use and practice of them is both most frequent and most universal, as among the negroes of Africa and the savage tribes of America. In civilized nations, the inferior ranks of people have very little leisure....Among savage nations, the great body of the people have frequently great intervals of leisure, and they have scarce any other amusement; they naturally, therefore, spend a great part of their time in almost the only one they have.<sup>145</sup>

This abundance of leisure for savages is quite damaging to Smith’s claim about the nature of their poverty. They cannot “spend a great part of their time” in music and

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 232 [V.i.b]

<sup>142</sup> Smith, “Report of 1762-3,” *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, p. 338 [vi.19].

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 184-5 [IV.i.10-11]. This passage represents one of Smith’s three uses of the language of the ‘invisible hand.’

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 205 [V.2.9].

<sup>145</sup> Adam Smith, “Of the Nature of that Imitation which Takes Place in What are Called the Imitative Arts,” *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, edited by W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1980), p. 187 [II.i]. See a similar passage in *Wealth of Nations*, p. 219 [V.i.i], though Smith also suggests (p. 214 [V.i.i]) that the precarious subsistence of savages leaves them little time.

dancing unless they can readily meet their minimum requirements as biological beings, a requirement that would seem to belie claims about their poverty.<sup>146</sup>

What might seem puzzling given Smith's historical narrative is perfectly consistent with the way of life of hunters and gatherers according to Marshall Sahlins.<sup>147</sup> It is precisely the presence of abundant leisure that justifies treating hunters and gatherers as "affluent." Hunters and gatherers combine a low level of needs and wants with relatively abundant means to meet those needs, leaving them abundant free time. Turning the tables on the economist quite convincingly, Sahlins concludes that scarcity, rather than being nature-given, is in fact produced by "market-industrial society."<sup>148</sup> It is market-industrial society that shrinks leisure time by expanding needs and wants beyond the capacity of the society to readily produce them. Hegel, drawing on the work of Scottish Enlightenment figures, noted similarly that the emergence of a modern market society itself promotes individual expression and self-seeking. And while that society generates wealth to support individualization and self-seeking, it also creates poverty and a subjugation of the least advantaged, such that the working classes suffer a loss of the "feeling of right, integrity and honor" that makes them part of society.<sup>149</sup>

Though we have perhaps tread into an area where Smith might claim that 'absolute,' not 'relative,' poverty is his concern, Smith's own language of "tolerably well" indicates that 'necessities and conveniences' are both involved in understanding poverty. It is also clear that he recognizes quite well the social stigma and alienation accompanying relative poverty. "The poor man," as Smith writes, "is ashamed of his poverty." This is hardly surprising since indigence produces a kind of social

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<sup>146</sup> See Levine, *Economic Studies*, Chapter 2, and Naeem Inayatullah, "Theories of Spontaneous Order."

<sup>147</sup> Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine, 1972). The relevant chapter is titled, "The Original Affluent Society."

<sup>148</sup> Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Georg Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen G. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 182-3, 187, 241-4. See also Schlomo Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), chapter 7, "The Political Economy of Modern Society." Recent versions of this set of claims can be found in Majid Rahnema, "Poverty," in Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Press, 1992), pp. 158-76, and Serge Latouche, *In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post-Development* (London: Zed Press, 1993), chapter 6, "The Standard of Living."

invisibility: “The poor man goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel.”<sup>150</sup>

If this is so, even assuming Smith’s most optimistic assumptions about a commercial society, we cannot sustain the claim that poverty is a condition distinct to savage societies. Rather, poverty is strikingly associated with, perhaps even tied to the emergence of, commercial society. Poverty cannot be assumed as an original condition for which commercial society is the antidote.

Like irrational sentiments and violent factionalism, poverty cannot be relegated to the past. Nor can our cognitive travels so readily put aside the moral resources offered by ‘superceded’ forms of society. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Smith’s dominant mode of relating to poverty (and other realities of commercial society) is either to re-locate them to the past or to dilute their potency by pointing to the advantages of the age of commerce relative to past ages. Smith’s stance seems indicative of the fact that poverty and moral corruption serve as the ‘real’ of a wealthy commercial society—the other a commercial society can neither solve, nor avoid.

Thus, in contrast to his dominant practice, we can see that there is a part of Smith that engages the ‘real’ of travel. He creates a horizon within which engaging the other of commercial society—what Cheyfitz in the opening epigram calls the *kinship economics* of the Indians, what Sahlins calls the *original affluent society* of hunters and gatherers, or what Smith himself alludes to as the *singing and dancing economy of savages*—serves as a potential learning experience for his European commercial society and those of us who remain immersed in modern capitalism.

### ***Conclusion***

Ashis Nandy notes that where political and ethical recourse to various ‘pasts’ (including those now being lived) is foreclosed, it impairs our capacity to imagine

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<sup>150</sup>Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 51 [I.iii.2.2.].

alternative “visions of the future.”<sup>151</sup> Our claim, to be clear, is not that Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment offer us nothing of value. Rather, Smith’s engagement with the Amerindians, however quaint, is a key part of the historical record theorizing capitalist society. The importance of these past sets of cognitive travels, in Quentin Skinner’s terms, is that they offer us a “repository of values we no longer endorse, of questions we no longer ask.” The challenge is to recover this moment so that we might be able “to stand back from, and perhaps even to reappraise, some of our current assumptions and beliefs.”<sup>152</sup> Combining Nandy and Skinner, if we find it difficult to travel the way of the Scots, we nevertheless can learn much from their travels. Seeing how Smith constructs a temporal fortress around commercial society may make us, as Skinner might suggest, more alert to contemporary constructions that deploy similar ethical barriers. This awareness may allow us, as Nandy recommends, to consult the experiences of an outmoded past—including the savages Smith displaces from the present—as resources in our reflections on the shape of the present and future.

Despite the temporal walls and borders Smith builds in order to protect liberal capitalism, we can also retrieve alternative moments and recessive spaces that restore the co-presence of others as a critical ethical resource. Thus, an encounter with Adam Smith requires a more careful engagement with his texts and context than is characteristic of much of contemporary political economy. Equally, an encounter with those societies that various theories relegate to dead history might require contemporary political economy to receive and absorb their criticisms.

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<sup>151</sup>Nandy, *Time Warps*, p. 5.

<sup>152</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 112.