

ENLIGHTENMENT AGAINST EMPIRE

Sankar Muthu

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After the city or town comes the world, which the philosophers identify as the third level of human society. They begin with the household, progress to the city, and come finally to the world. And the world, like a gathering of waters, is all the more full of perils by reason of its greater size. First of all, the diversity of tongues now divides man from man. . . . It is true that the Imperial City has imposed on subject nations not only her yoke but also her language, as a bond of peace and society, so that there should be no lack of interpreters but a great abundance of them. But how many great wars, what slaughter of men, what outpourings of human blood have been necessary to bring this about! Those wars are now over; but the misery of these evils has not yet come to an end.

(Augustine)

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One

Introduction: Enlightenment Political Thought and the Age of Empire

IN THE late eighteenth century, a number of prominent European political thinkers attacked imperialism, not only defending non-European peoples against the injustices of European imperial rule, as some earlier modern thinkers had done, but also challenging the idea that Europeans had any right to subjugate, colonize, and 'civilize' the rest of the world. This book is a study of this historically anomalous and understudied episode of political thinking. It is an era unique in the history of modern political thought: strikingly, virtually every prominent and influential European thinker in the three hundred years before the eighteenth century and nearly the full century after it were either agnostic toward or enthusiastically in favour of imperialism. In the context of the many philosophical and political questions raised by the emerging relationships between the European and non-European worlds, Enlightenment anti-imperialist thinkers crafted nuanced and intriguingly counter-intuitive arguments about human nature, cultural diversity, cross-cultural moral judgements, and political obligations. This study aims both to pluralize our understanding of the philosophical era known as 'the Enlightenment' and to explore a set of arguments and intellectual dispositions that reorient contemporary assumptions about the relationship between human unity and human diversity.)

Throughout this book, I use the term 'Enlightenment' as a temporal adjective; in this sense of the term, Enlightenment political theory simply refers to the political thought of the long eighteenth century (that is, the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries). As I argue in the concluding chapter, more substantive and conventional understandings of 'the Enlightenment' usually occlude more than they illuminate the writings about non-European peoples and empire by eighteenth-century political thinkers. This study, then, is neither a defence of 'the' Enlightenment nor an attack upon it, for an investigation of the anti-imperialist strand of eighteenth-century writings is meant to broaden our understanding of Enlightenment-era perspectives, rather than to redescribe 'the' Enlightenment or an overriding 'Enlightenment project' that ostensibly typified this age of philosophical thought. As with other historiographic terms of convenience, 'the Enlightenment' groups together an

✓extraordinarily diverse set of authors, texts, arguments, opinions, dispositions, assumptions, institutions, and practices. Thus, I begin this book with the presumption that we should diversify our understanding of Enlightenment thought.¹ On this understanding, rather than categorizing 'the' Enlightenment *as such* or constructing ideas of a single 'Enlightenment project' that one must defend or reject, I take Enlightenment anti-imperialist arguments, which are themselves multifaceted, to represent only some of many, often conflicting, discourses in eighteenth-century moral and political thought.

In the following chapters, I interpret the relationship among theories about the constitutive features of humanity, explanations of human diversity and historical change, and political arguments about European imperialism.² In exploring the rise of anti-imperialist arguments in Enlightenment political thought, I concentrate upon the philosophically robust and distinctive strand of such arguments made by Denis Diderot (1713–84), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). These thinkers are not usually grouped together; indeed, they could be viewed as fundamentally antithetical, as representing some of the contrasting ideal-types of eighteenth-century political thought: atheistic materialism, enlightened rationalism, and romantic nationalism. To begin with, such labels grossly distort their actual philosophies. Moreover, as I will argue, viewing these thinkers through the lens of debates about international relations that concerned them deeply, in particular those about the relationship between the European and non-European worlds, brings out the remarkable extent to which their political theories, though obviously unique to be sure, are nonetheless cut from the same cloth.³ Diderot's immense philosophical influence in this period with regard to questions of imperialism explains in part the shared intellectual disposition about the immorality of empire and the related philosophical ideas upon which this disposition often rested: theories of human nature; conceptualizations of human diversity; and the relationship between universal moral and political norms, on the one hand, and a commitment to moral incommensurability, on the other. As we will see, Diderot's anti-imperialist contributions to Abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* [*Philosophical and political history of European settlements and commerce in the two Indies*], one of the most widely read, 'underground' nonfiction works of the eighteenth century, appear to have left their mark on both Kant and Herder. Behind them all, I will argue, lie Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings, in particular the two *Discourses*, which exerted both a negative and a positive influence upon the development of this aspect of Enlightenment thought, for Diderot's, Kant's, and Herder's anti-imperialism rested crucially upon both an appropriation as well as a rejection of

particular elements of Rousseau's philosophical anthropology and political thought.

In this chapter, I elaborate the historical and philosophical distinctiveness of Enlightenment anti-imperialist political thought. I also note briefly some of the philosophical sources and legacies of Enlightenment anti-imperialism, which I examine in more detail in the concluding chapter. As I will contend, a number of the conventional distinctions that are deployed by many contemporary political theorists—for instance, between universalism and relativism, or essential and constructed identities—fail to do justice to the arguments made by Enlightenment anti-imperialists, who often treat such supposed opposites as interrelated features of the human condition. A study of Enlightenment anti-imperialism offers a richer and more accurate portrait of eighteenth-century political thought and illuminates the underappreciated philosophical interconnections between human unity and human diversity, and between moral universalism and moral incommensurability.

Enlightenment Anti-imperialism as a Historical Anomaly

Enlightenment anti-imperialist political theory has been the object of far less study than the anti-slavery writings of the same period.⁴ Some of the best contemporary scholarship on slavery details the rising tide of philosophical opinion against it, and the emergence of a humanitarian ethic that provided the concepts and languages that newly formed anti-slavery societies and activists deployed in their controversial, lengthy, and ultimately successful campaigns. In their studies about slavery, David Brion Davis and Robin Blackburn attempt to discern why an institution that is universally decried today underwent no sustained opposition from a critical mass of thinkers and political actors until the eighteenth century.⁵ The same question can plausibly be asked with regard to imperialism, for it is only in the latter half of the eighteenth century that a group of significant European political thinkers began to attack the imperial and colonial enterprise as such. To be sure, in surveying the philosophical and political debates that followed the European discovery of the New World, one encounters discussions about the hypocrisy of European imperialists,⁶ humanitarian attacks upon the practice of Amerindian slavery and other cruelties perpetrated by the conquistadors in the New World,⁷ and romanticized (though, as I argue in chapter 2, ultimately dehumanizing) accounts of noble savages in travel, literary, and philosophical texts. Before the late eighteenth century, however, those who sympathized with the plight of colonized peoples and those who launched explicit criticisms of Europeans' relations with the non-European world (including

the most morally impassioned accounts, such as Bartolomé de Las Casas' arguments against the Castilian crown in the mid-sixteenth century) generally decried the abuses of imperial power, but not the imperial mission itself. Imperial rule, however it may have been perceived and justified (inter alia, in light of religious conversion, the civilizing mission of imperialism, economic and other commercial benefits, or the more rational use of otherwise supposedly wasted natural resources), was widely endorsed even by the most zealous *critics* of the violence perpetrated by Europeans in the New World.

* Truly anti-imperialist political philosophy emerges in the late eighteenth century among a broad array of thinkers from different intellectual and national contexts. A significant group of European political thinkers rejected imperialism outright as unworkable, dangerous, or immoral—for economic reasons of free trade, as a result of principles of self-determination or cultural integrity, due to concerns about the effects of imperial politics upon domestic political institutions and practices, or out of contempt over the ironic spectacle of ostensibly civilized nations engaging in despotism, corruption, and lawlessness abroad. In confronting the steadily expanding commercial and political power of European states and imperial trading companies over the non-European world, the diverse group of thinkers who assailed the injustices and countered the dominant justifications of European imperialism include Jeremy Bentham, Condorcet, Diderot, Herder, Kant, and Adam Smith.⁸ Moreover, such denunciations of what Herder liked to call "the grand European sponging enterprise" were complemented by more specific attacks upon European imperial or quasi-imperial activities in particular regions. Along these lines, the most notable efforts are Edmund Burke's legislative attempts to curtail and to regulate the activities of the East India Company and his lengthy, zealous prosecution of the impeachment of Warren Hastings, a senior East India Company official and the Governor-General of Bengal.⁹ Burke argued that the British had failed to respect the sovereignty of local Indian powers, and had accordingly enriched themselves through illegal and unjust means, contributing not one iota, in his view, to the well-being of Indians themselves. In making such arguments, Burke was not a lone voice in the wilderness; rather, he raised concerns that were shared by a number of his contemporaries, a fact that has been neglected even by incisive scholars who have studied the connections between modern political theory and empire.¹⁰ Of course, such anti-imperialist political thinkers fought an uphill battle, for defences of European imperial rule were still prevalent; the Enlightenment era is unique not because of the absence of imperialist arguments, but rather due to the presence of spirited attacks upon the foundations of empire.

Enlightenment anti-imperialism is understudied most likely because of

its failure to take root both in the broader political cultures in which it was presented and in the intellectual writings of later thinkers, including those who in some sense saw themselves as heirs to the tradition of progressive thinking of the eighteenth century. Here the contrast with anti-slavery writings is especially stark. Anti-slavery writings of the eighteenth century, from Montesquieu onward, provided much of the political language and principles that were used by anti-slavery activists and by newly formed anti-slavery societies; accordingly, the immorality of slavery became a common (though, of course, by no means a universal) presumption of nineteenth-century European social and political thought. Eigh-
teenth-century anti-imperialist arguments, on the other hand, almost
always went unheeded, not only by political, religious, and commercial
authorities (as one would expect), but also by later political thinkers, including some of the most progressive social and political reformers of the nineteenth century. Those who crusaded against the fraud and oppression of imperial rule and the activities of commercial trading companies were generally ridiculed and ultimately defeated in their efforts. Burke's efforts in the Hastings trial are particularly suggestive of the failed political results of anti-imperialist crusades; Hastings was found innocent, and Burke's refusal to compromise on the India issue damaged his standing not only with his parliamentary colleagues, but also with the press and the general populace.¹¹ And although the French Revolution gave an impetus to eradicating slavery, revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, as Benjamin Constant noted, was firmly committed to a form of imperialism, one of conquest within Europe, in order to spread the ideals and institutions of the revolution.¹² Strikingly, with regard to intellectual opinion, anti-imperialist sentiments largely fell by the wayside as the eighteenth century came to a close. The anti-imperialist writings of the latter half of the eighteenth century failed to rally later thinkers to the cause of exposing imperialist injustices, defending non-European peoples against imperial rule, and attacking the standard rationales for empire. None of the most significant anti-imperialist thinkers of the eighteenth century can be matched with any nineteenth-century anti-imperialist thinker of a comparable stature. By the mid-nineteenth century, anti-
imperialist political thinking was virtually absent from Western European
intellectual debates, surfacing only rarely by way of philosophically ob-
scure and politically marginal figures.¹³ Indeed, the major European political theorists of the immediate post-Enlightenment period either were ambivalent about European imperialism or were quite often explicitly in favour of it.

Thus, while imperialist arguments surface frequently in eighteenth-century European political debates, this period is anomalous in the history of modern political philosophy in that it includes a significant anti-

imperialist strand, one moreover that includes not simply marginal figures, but some of the most prominent and innovative thinkers of the age. In this respect, the nineteenth-century European political and philosophical discourse on empire marked a return to the frequently held imperialist sentiments of pre-Enlightenment political thought. While the dominance of languages of race and nation in the nineteenth century was new, the virtual consensus about the necessity and justice of imperialism among European political thinkers recalls the pre-Enlightenment discourse on empire. It is perhaps by reading popular nineteenth-century political views of progress, nationality, and empire back into the eighteenth century that 'the Enlightenment' as a whole has been characterized as a project that ultimately attempted to efface or marginalize difference, a characterization that has hidden from view the anti-imperialist strand of Enlightenment-era political thought.

Synopsis

The following chapters proceed chronologically, and they are also linked biographically. Rousseau and Diderot were, for a time, friends who influenced one another's political writings, in particular the texts under study in this book. As Kant himself famously attested, his philosophical commitments and intellectual disposition were deeply shaped by Rousseau's writings. In addition, I will argue that Diderot's most radical political and historical writings appear to have informed Kant's and Herder's anti-imperialism. As is well known, Herder studied under Kant at Königsberg, and held him in great admiration even after Kant had written critical book reviews of the first two installments of Herder's masterpiece, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [*Ideas Toward a Philosophy of History of Humankind*]. Approaching some of the philosophically most incisive and innovative currents of eighteenth-century political thought on human diversity and European imperialism reveals the overlapping and intersecting character of such writings and debates. The rapidly proliferating literature about human unity and diversity in the Enlightenment era reflects a cross-fertilization of concepts, arguments, and perspectives from diverse intellectual contexts.¹⁴ Whatever the conclusions and assessments that one draws from their diverse writings, it is clear that many social and political reformers of the eighteenth century saw their efforts as part of a broad, though also a diffuse and contentious, multinational effort. Such a 'Republic of Letters', to use a phrase that was employed often in the eighteenth century, aimed to identify and to check oppression not only within Europe, but often also in light of what a number of eighteenth-century thinkers viewed as Europe's tyranny over

other continents. Hence, the specific grouping of thinkers in this book illuminates both a cohesive set of arguments about international justice and cultural pluralism as well as a set of influences, both negative and positive, across national and ideological lines.

The rise of anti-imperialist political theory in the late eighteenth century depended upon far more than a universal ethic that ascribed value or dignity to every human being. In addition to the fact that the indigenous inhabitants of the New World had been considered by many Europeans, from the fifteenth century onward, to be subhuman, it is crucial to note that even when their humanity was accepted, they failed to win recognition as free and self-governing peoples. Within the modern natural right and social contractarian traditions, Amerindians in particular were almost always deployed as empirical examples of pure humans, that is, as beings who inhabit a state of nature and who thus exhibit purely natural qualities, such as natural sentiments or an unmediated knowledge of natural laws and rights. Ironically, however, for reasons that are philosophically revealing and that I will later discuss, the profoundly influential natural right theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, such as Grotius and Vattel, as well as the social critics who celebrated Amerindians as noble savages, categorized Amerindians as the most purely human of humans, while also according them the weakest possible (and sometimes even a nonexistent) moral status in the face of European imperial power. The idea of what it meant fundamentally to be human went through a transformation before an anti-imperialist political theory could emerge. Human nature had sometimes been viewed as a stable category, one that is unchanging and that serves as a foundational essence upon which more ephemeral, particular features of human life (mores, institutions, social practices) are layered. This account came to be replaced—at times, no doubt, unwittingly, but largely in conscious opposition to naturalistic and unitary understandings of human nature—by the view that humanity is marked fundamentally by cultural difference. This is what I will call the view of *humanity as cultural agency*, which in varying ways animates the thinking of Diderot, Kant, and Herder.

By using the term 'cultural agency', I am not suggesting that Enlightenment anti-imperialists believed that there are different cultures, that non-Europeans are members of distinct cultures, and that such cultures are of worth equal to that of all other cultures. Enlightenment anti-imperialism is not 'multiculturalist' in this conventional (and contemporary) sense because eighteenth-century thinkers did not write of culture in the plural. This was a development that would occur in European writings of the nineteenth century, when 'cultures' would begin to signify (sometimes only certain) peoples. The Enlightenment anti-imperialists under study in this book, by contrast, believed that human beings are funda-

mentally cultural creatures, that is, they possess and exercise, simply by virtue of being human, a range of rational, emotive, aesthetic, and imaginative capacities that create, sustain, and transform diverse practices and institutions over time. The fact that humans are cultural agents, according to these writers, underlies the diverse mores, practices, beliefs, and institutions of different peoples. My use of the term 'cultural' is only somewhat anachronistic, since the philosophical use of the term 'culture' itself, in particular to denote some aspect of the differences among humans, emerges in a number of late eighteenth-century German writings. *Kultur*, like the English 'culture', derives from the Latin *cultura*, which referred to cultivation generally and often to agricultural practices, a fact that (as we will see) is by no means unimportant for appreciating some imperial understandings of cultural development. Even in its earliest uses, 'culture' was a highly ambiguous term, for it could refer to a particular social or collective lifestyle (usually sedentary and agricultural) or to an aesthetic sensibility that was posited either as an ideal or as a reality that had been achieved by only some peoples or individuals.¹⁵ It could also, however, connote the constitutive features of humankind; in this book, I use the term 'cultural agency' in this most expansive sense, in order to indicate those qualities that humans have in common and that also account for many of their differences. The concept of 'cultural agency', then, signifies how Enlightenment anti-imperialists anthropologically employed the term 'culture' or its near equivalents and analogues. These include the French *mœurs*, which both Rousseau and Diderot employ in the context of theorizing human diversity, and the language of 'sociability', under which many eighteenth-century thinkers discussed the varied capacities, activities, and values that today would often be categorized by the word 'culture' and its variants.

Diderot, Kant, and Herder were all profoundly influenced by Rousseau's account of human history and social life, of his conception of humans as free, self-making creatures, whose very freedom creates and perpetuates diverse psychological needs, social inequalities, and political constraints, while also serving potentially as a source for a less unjust society. But they argued, contra Rousseau, that humans are constitutively social and diverse creatures, that they are cultural agents. Thus, they appropriated Rousseau's social criticism and much of his accompanying account of freedom, but jettisoned his attack on the idea of natural sociability. Diderot, Kant, and Herder all elaborated the view that, to use Edmund Burke's concise formulation, "art is Man's nature".¹⁶ Having appreciated Rousseau's searing indictment of European mores, social institutions, political power, and economic inequality, they were loathe to recommend European societies as models for other peoples. But they were also unwilling to classify any people or set of peoples as virtually

natural, as free from artifice. For them, the art (or culture) that constitutes human practices, beliefs, and institutions is necessarily diverse and also, importantly, in many respects, incommensurable. Consequently, non-Europeans, including nomadic peoples who were often viewed as exotically uncultivated and purely natural, were members of societies that were artful, or cultural; they were simply artful in a different manner, one that could not be judged as intrinsically superior or inferior. At certain moments of Enlightenment thought, as cultural differences came to be viewed as the results produced by interactions of human freedom and reason with diverse environments—rather than as pathological aberrations from a single true way of life as represented by some set of European mores, practices, and institutions—Europeans' brutal treatment of foreign peoples evoked an outpouring of moral indignation and protest. Intriguingly, as the particularity and partial incommensurability of human lives came to the fore in a number of late eighteenth-century political writings, the moral universalism that occupied a formal, but ultimately hollow, position in earlier political theories became more genuinely inclusive.

In the following chapters, I examine the core philosophical assumptions and arguments that underlie the anti-imperialist political theories of Diderot, Kant, and Herder. In chapter 2, I examine a series of French writings that constitute what in retrospect can be identified as a tradition of noble savage thinking, which exerted an enormous influence upon many eighteenth-century thinkers, including Diderot. Focusing principally upon understandings of 'natural men' in Montaigne, Lahontan, and Rousseau, I then turn toward Diderot's appropriation and subversion of noble savagery in his account of Tahitian society in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*. Diderot's philosophic dialogue upsets the standard assumptions of noble savagery—most notably, the presumption of the existence and philosophical usefulness of 'natural' humans, who were thought to be free, or nearly free, of artifice or culture. Diderot's subversion of noble savagery and his attendant account of humanity as fundamentally cultural would help to ground many aspects of his anti-imperialist political thought. In chapter 3, I analyze Diderot's myriad arguments against empire and conquest in his influential contributions to Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*, many of which reemerge in later Enlightenment attacks upon empire. In chapter 4, I examine Kant's understanding of 'humanity' in order to elucidate a key and often misunderstood concept of his political philosophy that has profound consequences for his writings on international and cosmopolitan justice. In Kant's view, humans were not at bottom metaphysical essences from whom one could abstract all social and cultural attachments, but rather they were fundamentally cultural agents. I offer an account of the understandings of reason and

freedom that he associated with 'humanity' and I show how this influenced his views of history and society. In chapter 5, I interpret Kant's account of plural values in order to examine how he defends an anti-paternalistic conception of human development. I then turn to his understanding of human diversity and his attacks upon European imperialism in light of his account of humanity and ideal of cosmopolitan justice. In chapter 6, I provide an interpretation of Herder's political thought that emphasizes both its distinctiveness and its deep similarities to Diderot's and Kant's anti-imperialist political philosophies. Underlying Herder's account of pluralism and independent nationalities, I contend, is a nuanced and complex understanding of 'humanity' (*Humanität*) that is at once anthropological, moral, and political. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I present the key philosophical sources and legacies of the strand of Enlightenment anti-imperialism under study in this book. I argue that Diderot's, Kant's, and Herder's incisive and hitherto underappreciated arguments against empire provide us with an opportunity to rethink prevalent assumptions about our understandings of 'the' Enlightenment and about the relationship between human unity and diversity, and between universal moral concepts and pluralistic ethical commitments. Common understandings of 'Enlightenment universalism' fail to come to terms with the complicated and intriguing manner in which Diderot, Kant, and Herder interweave commitments to moral universalism and moral incommensurability, to humanity and cultural difference. Such universal and particular categories in their political philosophies not only coexist, but deeply inform one another. Thus, as I will show, their arguments against empire treat the affirmation of a wide plurality of individual and collective ways of life and the dignity of a universal, shared humanity as fundamentally intertwined ethical and political commitments.

Two

Toward a Subversion of Noble Savagery: From Natural Humans to Cultural Humans

THE DEVELOPMENT of anti-imperialist political thought in the late eighteenth century is attributable only partly to the development of the natural rights doctrine or, indeed, to any other version of the idea that humans as such deserve moral respect. It is a much noted feature of modern political theory that proponents of egalitarian doctrines of equal rights and liberty regularly flouted such norms when reflecting upon the social and political status of women, nonpropertied males, and those who were deemed foreign or exotic, among others. At times, this reflected a gross inconsistency between *prima facie* humanistic norms and self-serving or prejudicial arguments that sought to exclude certain categories of humans from having full social, legal, and political standing. This seeming paradox, however, could also follow from the specific characterization of universal principles themselves; as I will argue in this chapter, even on the assumption that non-Europeans or New World peoples were human, particular understandings of humanity were less likely (and, conversely, other understandings were more likely) to undergird political arguments in favour of the rights and liberties of non-European peoples. This tension between moral universalism and the politics of exclusion was overcome to a certain extent by anti-imperialist thinkers who framed the relationship between human nature and cultural pluralism differently from previous thinkers (and from some of their contemporaries); their view that imperial rule was manifestly unjust, and their inclination to defend a variety of non-European peoples against imperial policies and institutions, in part developed out of an understanding of humanity as cultural agency, a view that was distinct from that of a number of their most obvious forebears.

In this chapter, I investigate the philosophical and political assumptions and arguments that made this outlook possible in part by contrasting this view, as we find it in Diderot's understanding of Tahitian society, from the influential image of New World peoples as 'noble savages'.¹ This idealized conception of what were usually taken to be nomadic peoples sought to counter the most pejorative characterizations of foreign peoples as barbaric and fundamentally inferior. As David Brion Davis has plausibly speculated, the celebration of so-called primitives may well have "partially weaken[ed] Europe's arrogant ethnocentrism and create[d] at

least a momentary ambivalence about the human costs of modern civilization".² Yet, ultimately, as much as this may have helped to elicit the intellectual groundwork for the humanitarianism of anti-slavery thinking, a *rejection* of noble savagery was necessary before a more meaningful and substantive moral commiseration with non-Europeans could develop, in particular one that could help to engender an anti-imperialist political philosophy. As I will argue, the peculiar understanding of the relationship between human nature and culture in noble savage writings yielded a virtually dehumanizing exoticism, despite the best intentions of the thinkers who chose to celebrate what they saw as the 'purely natural' specimens of humanity in the New World. In order to understand how Diderot drew upon the mode of social criticism distinctive to the tradition of noble savagery, while also ultimately subverting its core presumptions about the character of New World peoples and indeed of humanity itself, we must first examine the exponents of this tradition who most shaped the relevant aspects of his intellectual milieu.

The interpretations of New World peoples inherited by eighteenth-century thinkers vary widely and are not reducible to any one doctrine, although theories that were based upon the purported genetic, behavioural, or cultural inferiority of Amerindians were by far the most influential and dominant at the outset of the century, by which time European colonial and imperial activities were well entrenched and steadily expanding. Given its complicated influence upon the group of anti-imperialist thinkers discussed in later chapters, I focus here largely upon the heterodox noble savage literature that, in contrast, celebrated New World peoples as intrinsically pacific and benevolent natural beings, free from the corruption not only of modern life but indeed of culture itself. The sixteenth-century essayist Michel de Montaigne plays a central role in the philosophical history of theorizing Amerindians, although he both deploys the idea of a noble savage and at times undermines it. While in this respect his writings foreshadow Diderot's views, they also reveal the deep philosophical tensions of noble savage theory, which Montaigne never comprehensively or directly explored. These tensions are even more glaring, and consequently the exoticism inherent in noble savagery is thrown into even sharper relief, in the writings of Baron Lahontan. At the turn of the eighteenth century, Lahontan, a French imperial officer who lived in Quebec and studied the Huron, Algonquin, and Iroquois peoples, was among the most influential noble savage theorists in the French tradition. Like other noble savage accounts, Lahontan's writings offer an amalgam of anthropological interpretations and radical social and political criticism. Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* is heavily indebted to Lahontan and Montaigne and to this tradition of social criticism in general, which highlighted and elaborated idealized representations of Amerindians from

Lahontan

New World ethnography. As with previous attacks on European social practices and political institutions that used the Amerindian as a pure and natural foil, European imperialism itself was never the sustained object of Rousseau's trenchant criticism. Paradoxically, as I argue later, identifying indigenous Americans as purely human resulted ultimately in their dehumanization, making the possibility of any meaningful commiseration with their oppression remote. Nonetheless, the subtlety and power of Rousseau's account of humans as self-making (and self-enslaving) agents shaped the political thought of Diderot, in addition to the writings of Kant and Herder. When the critical features of Rousseau's account of freedom and history were conjoined to a philosophical anthropology that, contra Rousseau, viewed social and cultural differentiation as central to the human condition, it became more likely that at least some thinkers would engage in sustained intellectual assaults upon European state power not only in a domestic or intra-European setting, but also as it was exercised in imperialist ventures abroad. Thus, Rousseau looms over the latter half of the eighteenth century as an ambiguous figure who both impedes and enables the development of anti-imperialist political thought. To understand this better, however, and to appreciate the innovation of thinkers such as Diderot, Kant, and Herder, it is crucial to begin with the accounts of noble savagery that most informed Rousseau's (and through Rousseau, Diderot's) understanding of New World peoples.

The accounts of many of the earliest encounters between Europeans and Amerindians contain reactions toward New World peoples that implied, or more directly offered, praise for what was perceived to be their 'natural' manner of living. Idealized portrayals of Amerindians in these writings reflect the varied, and at times conflicting, fables about faraway lands and peoples across the seas that shaped the expectations of the late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century explorers, missionaries, and soldiers who travelled to the Americas. Imagined visions of distant lands occupied by magical creatures, instantiations of mythological 'wild men', or members of a golden age who were celebrated in song and in lyrical poetry no doubt helped to occasion moments of what can be described in hindsight as noble savagery.³ To the extent that early accounts contained any positive assessments of Amerindians, they typically offered only fleeting moments of adulation of Amerindians' rusticity, which could then turn rapidly to outright disgust at what appeared to explorers and settlers as manifestly backward and barbaric appearances and behaviour. Still, these occasional nonpejorative expressions of wonder often became widely circulated and redescribed, eventually forming a vivid image of the Amerindian that served many rhetorical purposes for imperial administrators, church officials, theologians, social critics, and the humanist literati. One of the origins of noble savage sentiments, for instance, can be found in

missionaries' writings that lauded Amerindians' simple nobility and reasonableness both in an effort to persuade European political authorities that they could be converted and to censure sinful behaviour within modern European societies.⁴ More sustained noble savage accounts, however, broadly attacked Europe's moral standing—and that of all civilizations—rather than supporting the more conventional social and political aims that inspired many of the isolated fragments of wonder and praise in the earliest travel literature and theological commentaries. The distinction between nature and artifice, which plays such a central role in Montaigne's influential essay, "Des Cannibales" ["Of Cannibals"] (1578–80), was crucial to such modes of radical social criticism.

Noble Savagery in Montaigne's "Of Cannibals"

One especially significant instance of the proliferation of noble savagery can be traced to Amerigo Vespucci's *Mundus Novus* (1503), a letter that became one of the most popular essays on the New World in the sixteenth century.

They have no cloth of wool, linen, or cotton, since they need none. Nor have they private property, but own everything in common: they live together without a king and without authorities, each man his own master. They take as many wives as they wish, and son may couple with mother, brother with sister, cousin with cousin, and in general men with women as they chance to meet. They dissolve marriage as often as they please, observing no order in any of these matters. Moreover, they have no temple and no religion, nor do they worship idols. What more can I say? They live according to nature, and might be called Epicureans rather than Stoics. There are no merchants among them, nor is there any commerce. The peoples make war among themselves without art or order.⁵

The lack of "art or order" among beings who live simply according to nature is a trope that emerges in nearly every idealized conception of Amerindian life, although the specific manner in which such "natural" lifestyles are presented and explained differ from thinker to thinker. A key philosophical assumption of such portrayals is that a human life *could* be simply natural (or very nearly so), free from the 'artificial', regular social practices and constructed institutions that shape human expectations and form the horizon of possibilities—free, that is, from what would now most often be described as 'culture'. Montaigne paraphrased Amerigo's celebrated description, but set it in the context of a more extensive discourse about the corruption of European societies and the superior excellence of nature's treasures, which included for him most of the indige-

nous inhabitants of the New World who had hardly strayed from their "original naturalness" (153).⁶

Montaigne's essay is often interpreted as an ingenious attempt at complicating the very idea of savagery, for he directly challenges the view that Amerindians are savage in any pejorative sense.⁷ A proper understanding of the term *sauvage*, in his view, shows that Europeans who have altered themselves and their environments are in fact savagely artificial, rather than naturally pure. As Montaigne argues,

Those people [Amerindians] are wild [*sauvage*], just as we call wild [*sauvage*] the fruits that Nature has produced by herself and in her normal course; whereas really it is those that we have changed artificially and led astray from the common order, that we should rather call wild [*sauvage*]. The former retain alive and vigorous their genuine, their most useful and natural, virtues and properties, which we have debased in the latter in adapting them to gratify our corrupted taste. (152)

Yet, while this challenges the moral superiority associated with cultivation or civilization (though he himself does not use the latter term in this context), his analysis of the term "savage" serves only to replicate antecedent understandings of Amerindians as noble savages. Amerindians are savage, Montaigne argues, not in the sense that they are inferior, but only in the sense that they are natural, closer to what human beings are like in a pure, undeveloped state, and thus without the largely corrupting layers of artificiality that constitute modern humans. This is, of course, what a number of previous and seemingly nonpejorative descriptions of Amerindians had asserted. Montaigne makes the simple naturalness of Amerindians explicit when he concludes that "[t]hese nations, then, seem to me barbarous only in this sense, that they have been fashioned very little by the human mind, and are still very close to their original naturalness." (153) It is precisely to underscore this point that Montaigne paraphrases Amerigo's celebrated description of Amerindian life. Montaigne declares,

This is a nation, I should say to Plato, in which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name for a magistrate or for political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupations but leisure ones, no care for any but common kinship, no clothes, no agriculture, no metal or use of wine or wheat. (153)

By way of John Florio's English translation of "Des Cannibales", this passage would emerge yet again, and the attendant understanding of Amerindians as pure, undeveloped natural humans would be further popularized through yet another literary form in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.⁸

The initial amazement that New World peoples led seemingly pristine lives developed over time into a tradition that understood Amerindians according to recurring, naturalistic themes, albeit with minor (and sometimes instructive) variations. Montaigne's effort at unravelling the meanings and implications of a 'savage' existence, one that could in many respects be celebrated over and against European ways of life, rests principally upon an examination of what specifically constituted a 'natural' life. Montaigne does not systematically study this question, but his characteristically subtle and meandering thoughts on the topic outline the range of meanings of a 'natural' existence that many later thinkers would draw together into theories about human nature and the origins of human societies.

For Montaigne, a natural life consists of the most simple physical and psychological needs. "They [the Amerindians] are still in that happy state of desiring only as much as their natural needs demand; anything beyond this is superfluous to them." (156) On this view, Amerindians are not corrupted by an attachment to material goods (or, even worse, by a fondness for luxury), as Montaigne suggests in his discussion of wars among Amerindian nations. The wars that New World peoples fight among each other are motivated not by base material concerns but by an elevated sense of courage; while this might not excuse them for engaging in the horrors of war, it nevertheless offers a sharp contrast, he implies, to the self-interested motives that appear to lie behind the European conquest of the Americas.

Their warfare is wholly noble and generous, and as excusable and beautiful as this human disease can be; its only basis among them is their rivalry in valour. They are not fighting for the conquest of new lands, for they still enjoy that natural abundance that provides them without toil and trouble with all necessary things in such profusion that they have no wish to enlarge their boundaries. (156)

Montaigne contrasts what is savage or natural and what is artificial and conventional not only at an individual but concomitantly at a social level, for the lack of superfluous personal desires helps to maintain a relatively egalitarian society. He contends that Amerindians appear to live in entirely (or largely) communal societies that tend to shun private property and that distribute all (or nearly all) goods in common.

They generally call those of the same age, brothers; those who are younger, children; and the old men are fathers to all the others. These leave to their heirs in common the full possession of their property, without division or any other title at all than just the one that Nature gives to her creatures in bringing them into the world.' (156)

The near absence among New World peoples of what were taken to be artificial hierarchies and inequalities, in particular those of political authority, would be asserted by virtually all of the foremost social contract thinkers in the European tradition, from Grotius and Hobbes to Locke and Pufendorf (though not, as we shall see, by Kant), for this supposed anthropological fact about Amerindians buttressed the philosophical claim that all humans are naturally equal and that political power is thoroughly artificial and constructed. As with later thinkers who would deploy the image of noble savagery, Montaigne connects these two ideas of simple desires and egalitarianism with a third: the moral health of a non-hierarchical and simple life engenders physical health. Drawing his information, we are told, from a European friend who lived for a time in Brazil, Montaigne contends that "it is rare to see a sick man there" (153). Conversely, as we will see with Lahontan and later Rousseau, Europeans' diseases are said to result most often from either their luxury or their poverty, both of which rest upon artificial desires and social, legal, and political inequalities that are minimal in the New World.

What animates the behaviour of savage peoples, given that they purportedly lack culture? The concepts that best address this aspect of noble savagery in Montaigne can be derived from the schema that he borrows from Plato to defend the idea that what is "natural" is often superior, more perfect (or less imperfect), and more praiseworthy than what is artificially created: "All things, says Plato, are produced by nature, by fortune, or by art; the greatest and most beautiful by one or the other of the first two, the least and most imperfect by the last." (153) As we have seen, for Montaigne, New World peoples—with the exception of the Mexica and Inca nations that he discusses toward the end of a later essay, "Des Coches" ["Of Coaches"] (1585–88)—are altered by hardly any cultural artifice. This nearly acultural understanding of New World peoples leaves the work of the creation and maintenance of these societies largely to fortune and nature. The role of climate, a key category in the analysis of human diversity not only in Montaigne's time but through the Enlightenment period, was central to his understanding of the role of fortune in helping to bring about and to maintain savage societies. New World peoples were blessed by a favourable climate and an abundance of natural resources that afforded sustenance without the need of complex social organizations and intensive industry, "without toil and trouble" (156). "[T]hey live in a country", Montaigne explains, "with a very pleasant and temperate climate. . . . They have a great abundance of fish and flesh . . . and they eat them with no other artifice than cooking." (153) But the primary ordering principle, or source, of such savage lives is nature itself. "The laws of nature still rule them, very little corrupted by ours" (153). For most, perhaps even all, noble savage accounts, savagery

is largely a function of naturalness, which is generally seen as the antithesis of artificiality and of culture, that is, of any of the modes of thinking, acting, imagining, and creating that are at all conventional, that vary over time and place, and are performed differently by various peoples and even by different individuals.

If New World peoples are 'natural' and 'savage', there remains the difficult question of how such peoples exercise their rationality and whether their rationality generates and revises practices and institutions through the use of reason, memory, imagination, and other creative faculties. No proponent of noble savagery as a method of understanding the peoples of the New World doubted their capacity to foster such cultural agency in the future—if they became cultivated, for instance, by Europeans who would introduce supposedly artificial ways of life to them. In their allegedly natural condition, however, before what proponents of noble savagery would consider largely corrupting foreign conventional practices and institutions were introduced to them, a savage or natural life is driven either by natural instincts that mechanically motivate individuals and even whole societies, or by the innate knowledge and virtually automatic observance of natural laws. Many noble savage accounts moved back and forth, however inconsistently, between the two, with Amerindians and at times other New World peoples leading 'natural' lives sometimes by instinct and other times by rationally following the dictates of natural law. While the latter option would appear to partake of some sense of active rationality, noble savage accounts rarely attribute to New World peoples the act of choice or agency to follow or not to follow such laws. Indeed, it seems at times that such accounts do not even describe them as consciously following such laws or principles, or if so then only because a life oriented toward pleasure corresponds to them. It is telling that Amerigo notes that Amerindians are natural in the manner of Epicureans, rather than Stoics, for this implies that their natural lifestyle derives from following their most basic desires in order to meet their unartificial needs and thus to engage in healthy pleasures, rather than leading such lives from a more sober, self-disciplined, reasoned, or Stoic assessment of the superiority of a rustic way of life.¹⁰ Montaigne writes that natural laws rule Amerindians, hence producing a "happy state of man" that "surpasses . . . all the pictures in which poets have idealized the golden age", rather than describing Amerindians themselves as cognizing, understanding, and applying natural laws to their specific conditions (153). This is the manner in which nearly all noble savage accounts tend to reduce peoples to sets of hard-wired creatures who follow their most basic (and presumably naturally good) physiological drives or who instinctively put into practice the laws of nature, for such behaviour most closely conforms to the key claim of noble savage narratives: that a non-

artificial, or acultural, life empirically exists. Montaigne himself notes that the greatest lawgivers, such as Lycurgus and Plato, would be incredulous that such societies in the New World could exist with virtually no consciously created and maintained order: "They could not imagine a naturalness so pure and simple as we see by experience; nor could they believe that our society [i.e., the one that we Europeans witness in the New World] could be maintained with so little artifice and human solder." (153)

This understanding of New World peoples at times creates tensions within noble savage accounts, for one of the central critical claims of these writings is that the prevalent idea that such peoples are inferior or barbaric is wrongheaded. Yet, in order to make this charge and hence to humanize these peoples, proponents of noble savage understandings would laud not only the naturalness but also on occasion the mental acuity and ingeniousness of such peoples. Thus Montaigne feels compelled to contest the view that

all this [Amerindian behaviour] is done through a simple and servile bondage to usage and through the pressure of the authority of their ancient customs, without reasoning or judgement, and because their minds are so stupid that they cannot take any other course. . . ." (158)

To prove that Amerindians are not simply creatures of custom (note that he does not, of course, aim to challenge the view that they are largely creatures of *nature*), Montaigne cites two examples of "their capacity": a stirring song composed by an Amerindian prisoner of war in order to taunt his captors, and a love song, both of which demonstrate the lack of barbarity in Amerindians' character. Yet these stray examples of aesthetic creativity do not amount to a defence of the idea that New World societies are maintained first and foremost by creative powers, for this would undercut the naturalness that is integral to the idea of a praiseworthy savage. To be sure, Montaigne makes several claims about various kinds of creativity and excellence in "Of Coaches", but with regard to the Mexica and Inca—that is, with reference to sedentary, agriculturally based, city-dwelling peoples, those who more easily fit the prevalent understandings of what constituted 'civilized' society. From the late fifteenth century onward, in European ethnographic writings and other texts that drew upon them or from direct experience in the New World, the less complex societies of hunters, gatherers, fishermen, and pastoralists were almost always the referents for either the most depraved and barbaric or, in the hands of noble savage theorists, the most natural and praiseworthy peoples; these are the peoples Montaigne discusses in "Of Cannibals" and he presents them there almost without exception as unartificial, naturally driven humans. There is no doubt that on occasion Mon-

taigne acknowledged, in effect, that the simplest peoples could also manifest a kind of cultural agency, but, given the predominant assertion of the cannibals essay, that "these peoples are fashioned very little by the human mind" (153), this thicker view of Amerindian life emerges as a curious and somewhat inconsistent footnote to the more central theme of the "naturalness" of New World societies. The resulting paradox of an image of purely natural humans who lack all artifice, yet who also appear impressively at times to practise certain arts lies unresolved and undertheorized in "Of Cannibals", as it is in later thinkers of the noble savage tradition. As we will see, this paradox takes shape in Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, since he presents New World peoples there both to flesh out the image of a pure state of nature and to present empirical examples of the middle (post-natural, but precivilized) stage of human development. The manner in which Enlightenment thinkers responded, often tacitly, to this paradox shaped their theories of the relationship between human nature and culture, and led in some cases to the reconceptualization of noble savage arguments and assumptions; in the case of Diderot, it would even lead to what amounted to a rejection of the concept of noble savagery.

Paradoxes of this kind were usually not explicitly taken up by noble savage thinkers because the primary purpose of such accounts was not to produce an accurate ethnography (although, to be sure, the rhetorical power of these writings did much to shape Europeans' attitudes about actual New World peoples), but to foster social criticism. First and foremost, the concept of the noble savage was a critical device that could serve the interests of thinkers who sought to challenge a variety of orthodox doctrines. Two central normative claims run through most noble savage writings: first, that one should be wary of judging others simply by one's own, possibly parochial, standards and, second, that a sympathetic analysis of the 'natural' peoples of the New World could place into particularly sharp relief the deep injustices of 'artificial' European societies.

These critical impulses find their expression most clearly in Montaigne's response to the view that Amerindians are barbaric.

[T]here is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in. (152)

The plurality of perspectives from which one can make moral judgements and the resultant appeals to tolerance and against narrow dogmatism are among the best known features of Montaigne's thinking, but it is the controversy regarding the barbarity of cannibalism in the New World that afforded him with an especially propitious opportunity to develop the

most distinctive features of his moral thought. Despite the thoroughgoing scepticism of his most sustained attacks upon transcendent notions of truth and knowledge, in particular in the "The Apology for Raymond Seybond" (originally written 1575-76; revised 1578-80), Montaigne's ultimate object of scorn in most of his essays is self-serving, intellectual dogmatism and the prejudices that flow from it, and not the very idea of cross-cultural standards of judgement. Indeed, as he notes above, it only "seems" as if we have no other standard of truth than our own customs, and at the outset of the cannibals essay he intones that "we should beware of clinging to vulgar opinions, and judge things by reason's way, not by popular say." (150) In confronting the reported existence of cannibalism in the Americas (interpreted by Montaigne as a corollary of warfare among New World peoples, who at times kill and then eat certain prisoners of war), Montaigne seeks to balance the demands of judging by reason and engaging in a tolerant scepticism by arguing that the practice of cannibalism is indeed barbaric, but that Europeans, precisely by attacking cannibalism abroad, fail to notice and to criticize the barbaric cannibalism of religious and political persecution at home.

I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own. I think there is more barbarity in eating a man alive than in eating him dead; and in tearing by tortures and the rack a body still full of feeling, in roasting a man bit by bit, in having him bitten and mangled by dogs and swine (as we have not only read but seen within fresh memory, not among ancient enemies, but among neighbors and fellow citizens, and what is worse, on the pretext of piety and religion), than in roasting and eating him after he is dead. (155)

If we are to judge others by defensible standards, then such standards should be used with reference to our own practices and institutions. In doing so, Montaigne suggests that New World peoples may well be described as engaging in barbaric practices, but that the standards by which such barbarity should be judged derive not from our own supposed excellence or goodness, but rather "in respect to the rules of reason". According to such standards, Montaigne asserts that Europeans surpass Amerindians "in every kind of barbarity", a claim whose general formulation would recur in many noble savage accounts: it is we who are the real (or the more fully realized) barbarians (156).

Montaigne's treatment of cannibalism, then, allows him both to attack what he sees as the predominant impulse to judge others simply according to one's own practices and customs and to draw upon New World ethnography in order to attack injustices within Europe. The mode of social criticism of European institutions and practices that was most dis-

tinctive to the noble savage literature, however, and one that was especially potent, was to speculate or to report upon what New World indigenous individuals themselves thought of Europeans and of Europe more generally. Montaigne ends his essay with this classic device of criticism, when he reports of a visit that he had personally witnessed (in 1562, when he was a counselor to the Parlement of Bordeaux) of three Amerindians to the court of King Charles IX in Rouen. The puzzled reaction of these visitors, Montaigne reports, concerned the curious sight of grown men serving a child, and of the vast and persistent disparity of wealth in France. The 'natural' lives of relatively egalitarian and communal individuals in the New World here directly confront the artificiality of hereditary monarchical rule and the artificial inequalities of wealth of a supposedly advanced society.

Philosophically, New World ethnography offered thinkers such as Montaigne, and those who would be influenced by him, with a rich trove of empirical examples that could provide a reliable portrait of humans' fundamental properties. In this view, 'human nature' can be discerned effortlessly in the New World since it was thought to be populated by 'natural humans'. Thus, no longer would one have to rely solely upon arcadian myths of pastoral simplicity and happiness, or past golden ages as celebrated in poems, epics, songs, and pictorial representations, to reflect upon the innocent and simple nature of humanity. Such naturalness actually exists today, noble savage proponents could argue; moreover, their presence was said to be a living example of Europe's (and humanity's) own past. This temporal claim, that the New World was new not only to European explorers, but new to the development of social and political life itself, and that it represented the earliest stages of human history that civilized societies themselves once inhabited, became a key feature of many interpretive accounts of New World peoples. Those who viewed them as fundamentally inferior could use such an assumption to argue for their forced enslavement or civilization under imperial rule. In contrast, noble savage writings presented the earliest stages of humanity, as represented by Amerindians and others, as savage only in the sense, as Montaigne argues, that they are close to humanity's "original naturalness".

At the beginning of the discussion of the New World in "Of Coaches", before focusing upon the Mexica and Inca nations, Montaigne describes New World societies as part of an "infant world", apparently drawing again upon Amerigo's vivid description in *Mundus Novus*.

Our world has just discovered another world . . . no less great, full, and well-limbed than itself, yet so new and so infantile that it is still being taught its A B C; not fifty years ago it knew neither letters, nor weights and measures, nor

clothes, nor wheat nor vines. It was still quite naked at the breast, and lived only on what its nursing mother provided. (693)

The infantilization of New World peoples by noble savage writers was meant primarily as an attack upon the decrepitude of European civilization, which they generally viewed as well past its prime, and not as an attempt to lower the status of 'new' peoples. Again, such understandings gave further currency to narratives that were already well established, from the Biblical narrative of Eden to countless meditations upon the golden ages of the most ancient and (in such accounts) the happiest peoples. The states of nature described by modern social contract theories not surprisingly elaborated these themes, although the manner in which New World ethnography was interpreted differed according to the natural condition that was being justified. Regardless of the substantive anthropological claims in such arguments, it became a commonplace of such contractarian arguments of governmental power and natural rights to assert, as John Locke could with confidence in the 1680s, that "in the beginning all the World was *America*."¹²

The presentation of New World peoples that served as the anthropological basis of unorthodox, or even radical, moral and political claims ultimately came at the price of presenting them as largely hard-wired automatons, rather than as creative agents who were embedded within and who shaped and altered cultural systems of meaning and value; the latter belonged to the life of civilized artificiality, and not—most emphatically not in this view—of the natural, savage peoples of the New World. Still, it is important to note that the intent, and much of the power, of such accounts lay in their attempts to foster humanistic and tolerant moral judgements in addition to offering a sharper sense of the injustices of Europe's own social, religious, and political order. Although not by intent then, but nevertheless in effect, the irony of treating New World peoples as the earliest, least artificial, and most natural humans—the very attempt, that is, to humanize them or to turn their presumed savagery into a badge of honour—ultimately cast them as lacking the cultural agency that would have made them recognizably human. The closer to nature they were said to be, the more exotically and inhumanly foreign they appeared. As Montaigne himself notes of his portrayal of Amerindians, "there is an amazing distance between their character and ours." (158) Closing this distance, however, would involve not only reinterpreting the relevant ethnographic accounts, but also revising the accompanying philosophical arguments in noble savage writings—those that were either explicitly delineated or tacitly invoked—about human nature and its relationship to culture. Only then would some European thinkers more successfully humanize New World peoples.

Lahontan's Dialogue with a Huron

Notwithstanding Montaigne's stature among the *philosophes*, the most influential noble savage writer in the French tradition was Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, baron de Lahontan, who in 1703 published in a two-volume set a collection of letters that he had written while in Canada (*Nouveaux Voyages* [*New Voyages*]); a discourse on the lands, peoples, and colonial politics of the New World (*Mémoires de l'Amérique Septentrionale* [*Memoirs of North America*]); and an enormously popular dialogue ostensibly between Lahontan and a Huron (*Dialogues Curieux entre l'Auteur et un Sauvage de bons sens qui a voyagé* [*Curious dialogues between the author and a savage of good sense who has travelled*]). An army officer who commanded local garrisons in New France, Lahontan travelled widely within North America, created maps (though sometimes fanciful and highly flawed) of territories hitherto unknown to Europeans, lived occasionally with indigenous peoples, and eventually learned to speak Algonquin and Huron. In 1693, after a political controversy stemming from charges of insubordination, he fled to Amsterdam and, for a time, became a vagabond. His personal history and itinerant lifestyle were so obscure that some disputed his existence when his writings were published. In spite of such eccentricities, Lahontan reached a wide audience and popularized, probably more than any other single thinker in the French tradition, the image of the noble savage: Montesquieu, Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire (as well as Swift) were among those influenced by his writings.

Using a style that was imitated at times by such thinkers, Lahontan places almost all of his critical commentary about European societies in the mouths of Amerindians. Perhaps hoping to stave off any controversy that might have affected him personally (oddly, perhaps, given his practically fugitive status at the time of publication), Lahontan carefully presents criticisms of European mores and practices as descriptions of Amerindians' attitudes. Thus, his writings are full of editorial comments impugning such criticisms and asserting, however weakly, the obvious superiority of civilization to savagery. It is not insignificant that, in the *Dialogues*, the eponymous character Lahontan attempts to convince Adario, a Huron, of the benefits of European civilization and Christianity. Yet, despite this (somewhat transparent) caution and the partly confused tone that results, the upshot of Lahontan's dialogue is clear: recalling an identical point made by Montaigne, Lahontan writes that "the name of savages that we bestow among them would fit ourselves better".¹² Lahontan describes Amerindians' lives as happier and more fulfilling than those of Europeans; hence, despite the character Lahontan's arguments to the

contrary, the *Dialogues* presents Adario's disgust with European society as entirely well founded.¹⁴

Lahontan's writings incorporate many of the staple elements of noble savage accounts. Hurons' simple lives are made possible, he writes, by their lack of attachment to material goods: the "Savages know neither thine nor mine, for what belongs to one is equally that of another." (95) Once again, as Montaigne had suggested, a vigorous and natural lifestyle ensures robust physical constitutions, free from most diseases and easily restored to health from common maladies (93-95; cf. 200-201). Behind the minimalism and good will of New World peoples lies a profound equality that Lahontan frequently contrasts with European societies. In a comment that encapsulates the purported egalitarianism of Huron life, Adario announces proudly that among his people "everyone is as rich and as noble as his neighbour; the women are entitled to the same liberty with the men, and the children enjoy the same privileges with their fathers." (228) Such sentiments fuel Lahontan's criticism of monarchies: in an absurd contrast to the freedom from rank and privilege in the New World, the French bend their knees to a single all-powerful ruler. Lahontan claims that Amerindians themselves "brand us for slaves" by noting that "we degrade ourselves in subjecting ourselves to one man who possesses the whole power, and is bound by no law but his own will" (96). In addition, Amerindians' supposed antipathy toward distinctions of rank and wealth forms the basis of a stringent assault on private interests and luxury that presage many of Rousseau's specific criticisms of civilized life. Separate, private interests that follow from the distinction between "mine and thine", Adario argues, are ultimately the roots of all evil; they are exacerbated by the existence of currency, the treacherous drive toward accumulating wealth, and the distinctions perpetuated by such means (199-201). Hurons are free because they are their own masters, enslaved neither by their appetites (in particular, the quest for social standing and wealth) nor by other people who claim superiority (the clergy, magistrates, nobles, and kings). As Rousseau would later argue at length, Lahontan's Adario asserts that this freedom from dependence is the source of true liberty, a quality unknown to modern Europeans, but at the heart of savage life (183-85).

The lesson that Lahontan could offer for Europe is potentially radical: dismantle civilization itself in order to live a humane and free existence. Indeed, Adario claims that Providence may lie behind Europeans' discovery of North America because they may now have an opportunity to correct their faults and follow the example of Amerindians. Moreover, Lahontan describes the values that Amerindians embody—innocence of life, tranquillity of mind, a communal existence free from selfish and parochial divisions—as *human* values and, thus, as universally applicable.

On this view, all humans should work toward them because they manifest the fundamental goodness of human nature itself (181–83). Yet, as with so many thinkers who used the image of the noble savage, Lahontan is not a proponent of primitivism; he never claims that Europeans should, as it were, return to the forests. His constructive advice is rather thin, and consists largely of a call for the gradual levelling of social strata in Europe in order to benefit the poor and to combat the petty, corrupting, and selfish private interests that are based on distinctions of wealth (197–98). The egalitarian impulse behind such ideas certainly has a utopian cast—indeed, the tone of Lahontan's writings at times resonates with an almost revolutionary fervour. But, in the final analysis, the power of his rhetoric rests more in its social criticism than in its vague calls for reform.

Lahontan supplements Montaigne's classic account of Amerindians by more comprehensively elaborating what had become the standard objections in the noble savage literature against European civilized society. Moreover, he examines two subjects that would play a prominent role in many later eighteenth-century noble savage writings: (Christianity and the status of women.) Lahontan portrays Amerindians as believers in a "natural" religion, a claim that Montaigne briefly touched upon in "Of Cannibals" and that anti-clerical thinkers such as Voltaire and Diderot would make as well. Lahontan presents a view of spirituality that rests solely upon the rational cognition of a basic postulate: that a powerful being created the Earth and instituted moral laws discernible through reason alone (105–12). The existence of a hierarchy of clergy and of formal religious institutions, he thus implies, are unnecessary and corrupting additions to the pure and simple faith that all humans should enjoy.¹⁵ Under the weight of a host of superfluous and sometimes contradictory rules and obligations, Christians become hypocrites, especially in their role as missionaries—preaching such doctrines to Amerindians, while acting contrary to them (111–12).

women

The New World travel literature inspired a diverse range of arguments about the role of women in society, and more generally about the themes of love, marriage, and sexuality. A common theme in writings that appropriated New World ethnography in order to highlight the purported barbarism of New World peoples was that women in New World societies were especially maltreated and subject to conditions of near slavery and that Europe, in comparison, offered a civilized liberty to its women. While this sentiment at times curiously emerged in writings that largely celebrated the natural lifestyles of New World peoples and criticized European social and political attitudes, many noble savage writers challenged such conventional arguments by celebrating what they understood to be the relative equality of men and women in 'natural' societies. More broadly, love and intimacy were at times interpreted through the lenses of nature and artificiality in order to cast aspersions against Euro-

pean gender relations, though this could sometimes take the form of primarily criticizing European women for purportedly controlling men through their artificial and complex sexual charms. In a passage that recalls and may have inspired such a discussion about moral versus physical love in Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, Lahontan contrasts the jealous, blind fury of European love to the simple good will of Amerindians' passions (115-16). The sexual relations between men and women among indigenous Canadians strikes Lahontan as more honest and sincere than the excessively formalized and Janus-faced discourse between the sexes in France. In addition, Lahontan chastises the sexism of French society by noting that only women bear the social costs of adultery, whereas men are often celebrated for their sexual prowess (226-27). In the New World, he argues, marriages are more secure and infidelity is rare. Moreover, in a critique of church doctrine on divorce, Lahontan notes appreciatively that, among the Huron, when marriages unravel, divorce can be initiated by either men or women for no other reason than a desire to become single again (120). In addition, the power of fathers to choose, or to veto, their daughters' potential mate in Europe is absent, Lahontan asserts, among Amerindians (222-23). Instead, he continues, young women are given complete autonomy to choose or to consent to potential husbands. The tendency for some reflections upon the New World to evoke relatively egalitarian ideas about gender relations arises again in some of Diderot's commentary about Tahitian society in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*. Other passages of the *Supplément*, however, and a number of Rousseau's assertions about women demonstrate that Amerindian peoples could inspire just as easily more traditional responses to the heated eighteenth-century debates about women's capacities and what roles they occupy, and ought to occupy, in society.

Since the idea of a radical difference between European and indigenous New World peoples—a difference in kind between natural and artificial societies—is a presumption of Lahontan's entire dialogue and of noble savage writings more generally, the simple fact of what was taken to be exotic difference did not in and of itself make a foreign society praiseworthy or useful for the purpose of social criticism. In contrast to political writings that incorporated the themes of noble savagery, the praise of the 'other' suggested by a variety of modern European thinkers' invocation of China consisted usually of lauding its ancient and sophisticated civilization. Whereas Lahontan and others praised the New World for embodying the values of naturalism, philosophers such as Voltaire, Leibniz, and the Leibnizian rationalist Christian Wolff placed China in the noble rank of a super-civilization, an extraordinary site of rationality incarnate with a political system overseen by enlightened mandarins, in contrast to the absolute despots who sat on most European thrones. Rather than attempt to civilize the New World, Leibniz suggested wryly in his *No-*

vissima Sinica (1697) that China ought to send missionaries to Europe.¹⁴ To undermine such enthusiasm, Adario, in response to Lahontan's boast that the Chinese and Siamese who visit France appear to admire its civilization, castigates the Far East as even more interest-oriented, propertied, and hence even more brutish than Europe (210–13). Rousseau closely follows this line of thinking in the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750). From one angle, he criticizes civilization and its supposed wisdom by reference to the New World: "those happy Nations which do not know even by name the vices we have so much difficulty in repressing, those savages of America whose simple and natural polity Montaigne unhesitatingly prefers . . . to everything that Philosophy could ever imagine as most perfect for the government of Peoples". From another angle, he employs the resonant image of oriental despotism: "If the Sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their blood for the Fatherland, if they animated courage, then the Peoples of China should be wise, free, and invincible. But if there is not a single vice that does not rule them. . . . [w]hat benefits has China derived from all the honours bestowed upon them? To be peopled by slaves and evil-doers?"¹⁷ The twin themes of the praiseworthy naturalness of New World peoples and the artificial despotism of Asia make clear, of course, the extent to which the ethnography about the non-European world gave European thinkers almost ready-made vehicles for their own political outlooks, predetermined, it would appear, by their antecedent beliefs about the practices and institutions of European societies. To be sure, noble savage writings, in particular, usually aimed not only to use New World ethnography to engage in political debates about Europe, but also to humanize New World peoples. Lahontan attacks the injustices of European life as well as those Europeans who have denigrated and barbarized New World peoples. The former strategy gains rhetorical power and a seeming empirical validity by pointing to supposedly natural beings in the actual world, but ultimately at the expense of the latter strategy. For Lahontan's writings (and, as we will see, Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*) make or presuppose philosophical arguments about human nature and its relationship to culture that undermine the claim that New World peoples are fully human beings.

The paradoxical understanding of New World peoples' mental capacities in the noble savage literature discloses itself sharply in Lahontan's writings. As Lahontan's discussion of natural religion implies, Amerindians are fundamentally rational creatures. It is precisely this standard of rationality that Europeans fail to practise, given their prejudices, superstitions, and their superfluous and often degrading institutions and practices. On this view, an understanding of "natural" New World societies can enlighten Europe. Describing his approach toward understanding Amerindians, Lahontan notes that he attempts to steer a middle course

between theologians who view them as incapable of reflection (and, thus, impossible to convert), and those, especially the Jesuits, who assert that they warmly embrace the Gospels (92). The former denies Amerindians the cognitive abilities that they quite clearly possess; the latter is mistaken since, in addition to appearing wholly satisfied with their lives, they seem, Lahontan contends, to abhor Christianity and the practices of European civilization. Lahontan's fictional Huron, Adario, is an especially perceptive interlocutor because he is portrayed to be, as the title of the *Dialogues* informs us, "well travelled". We learn that he has viewed English America and even France itself with his own eyes; his criticisms, then, are supposed to gain a credibility they may have lacked without such wide exposure. But Adario's powers of reason and speech are perfectly ordinary and typical of less cosmopolitan Amerindians, Lahontan insists, for when criticizing European life, they all prove themselves to be "great moralists" [*grands Moralistes*], drawing upon an extraordinary memory and employing impressive argumentative skills (104; also, 95-104). They speak acutely, with subtlety and imagination, in tribal council meetings during which matters of communal interest are at stake. It appears, at such moments, that they lead an artful and cultivated life, one that may be different from European peoples, but not fundamentally different, or different in kind. Yet, Lahontan's attempts to humanize Amerindians cannot stray too far from the notion that they are natural, largely free of the corrupting trappings of artifice. As we have seen, like other noble savage writings, the bulk of his social criticism rests upon the claim that such peoples live purely naturally, or very nearly so. Hence, he suggests that New World peoples reason and deliberate well *despite* "having no advantage of education"; these "truly rustic philosophers", in short, must be "directed only by the pure light of nature" (99).

The tensions raised by such comments result from Lahontan's practice of describing Amerindians' various customs, rituals, myths, and social practices at length without also being able to interpret them as non-natural, cultural forms of activity and self-understanding. Lahontan does not treat the inheritance and creative transformation of specific traditions and self-understandings over generations as a form of "education", even though he regularly witnessed such artful activities taking place among the Huron and other peoples in French Canada. As we have seen, such a move would not be easy to make for a thinker who has invested heavily in the principal anthropological claim of noble savagery: that New World peoples—however much they appear to be situated within and transform an array of practices, beliefs, and institutions—are ultimately free from artifice. Thus, Lahontan's Adario asserts that the Huron

live quietly under the laws of instinct and innocent conduct, which wise Nature has imprinted upon our minds from our cradles. We are all of one mind; our

wills, opinions and sentiments observe an exact conformity; and thus we spend our lives with such perfect good understanding, that no disputes or suits can take place amongst us. (188)

One important consequence of such a view is that throughout his writings Lahontan easily slips from discussing the Huron, or more generally the indigenous peoples of Canada, to "savages" in general. Shorn of their distinctive cultural systems of meaning and value and reduced entirely to natural beings, Amerindians become an amorphous, undifferentiated whole, even for someone like Lahontan, who learned a great deal about Huron and Algonquin life. The danger of such a view is that, stripped of all cultural attributes, New World peoples must inevitably be presented as instinct-driven brutes whose basic humanity, though not formally denied, becomes increasingly difficult to discern. As we shall see, Rousseau's conjectural anthropology engenders a theory of human nature and social development that quite clearly fosters such paradoxes and unintended results.

While noble savage accounts attempted in part to raise the status of New World peoples and challenged the view that such peoples are fundamentally barbaric, the portrait of such peoples as artless and purely natural (and the corresponding belief that human nature itself consists of a lack of artifice) yielded a fantastic and unreal understanding of them, one that was unlikely to produce the moral understanding and commiseration necessary for a thoroughgoing criticism of their subject status under European imperial power. David Hume's reaction to such accounts, focusing on the fact that supposedly natural beings in distant lands exhibit only virtues and no vices, and also emphasizing that such narratives usually portrayed such people as lacking ambition (and, one might add, lacking all of the artfulness that ambition was thought to be linked with in many eighteenth-century political writings), was precisely what noble savage writers inadvertently helped to foster:

Should a traveller, returning from a far country, bring us an account of men, wholly different from any with whom we were ever acquainted; men, who were entirely divested of avarice, ambition, or revenge; who knew no pleasure but friendship, generosity, and public spirit; we should immediately, from these circumstances, detect the falsehood, and prove him a liar, with the same certainty as if he had stuffed his narration with stories of centaurs and dragons, miracles and prodigies.¹⁸

Such a conception of foreign peoples was not only fanciful, Hume implied, but would also be clearly inhuman. Indeed, understandings of New World peoples as *cultural* beings were more likely to yield a robust affirmation of their status as *human* beings—this is borne out, I will

argue, both in the philosophical anthropologies of Diderot, Kant, and Herder, and concomitantly in their anti-imperialist political theories. Conversely, the *Realpolitik* of many of Lahontan's analyses of French imperial policies demonstrates that a noble savage celebration of Amerindian life not only sits alongside aggressive colonial schemes, but without as much contradiction as one might originally have thought. In the *New Voyages*, Lahontan argues against the complete "destruction" of the Iroquois not because of humanitarian concerns, but rather due to the probability that the enemies of the Iroquois would then turn against New France. Thus, Lahontan recommends playing off various Amerindian nations against one another. Ultimately, New France can sufficiently weaken the Iroquois and bring them into line, he argues, by virtually imprisoning them on a plot of land guarded by forts in order to "distress" them in times of war and "confine" them in times of peace. This should, Lahontan promises, "reduce them to one half of the power they now possess".¹⁹ These elements of Lahontan's political thought place his glorification of Amerindians in a different light, and it indicates what were usually the ethical limits of such perspectives about humanity and New World peoples. In the eighteenth century, the full recognition of non-Europeans as humans who should rule themselves and who are in no need of European imperial rule takes root almost always among thinkers whose understandings of humanity explicitly or tacitly reject the tenets of noble savagery.

New World Peoples in Rousseau's Conjectural History

In the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* [*Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*] (1755), Rousseau contends that "[a]lthough the inhabitants of Europe have for the past three or four hundred years overrun the other parts of the world, and are constantly publishing new collections of travels and reports, I am convinced that the only men we know are the Europeans" (212).²⁰ Rousseau's complaint stems from his belief that the only way one can begin to understand humanity as such is to examine the broadest possible array of human diversity. As he notes in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, the

great failing of Europeans is always to philosophize . . . in the light of what happens right around them. . . . When one proposes to study men, one has to look close by; but in order to study man one has to learn to cast one's glance afar; one has to begin by observing the differences in order to discover the properties.²¹

Given the increasingly vast range of cultural information housed in the travel literature of his day and the opportunities that it offered for a more accurate conception of humanity, Rousseau bemoaned the lack of a rigorous, philosophical study of such human diversity. Instead, he insists, one finds a mere chronicling of characters and mores in travel accounts without an attendant appreciation of the anthropological significance of such diversity, of how they might contribute to an understanding of the shared humanity of, and the genuine differences among, all peoples. Consequently, he argues that scholars' learned studies of human nature, even those that ostensibly draw upon the new knowledge of non-European peoples, are merely treatises about their own nations.

Rousseau argues that those who undertake the arduous journey to the New World produce anthropologically disappointing reports because of their prejudices, primarily those of their nation and of their particular occupation. "Sailors, Merchants, and Soldiers", he asserts, are hardly able to pronounce judgements of any philosophical import because of their narrow perspectives.²² The fourth kind of traveller, the missionaries, perhaps have the educational training necessary for an incisive study of humanity, but, he cautiously notes, they are too "absorbed by the sublime vocation" of religious conversion to partake in a scholarly study of humanity. Indeed, according to Rousseau, the philosophical acumen required for such a study is rare even among those with the appropriate training and intellectual skills. All this leads him to call desperately for a profound meditation upon human diversity:

Shall we never see reborn the happy times when Peoples did not pretend to Philosophize, but the Platos, the Thales, and the Pythagorases, seized with an ardent desire to know, undertook the greatest journeys merely in order to learn, and went far off to shake the yoke of National prejudices, to get to know men by their conformities and their differences, and to acquire that universal knowledge that is not exclusively of one Century or of one country but of all times and of all places, and thus is, so to speak, the common science of the wise?
(213)

This yearning for the wisdom of ancient philosophers, in contrast to the tracts of "Europeans more interested in filling their purses than their heads", did not prevent Rousseau from appropriating a significant amount of material from modern travel writings. Indeed, it is not often noted that his celebrated call for a more genuinely philosophical appreciation of humanity and human diversity in note X of the *Discourse on Inequality* arises in the context of his attack upon travel writers' assertions that orangutans are not human—a claim not unrelated to his presentation of Amerindians (as we will see)—rather than from a concern about distorted judgements or understandings of New World peoples. Despite

his misgivings, then, about the travel writings of his day, Rousseau drew upon them frequently. He also related many of the tropes of the then well-established philosophical and literary image of the noble savage to lend empirical support for what he knew would be controversial claims about natural humans.

The method that informs Rousseau's speculative history and the developmental sequence that he elaborates begin to explain the peculiar roles that New World peoples play in his narrative. Rousseau defends a theory of human nature that owes much to the tradition of noble savagery, but as part of an extended conjectural history that outlines stages of human development. Although he often simply contrasts "savage" and "civilized" life, Rousseau's conjectural history in fact outlines three stages of human development that mark distinct historical phases of social activity, scientific and technological complexity, and institutional development: a primordial condition (a pure state of nature); a primitive, middle stage; and the civilized condition of modern Europeans, a variety of ancient peoples, and some sedentary non-European peoples, such as the Chinese, who practise agriculture and metallurgy.²³

On the assumption that the behavioural patterns, social institutions, and the political machinery of modern peoples are *artificial* constructs that have masked, or even altered, our underlying humanity, Rousseau asks in the preface to the *Discourse on Inequality*:

how will man ever succeed in seeing himself as Nature formed him, through all the changes which the succession of times and of things must have wrought in his original constitution, and to disentangle what he owes to his own stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state? (122)

Rousseau explicates his method by using the imagery of the statue of Glaucus, so encrusted and warped by the ravages of the seas, storms, and time that it resembles more a "ferocious beast" than a God (122). Rousseau's account of natural humans is the result, then, of peeling away the layers of society and culture that, in his view, obscure humans' underlying, universal nature. Such a thought-experiment reveals that the most fundamental characteristics of human behaviour are self-preservation and sympathy, or pity, for other sentient beings. After contending that previous political thinkers who used the category of the state of nature did not go back far enough in human history to describe a truly natural, precivil human condition, he describes at length an earlier state of nature that exemplifies these two essential springs of human action. Rousseau's natural humans preserve themselves without the fixed order of law and government because of their *amour de soi*, a peaceable self-love that involves no comparison or needless competition with others. For Rousseau,

primordial humans' solitary existence is peaceful because of the bounty of their environment, their simple (that is, their natural, nonartificial) needs and desires, and their hard-wired (instinctive, natural) repugnance against human suffering. Given the method that informs his speculative history, it becomes clear why New World ethnography, as filtered through the lens of noble savagery, offered ideal resources for such an account of human origins. By removing from the distorted figure of 'civilized man' the purportedly corrupting layers of science, technology, art, sociability, and even language, in addition to the psychological states and passions that Rousseau contends they breed, the figure that remains is the natural human, a noble savage thoroughly free of artificiality.

Rousseau emphasizes in the exordium to the *Discourse* that the "[i]nquiries that may be pursued regarding this Subject ought not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin" (133). Yet, in detailing the precivilized condition of humanity, Rousseau makes frequent use of the real-world examples of savages in order to bolster his assertions about 'savage man'. The confusion that results is indicative precisely of the tensions that run through the tradition of noble savagery, where thinkers would both trumpet the pure and largely animalistic naturalness of Amerindians while also at times detailing cognitive and institutional features of Amerindian life. In the context of Rousseau's developmental account, the related paradoxes arise because he categorizes New World peoples as part of the middle stage, while also using them to substantiate a number of his claims about the earlier, pure state of nature.

The movement from a pure state of nature to the middle stage, in Rousseau's conjectural history, involves the development of language, the transition from an entirely nomadic existence to an occasionally sedentary life, the origin of a limited amount of private property (largely in the form of objects that can be carried, rather than of land itself), the formation of family units, and the gradual emergence of nations that are "united in morals and character, not by Rules or Laws, but by the same kind of life and of foods, and the influence of a shared Climate." (169) Rousseau did not believe that a middle, post-primordial and precivilized, state was entirely free of corruption and conflict. Once humans become social creatures, in his view, a corruption of their natural, purely instinctive characteristics inevitably follows. The psychological transformation wrought by such behavioural and sociological changes is significant because they give birth to *amour propre*, or vanity, the vice at the heart of modern unhappiness and social injustice. Thus, Rousseau notes that violence is not uncommon among New World peoples, just as it is embedded, though far more pervasively, in European societies. Nevertheless,

New World peoples lead generally praiseworthy lives, for having reached only the middle stage of human development, they are still restrained partly by natural pity for other creatures. In *On the Social Contract*, he asserts that Amerindians practise a form of government that can best be classified as a "natural aristocracy", for their rulers are elders who are thus naturally unequal to others by virtue of the "authority of experience", rather than civilized aristocrats, who rule according to "instituted inequalities" such as "riches". He concludes that "[t]he savages of northern America still govern themselves this way in our day, and they are very well governed." (406) Most importantly, Rousseau argues that New World peoples are free of two pernicious technological developments—large-scale agriculture (and, in tandem with this, they lack a more extensive and fixed system of private property holdings) and metallurgy—which rely upon and breed a high level of interdependence that in turn signals the death knell of human independence and freedom (171–72). For Rousseau, most peoples of the New World live at precisely the "just mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our vanity [*amour propre*]", a period during which humans are happiest and a condition that, simply stated, is the "best for man" (171).

Rousseau argues that the post-primordial, precivilized stage is not an ephemeral historical epoch that was achieved for a stunning but tragically brief moment. Instead, this relatively ideal form of human organization constituted the most stable, longest-lasting era of human history. He suggests that the very discovery of New World peoples at this level of social and technological development as late as the eighteenth century demonstrates its impressive durability. He writes that the

example of the Savages, almost all of whom have been found at this point, seems to confirm that the Human Race [*le Genre-Humain*] was made always to remain in it, that this state is the genuine youth of the World, and that all subsequent progress has been so many steps in appearance toward the perfection of the individual, and in effect toward the decrepitude of the species. (171)

Given Rousseau's stark pessimism about the advanced stage of anthropological development and the fact that it might never have been reached but for a string of contingent factors, the fall from the relatively peaceful and content middle state constitutes the greatest tragedy of human history. As Rousseau explains in *On the Social Contract*, the establishment of a "civil state" would constitute genuine, unalloyed progress were it not for the degradation that civilized life engenders. The brute existence of the state of nature led to a civilized condition in which natural, animalistic beings who possessed a set of social virtues and faculties in potentiality (because of their 'perfectibility') happened to become, through a series of

random occurrences that were by no means predestined, intelligent but also almost thoroughly corrupted and oppressed humans.

Although in this [civil] state he deprives himself of several advantages he has from nature, he gains such great advantages in return, his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas enlarged, his sentiments ennobled, his entire soul is elevated to such an extent, that if the abuses of this new condition did not often degrade him to beneath the condition he has left, he should ceaselessly bless the happy moment which wrested him from it forever, and out of a stupid and bounded animal made an intelligent being and a man. (364)

For this reason, Rousseau suggests that the arrival of the middle stage constitutes genuine progress, for it lacks the most egregious injustices of the civilized stage. A degree of humanization occurs in the movement toward the middle stage as the distinctively human faculty of perfectibility begins its operations, but without the corresponding dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, artificial inequalities, illness and disease, interdependence, and ultimately the despotic slavishness of the civilized stage.

Rousseau acknowledges that such a judgement is tantamount to the glorification of a golden age, one that exists far in Europe's past, but that continues to exist among the largely nomadic peoples of the Americas and Africa. In the "Last Reply" to the critics of his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, he scorns the corrupt modern individuals who reject the notion of a golden age by asserting that in doing so they treat virtue itself as a mere fantasy: "I am told that men have long since been disabused of the chimera of the Golden Age. Why not also add that they have long since been disabused of the chimera of virtue?" (80) Indeed, the golden age and Rousseau's idealized presentation of the ancient city-state Sparta are the twin, and (as Judith Shklar has noted) in certain respects the mutually exclusive, exemplary ideals that animate much of his social and political thinking.²⁴ As with many earlier theorists of noble savagery, Rousseau asserts that the middle stage of human history cannot be resurrected in Europe, for the social and psychological changes that arise with the development of civilized societies are too great to be undone by an attempt to return to the rustic happiness of the golden age. Still, much of Rousseau's thought can be interpreted as a series of attempts to revive certain aspects of this age. One such attempt involves re-creating in the modern world, *mutatis mutandis*, elements of the life of a rustic city-state (see *On the Social Contract* and, to a lesser extent, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*). Another involves fashioning a less corrupt life in the midst of civilized society either by a highly regimented education from birth that attempts to inculcate and foster the natural sentiments that still animate (without any such education) the indigenous inhabit-

ants of the New World (see, e.g., *Emile*, and *Emile et Sophie*), or by becoming an outsider on the margins of society whose immersion in the natural world provides a form of self-therapy (see, e.g., *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*).

To defend the empirical grounding that he had given in support of the middle stage, Rousseau challenges the common view that New World societies are sites of brutal passions and cruel social practices. Writings that extolled noble savages were always secondary in influence to pejorative understandings of the New World, the most detailed of which aimed not only to proclaim but also to explain the allegedly backward conditions and barbaric behaviour of Amerindians. Along with what can be termed *internal* explanations of their status and behaviour (of the kind that Francisco de Vitoria attacked, such as the view that Amerindians are examples of Aristotle's natural slaves), New World peoples were further encumbered, some argued, by *external* factors, the most important of which was climate.²⁵ Climate, a key concept in pre-nineteenth-century European social thought, was an umbrella category of the various characteristics of local environments (ranging from meteorological factors, such as the amount of sunshine and heat, to the landscape and other geographical features) that were said to shape social practices, psychological dispositions, and even political institutions.²⁶ Among French thinkers of the eighteenth century, Montesquieu was by far the most influential proponent of climatological social analysis. A lengthy section of *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) is devoted exclusively to the behavioural and institutional effects of climate. With regard to moral behaviour, Montesquieu's analysis focused upon the purported effects of heat on the passions:

You will find in the northern climates peoples who have few vices, enough virtues, and much sincerity and frankness. As you move toward the countries of the south, you will believe you have moved away from morality itself: the liveliest passions will increase crime; each will seek to take from others all the advantages that can favour these same passions.²⁷

Such theories grounded a common view of most New World and also African peoples: physiologically, the torrid climates in which they lived boiled their "humours" (and consequently their passions) to degrees uncontrollable by their presumed meagre rationality. In this view, then, the combination of two structural constraints, one external (climate) and one internal to New World inhabitants' constitutions (their ostensibly limited cognitive powers), together were said to account for the barbarous social practices described in many New World travel writings.

In response to such charges of barbarism, Rousseau finds it "ridiculous to portray Savages as constantly murdering one another in order to satisfy their brutality" (158). Despite his scepticism toward those who assert

that Amerindians are prone to violence because of their nature, their environment, or both, Rousseau does not deny the effects of climate on human behaviour. Indeed, the very need for a philosophical account of humanity, he maintains, stems from the "powerful effects of differences in Climates, air, foods, ways of life, habits in general and, above all, of the astonishing force of uniform causes acting continuously on long successions of generations." (208) It is for precisely this reason that, for Rousseau, theorizing a fully natural human existence requires stripping away the layers of social and cultural particularities to discern the pure elements of humanity, for modern individuals have been warped almost beyond recognition by a multiplicity of such contingent factors. Consequently, Rousseau attacks the view that primitive peoples are cruel and ferocious while, at the same time, accepting the climatology that had often supported the traditional representation of New World peoples. Thus, referring to the Caribs in particular, he asserts that they are "the most peaceful in their loves and the least given to jealousy, even though they live in a scorching Climate, which always seems to stir these passions to greater activity." (158)

Rousseau suggests that to the extent that episodes of cruelty and violence occur within noncivilized communities, they result not from the lack of civilization, but because the changes that might lead to a civilized condition have started to develop. Life in the middle stage has not yet reached the wretched interdependence of European civilization, and thus it constitutes the condition "best for man", but it is far from the natural isolation of a pure state of nature, which is the only sure guarantee of a complete freedom from cruelty in human life. The historical, and concomitant psychological, development from a purely natural condition, not the want of purportedly civilizing or refining elements of modern life, accounts for whatever strains of cruelty exist in primitive communities. Amerindians are sometimes cruel to one another because they have reached the stage of anthropological development at which one is exposed to the early stirrings of *amour propre*. Therefore, according to Rousseau, before too much civilization (and the interdependence it breeds) corrupts human life, the natural sentiment that makes doing evil repugnant to humans continues to counteract even the most powerful—and potentially degrading—climatic and social factors (156). As with its predecessors, noble savagery in its Rousseauian version, then, offered a counterpoint to the most pejorative understandings of New World peoples. In addition, Rousseau sought to balance his praise of the middle stage of human history, and concomitantly his celebration of New World peoples, with the understanding that such peoples had already been partly corrupted by the early development of sociability.

With a couple of exceptions (such as the Mexica, whom he categorizes as civilized in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* [5:386]), Rousseau claims then that New World peoples exist at a middle stage of anthropological development. Accordingly, he acknowledges that even the Caribs, "which of all existing Peoples have so far departed least from the state of Nature" (158), are not entirely natural humans. Still, the tension that tends to surface in noble savage accounts—between theorizing an acultural (and, in Rousseau's case, also an asocial) natural human and celebrating the qualities of New World inhabitants as praiseworthy humans (who are not different in kind, but simply closer to the pure conditions of natural humanity than civilized humans)—arises also in Rousseau's conjectural history. For despite his explicit categorization of New World inhabitants as peoples who exist in the middle stage of human development, Rousseau most often discusses Amerindians and the Hottentots of southern Africa to support his account of purely natural humans in the original state of nature. Rousseau's speculative history may well conclude that the middle stage of development is the "best for man", but the earliest state of nature occupies a special place in his theory since it provides the starkest contrast between modern humans and human nature itself. Moreover, only an appreciation of natural humanity, in his view, can ultimately provide the basis for understanding the laws that motivate humanity or that should govern humanity: "so long as we do not know natural man, we shall in vain try to ascertain either the Law which he has received or that which best suits his constitution." (125) Thus, while he presents the pure state of nature as a period so far back in the history of humanity that no written records can attest to its features, the documents that detail the life of indigenous New World inhabitants offer a wealth of examples to support his conjectures about the original state of nature. One can only speculate as to the motivations behind this use of New World ethnography, given its inconsistency with Rousseau's own categorization of Amerindians. Nonetheless, given the influence of the writers from the noble savage tradition upon Rousseau, it should perhaps come as no surprise that natural humans and New World peoples would, in effect, be equated in his account of human nature. As the *Discourse on Inequality* demonstrates, Rousseau moves easily from discussing the 'savages' of the pure state of nature to the 'savages' of contemporary New World societies. Natural, or savage, existence—*la vie sauvage*—can, in part, be accurately described for Rousseau by studying savage, or primitive, humans, *les hommes Sauvage*. Thus, precisely in the manner of the noble savage tradition, Rousseau often cites New World peoples as examples of the impressive *physical* and meagre *mental* qualities of natural humanity. In addition, since Rousseau tends to conflate the

boundary between New World humans and animals in this manner, his converse attempt to place orangutans at the level of natural humanity becomes especially noteworthy.

Physical qualities of natural humanity. The opening passages of the first part of the *Discourse on Inequality*, those meant to discern natural humans simply from their "physical" side before considering them from the "metaphysical and moral side", rely greatly upon New World ethnography to provide empirical evidence about the physical prowess of natural humans in the wild (141). To the extent that any animal becomes domesticated, argues Rousseau, it becomes timid and weak, lacking its original courage and vigour (139). After detailing the sharpness of sense and acuity of judgement of wild animals who live primarily according to self-preservation, Rousseau concludes, "Such is the animal state in general, and according to Travellers' reports, it also is the state of most Savage peoples." (140-41) Accordingly, Rousseau notes that "the Savages of America track the Spaniards by smell just as well as the best Dogs might have done" (141).

Rousseau's notes at the end of the *Discourse on Inequality* provide much of the ethnographic material that is meant to support his historical conjectures. Although most of the main text details the injustices of the civilized condition, sixteen of Rousseau's nineteen notes aim to elaborate and substantiate his claims about the pure state of nature and the middle stage of human development. In note VI, which marks one of the most intensive uses of travel literature in the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau lists several examples of indigenous peoples' physical vigour and skill, from the Hottentots' fishing, hunting, and running and the accurate shooting of the "Savages of the Antilles" to the general strength and physical skills of the "Savages" and "Indians" of both North and South America. In note V, drawing upon François Corréal's *Voyage aux Indes Occidentales* (1722), Rousseau defends his thesis that humans are naturally vegetarian in part by relating the story of the primitive inhabitants of Lucayes, who, removed by the Spanish from their homes and taken to Cuba, Santo Domingo, and elsewhere, died because of eating meat; such "natural" physiologies, Rousseau implies, could not handle animal flesh (199). In note III, Rousseau uses both indigenous peoples and feral children to study the question of whether humans are naturally bipeds or quadrupeds. After noting that humans must *teach* their children to walk on two limbs, Rousseau asserts that since Caribs and the Hottentots both "neglect" their children by keeping them as quadrupeds for so long, for them, learning to become bipeds requires considerable effort. Even their adults, he writes, are sometimes found as quadrupeds. Rousseau con-

siders the feral children of Europe, abandoned children who were discovered in rural areas and who often generated sensational publicity, as guides to the study of human nature.²⁸ Surviving in remote areas, and at times like the legendary Romulus and Remus allegedly raised by animals, feral children often elicited an enthusiastic response after their discovery in part because of their apparently 'natural' qualities. As if placed by fate in a laboratory experiment in which all the conventions of social life were eliminated, the feral child ostensibly exhibited the most primal, underlying characteristics of the human species. Accordingly, Rousseau cites five examples of feral children in order to elaborate the possibility that humans are naturally quadrupeds. In one passage, then, Rousseau manages to equate savages (understood as the earliest purely natural individuals of his conjectural history), the "Savage Nations" of the New World, and feral children (such as the "little Savage of Hanover") as natural creatures (196). Rousseau's frequent reliance upon supposedly empirical examples of "savages" in such cases indicates not only the centrality of New World ethnographic sources in his effort to discern humans' natural physical characteristics, but also the virtual animalization of New World peoples, however unintended, that this method risks. *

Mental qualities of natural humanity. In conjunction with the physical animality of natural humans, Rousseau attempts to establish the *mental* simplicity of "savages" as well. It is important in his account, as it is so often in narratives of natural humanity and noble savagery, to defend the idea that the virtues of such lives result not from forms of education, institutions, or self-conscious and dynamic social practices, or indeed from any other form of what was understood to constitute artificiality, but rather from the uncorrupted instincts (or, for Lahontan and others, the laws) that Nature itself implanted in humans. Hence, Rousseau asserts that "one might say that Savages are not wicked precisely because they do not know what it is to be good; for it is neither the growth of enlightenment nor the curb of the Law, but the calm of the passions and the ignorance of vice that keep them from evil-doing" (154). Although the humans of the middle, precivilized stage lead partly settled lives with minimal amounts of private property, produce simple commodities, and thus undergo significant psychological changes and the development of a rudimentary sociability, he also argues that this middle stage is remarkably durable partly because such humans have not yet reached the cognitive state in which the imagination, curiosity, and foresight needed for deep reflection and for scientific and technological advances (in short, for the more extensive flourishing of human perfectibility) exists. In such a condition, humans have minimal (and still largely natural) needs that are

met by subsistence hunting and gathering and, at times, small-scale agriculture. Their minds work constantly at what is before them, never abstracting from their own life or looking ahead to future events.

After elaborating such speculative claims about proto-civilized humans, Rousseau again illustrates them by noting the example of a New World people:

Such is still nowadays the extent of the Carib's foresight: he sells his Cotton bed in the morning and comes weeping to buy it back in the evening, having failed to foresee that he would need it for the coming night. (144)

Not merely primitive peoples' immediate social conditions and psychological dispositions, then, but also their cognitive abilities themselves, in Rousseau's view, exist at an elementary level, a stage that ensures little progress and therefore tremendous durability. Referring to "Savage man", he asserts that "nothing must be so calm as his soul and nothing so limited as his mind." (214) The physical prowess that Rousseau describes with such relish—single-handedly subduing wild bulls, striking distant and minute targets with stones, and swimming flawlessly in turbulent waters—all come at a price. This praise sits alongside Rousseau's contentions that Amerindians' impressive physical characteristics flourish precisely because their mental capacity cannot go beyond the simple association of basic ideas at their stage of historical development. Any higher form of reflection would lead to, and in part be a result of, interdependent social practices that over time would enervate humans' original, vigorous constitutions. Thus, the animality of natural humans is not only of the body, but of the mind as well. As with other noble savage representations of non-European peoples, the analytic ability to make lasting connections between sets of ideas—in short, sustained cognitive reflection—is nearly as absent in the human beings of the New World as it is in any of the animals of the wild.

Orangutans as natural humans? Since Rousseau's conjectural history conflates the boundary between the middle stage and what he himself describes as the animal condition of the earliest state of nature, it is not entirely astonishing to read his speculation that certain primates may very well be human beings.²⁹ Rousseau's representation of most New World peoples mirrors, therefore, his anthropomorphic conception of recently discovered primates. In note X of the *Discourse on Inequality*, he contends at length that orangutans, in particular, might be extant examples of the earliest and most primitive humans. After quoting a few passages about primates from one of his most frequent sources about non-European societies, Abbé Prévost's twenty-volume compendium, *Histoire Générale des Voyages*, Rousseau argues against travellers' accounts that

orangutans are definitively nonhuman.³⁰ These "Anthropomorphic animals", he argues, are so physically and even behaviourally similar to humans that "it is because of their stupidity" that voyagers have typically described them simply as animals (210). Rousseau muses sarcastically that if the travellers who make such claims had discovered a feral child with a human form but hardly any ability to reason or to speak, they "would have spoken about him learnedly in fine reports as a most curious Beast that rather resembled a man." (212)

Rousseau considers orangutans as likely humans in part because it was not adequately demonstrated, in his opinion, that they lack *perfectibilité*, the faculty of self-perfection that is a "specific characteristic of the human species." (211) In addition, Rousseau attempts to rebut the one argument that, in his view, is usually given to justify the assertion that orangutans are not humans: their lack of speech. In a claim about the history of human language, which he elaborates in detail in the unpublished *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (much of which was originally intended to be part of the second *Discourse*), Rousseau notes that orangutans' lack of any humanly comprehensible speech tells us nothing about the species to which they belong because the act of speech itself is not natural to humans. The earliest humans, in Rousseau's account, possess the "organ of speech" in an incipient form that then develops slowly in conjunction with a variety of social and psychological changes. Thus, orangutans—the word derives etymologically from two Malay words meaning "man of the woods"—could very well be examples of the earliest humans who managed to stay entirely uncultivated by dispersing themselves in remote forests eons ago (208). If this were true, then New World peoples presumably would no longer be the eighteenth-century humans best suited to model the original state of nature, since the primordial state itself would still be in existence in the forests of Asia. He notes cautiously, however, that with the dearth of information about, and lack of experimentation with, such creatures, his thoughts on this matter are purely speculative.³¹ Notwithstanding such qualifications, Rousseau never retracts his orangutan hypothesis and consistently voices scepticism over travellers' judgements to the contrary. By the end of the *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau manages both to humanize certain animals and, though it was clearly not his purpose, to animalize certain humans. Both sets of creatures living in the wild or savage regions of the world come, therefore, to resemble one another.

THIS CURIOUS FEATURE of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* becomes understandable when one considers the paradoxes underlying the tradition of noble savagery to which Rousseau's 'natural man' owes so much. Much of the admiration for New World peoples in this literature, as we have seen, concerns what is considered to be purely natural about them—

features that are often animalistic. Rousseau, of course, did not call for European societies to return either to the golden age he represented or, for that matter, to the condition of orangutans. The social and psychological changes that take place from one stage to the next, in his view, are too deep to allow for such movement. Although it is correct to note that Rousseau is therefore not a 'primitivist', it would be a mistake to conclude from this that Rousseau's treatment of New World peoples constitutes a fundamental departure from the noble savage doctrine.²¹ Noble savage thinkers, such as Lahontan, tended to naturalize and animalize Amerindians in precisely the same manner as Rousseau—that is, without arguing that Europeans should, in some sense, return to the forests. It is the particular characterization of New World peoples, rather than the claim that humans should abandon civilization, that most accurately typifies what can be characterized as noble savagery, the tradition of theorizing New World peoples that most influenced Rousseau. On balance, there is no doubt that Rousseau considered New World peoples to be simple, but not wholly natural. He makes clear in the *Discourse on Inequality* that Amerindians and Hottentots, for example, occupy his middle stage of anthropological development. The paradox of his treatment of such peoples is that of the entire tradition of noble savagery: New World peoples are meant both to illustrate a pure humanity free of artifice and culture (and sometimes, as with Rousseau, free of all sociability), while they are also occasionally praised for their conventional practices and norms, such as martial virtue or the eloquence of their speech. Since New World peoples are meant to provide a foil to 'civilized' societies, the manner in which they are portrayed in noble savage accounts tends to veer back and forth between wholly naturalistic and cultural descriptions; they are said to be superior or happier usually because they lead natural lives, yet at times their nobility reveals itself in artificial conventions that are less corrupt or more egalitarian than those of Europe. Hence, they are usually categorized as different in kind and also at times as different in degree, that is, as beings who are also artificial or cultural, but more simply and decently so. As we have seen in Rousseau's account, this is evident in the manner in which he categorizes most New World peoples as occupying his middle stage, but nonetheless uses them most often to illustrate features of the earliest state of nature.

Notwithstanding the influence of the noble savage tradition upon Rousseau, he moves beyond previous accounts by conceptualizing New World peoples within a philosophically sophisticated speculative history that aims not merely to contrast savage and civilized life, but also to hypothesize at length about the complex development of injustice and inequality. In this respect, Rousseau exerts an enormous influence over Diderot, who would appropriate much of Rousseau's conjectural history

and the incisive social criticism of European society that it made possible, while also rejecting the naturalistic (that is, the noble savage) elements of his philosophical anthropology. Moreover, like Montaigne, Rousseau was by no means indifferent to the imperial politics of his day. While expressions of sympathy toward the plight of New World peoples and criticism of the injustices of European imperial rule only infrequently emerge in Rousseau's writings, his contempt and anger toward the European subjugation of New World peoples is noteworthy. To be sure, Rousseau's early opera *La Découverte du Nouveau Monde* [*The Discovery of the New World*] offers not only praise for Amerindians' natural virtue and courage, but also a triumphal account of Columbus and the conquest of the New World, with the chorus declaring at the opening of the second act that the New World "is made for our chains".³³ This early writing (whose composition has been dated between 1739 and 1741) should not be taken, however, as a guide to his thinking about empire, given that it was not intended to offer a political analysis of imperial rule and especially since it precedes his turn toward more systematic and direct discussions of history, society, and politics. More significant is Rousseau's characterization of "the odious Cortés subjugating Mexico with powder, treachery and betrayal" in the "Last Reply" to the critics of the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (91). Responding to his critics' view that "barbarians" engage in conquest because they are "most unjust", Rousseau writes,

What, pray, were we during our so greatly admired conquest of America? But then, how could people with artillery, naval charts, and compasses, commit injustices! Am I to be told that the outcome proves the Conquerors' valour? All it proves is their cunning and their skill; it proves that an adroit and clever man can owe to his industry the success which a brave man expects from his valour alone. (91)

Accordingly, in *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau offers the conquest of the Americas as an example of the possession of land "by a vain ceremony". As he sarcastically asks,

When Núñez Balboa, standing on the shore, took possession of the southern seas and of all of South America in the name of the crown of Castile, was that enough to dispossess all of its inhabitants and to exclude all the Princes of the world? (366)

Instead, he argues, "labour and cultivation" is the only "real sign of property which others ought to respect in the absence of legal titles." (366) While this might resemble agriculturalist arguments in favour of the appropriation of nomadic peoples' lands, in the early draft of *On the Social Contract*, now known as the *Geneva Manuscript*, Rousseau wrote a footnote ridiculing the idea that lands inhabited by nonagriculturalist

"savages" should be viewed as open, unowned land. "I saw in, I think, a work entitled the *Dutch Observer*," he notes,

a most amusing principle [offered by Jacob Moreau in favour of the French seizure of Amerindian lands during the Seven Years' War], which is that all land inhabited only by savages should be considered vacant, and that one may legitimately seize it and drive the inhabitants away without doing them any wrong according to natural right." (301)

Although Rousseau chose not to include this comment in the final text, there is no evidence to suggest that he changed his mind about the common imperial classification of Amerindian land as *res nullius*, as belonging to no one.

Rousseau never pursued such scattered observations at any length in order to craft what might have been a powerful anti-imperialist political philosophy, and he thus has much in common with the many modern European thinkers who promoted the idea of a 'natural man', stripped of all artificial, cultural attributes, but without offering in addition a sustained criticism of European empires and defence of the New World peoples who were used as examples of such noble savages. It is a striking fact that the thoroughgoing anti-imperialist political theories and most robust accounts of the injustice of European imperialism in the history of modern European political thought were virtually always grounded by the view that humans are cultural agents, and hence the rejection of the very category of a 'natural human', as this was understood by noble savage thinkers. As I will further argue in the final section of this chapter, this should come as no surprise, for while concern about the oppression of non-European peoples under European imperial rule is not precluded by descriptions of New World peoples as (or as very nearly) natural and acultural, the extensive commiseration with non-European peoples and sustained criticism and outright rejection of European empires that we find, among others, in Diderot, Kant, and Herder, follows more easily from the anthropological understanding that humans as such are cultural creatures.

Diderot and Bougainville's *Voyage*

Diderot's presentation of Tahitian society in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* [*Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage*] subverts the tradition of noble savagery, even as it draws upon some of its classic tropes. Diderot was influenced by the writings that I have discussed thus far in this chapter, which together constitute an identifiable modern European philosophical tradition toward thinking about New World and other no-

madic, nonsedentary peoples. Like many of his fellow *philosophes*, Diderot viewed Montaigne as an exemplary hero whose scepticism, commitment to social criticism, and exposure of hypocrisies and injustices made him a model for enlightened thought.³⁴ Similarly, Diderot was also inspired by Baron Lahontan's *Dialogues curieux*, as well as other celebrated writings that idealized the pastoral themes of noble savagery but without any explicit reference to the New World, such as Fénelon's *Télémaque* (1699).³⁵ It was, however, Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*—in which the previous two centuries of noble savagery, and its attendant, distinctive form of social criticism, were distilled and transformed into a philosophically more complex conjectural history—that most captured Diderot's imagination. Unlike Voltaire, who wrote to Rousseau shortly after the publication of the *Discourse on Inequality* only to thank him sardonically for writing a treatise “against the human race”, Diderot was moved by Rousseau's account of the origin of inequality.³⁶ Indeed, the two discussed the arguments of the *Discourse* as Rousseau composed it. Diderot recognized the depth of Rousseau's vision, one that drew upon, but also went beyond, previous attempts at social criticism that were based upon golden ages and primitive, natural men. In light of this tradition of social criticism, his friendship with Rousseau, and his admiration in particular of the *Discourse on Inequality*, Diderot's *Supplément* is often understood as a standard example of eighteenth-century noble savagery, a work that presupposes its essential philosophical and anthropological assumptions, varying only in ethnography and locale—in this case, Bougainville's travel narrative, *Voyage autour du monde*, and the South Pacific islands, the New World of the eighteenth century.³⁷ In fact, Diderot's *Supplément* sets forth a doctrine of human nature, sociability, moral judgement, and human diversity that stands in sharp contrast to the tradition of noble savagery.³⁸ The political consequences of Diderot's immanent subversion of noble savage assumptions are significant because the development of his anti-imperialist political thought was enabled by precisely this rejection of the traditionally primitivist understanding of ‘natural man’.

As we have seen, when information about non-European peoples elicited genuine interest rather than contempt or puzzlement among European thinkers who were already critically disposed toward European religious and political institutions, the relevant ethnography became a weapon in the hands of such philosophers, poets, and other satirists. To the extent that such travel writings shaped the thinking of those who drew upon them, the variety of social forms and behaviour portrayed in these writings pointed to the relativity of European institutions, behaviour, and norms. In part, Rousseau's and Diderot's philosophical anthropologies sought to prove that the injustices and inequalities of European societies were not inevitable or permanent. For them, social, psychologi-

cal, and technological transformations over time demonstrate humans' self-construction and malleability.³⁹ Notwithstanding Rousseau's pessimism about humans' opportunities for the future, one normative implication of his anthropology is that humans can, within bounds, alter their political conditions for the better. Similarly, the discovery of the New World, in Diderot's view, promoted crucial advances in moral thought because its diverse practices enabled thinkers to discern that the roots of political injustice, economic exploitation, and social ills were not divinely sanctioned or historically inevitable, but "only the product of time, ignorance, weakness and deceit."⁴⁰ (193)

Rousseau and Diderot were both critically disposed toward the political injustices of their own societies, and their one-time friendship led to a close working relationship about such issues at the time when Rousseau was composing the two *Discourses*. As Rousseau would later explain in a letter to Malsherbes, he was struck by an epiphany—that humans are naturally good and that they themselves are to blame for the institutions that corrupted them—during a journey to visit Diderot, who at the time was in prison for having written allegedly blasphemous material. As Rousseau recalls,

I was going to see Diderot, at that time a prisoner at Vincennes; I had in my pocket a *Mercure de France* [the October 1749 issue of the popular periodical] which I began to leaf through along the way. I fell across the question of the Academy of Dijon ["Has the restoration of the Sciences and Arts tended to purify morals?"] which gave rise to my first writing. . . . Oh Sir, if I had ever been able to write a quarter of what I saw and felt under that tree, how clearly I would have made all the contradictions of the social system seen, with what strength I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions, with what simplicity I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good and that it is from these institutions alone that men become wicked.⁴¹

As Rousseau describes it in his *Confessions*, Diderot noticed his agitation at Vincennes and, after discovering the cause, "exhorted" Rousseau to submit an essay to the Academy.⁴² The *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* was published in 1751 and launched Rousseau's career as a writer and social critic. As Rousseau himself notes, in his letter to Malsherbes, this led almost ineluctably to the following *Discourse*, which provided a deeper philosophical and anthropological grounding for his radical criticisms. As we have seen, Rousseau uses New World travel literature most thoroughly in the course of explaining and justifying the pure state of nature in the *Discourse on Inequality*. This was a work that, as Rousseau states, "was more to Diderot's taste than all my other Writings, and for which his advice was most useful to me."⁴³ As they grew apart, Rousseau ultimately changed his view of Diderot's help, accusing him eventually of

inserting his own passages into Rousseau's text. He claimed, for instance, that Diderot had written into the *Discourse on Inequality* a passage that, Rousseau believed, made him appear harsh and overly critical.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding their eventual hostility toward one another, Rousseau had clearly influenced Diderot both by his use of ethnography about the non-European world and, philosophically, by his argument that the inequalities and injustices of human life were in fact humanly constructed (and, thus, amenable to human transformation), rather than rooted in the fundamental nature of human beings or human society.

Influenced by Rousseau, and most likely by Lahontan as well,⁴⁵ Diderot, too, engaged in a form of social criticism that drew upon New World travel literature, although, as I argue, his conceptualization of New World societies ultimately subverted the noble savage tradition, whereas Rousseau most often mirrored it. Diderot was especially captivated by the *Voyage autour du monde* [*Voyage around the world*], a travel narrative written by Louis Antoine de Bougainville, who had become the first French explorer to circumnavigate the globe, and the second European (shortly after James Cook) to visit Tahiti. At the time that he read Bougainville's book, Diderot was undertaking research for what eventually became his anti-imperialist contributions to Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. He had also recently completed two short stories, *Ceci n'est pas un conte* [*This is not a story*] and *Madame de La Carrière*, both of which had explored the many tensions between conventional social and religious morality and sexual desires and practices.⁴⁶ At first, Diderot wrote a book review of Bougainville's *Voyage*, within which he expressed outrage that Bougainville's visit to Tahiti was most likely laying the groundwork for French colonization in the South Pacific. As Diderot exclaims,

Bougainville, leave the shores of these innocent and fortunate Tahitians. They are happy and you can only harm their happiness. . . . This man whom you lay hold of as though he were a brute or a plant is a child of nature like you. What right have you over him? Let him have his morals [*moeurs*]; they are more decent and wiser than yours.⁴⁷

Eventually, however, the combination of Diderot's recent literary endeavours, the ongoing development of his humanism, and the early stirrings of his anti-imperialist politics led to the composition of a more substantial work, the remarkable dialogue *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*.⁴⁸ Diderot's *Supplément* makes clear his view that further contacts with the New World provided an opportunity to reflect deeply and innovatively upon human unity and diversity, and in ways that could be turned against European mores and European political power. In part, the ingenuity of his response to the "discovery" of Tahiti was to construct a complex

dialogue between two Europeans ("A" and "B") about the little-known supplement (written by Diderot himself) to Bougainville's published travel narrative—a supplement that contained further fictional dialogues among members of Bougainville's crew and Tahitians. The complicated structural and rhetorical features of the *Supplément* also allow Diderot to write in many voices and to offer a kind of running commentary throughout about relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, some of which ironizes the very myths that his fellow Europeans like Bougainville had constructed about Tahiti.⁴⁹

In the second section of the *Supplément*, in which an elderly Tahitian scathingly bids farewell to Bougainville and his sailors, Diderot affirms the shared humanity of Tahitians and the French and deplors the domineering behaviour of French travellers. Paraphrasing earlier comments from Diderot's review of Bougainville's *Voyage*, the old Tahitian argues, "This inhabitant of Tahiti, whom you wish to ensnare like an animal, is your brother. You are both children of Nature. What right do you have over him that he does not have over you?" (42) Fearing that future contact with the French will be violent and ultimately enslaving, the old man recalls angrily how justly his fellow Tahitians treated Bougainville's crew: "You came; did we attack you? Have we plundered your ship? Did we seize you and expose you to the arrows of our enemies? Did we harness you to work with our animals in the fields? We respected our image in you." (42–43) By presenting Tahitians and the French as kindred souls, or "children of Nature", Diderot emphasizes their shared humanity and, thus, grounds their comparison and moral equality; yet, it is ultimately their differences, in his view, that are most telling, for an encounter with a foreign society can serve to dislodge the prejudices of one's country, the kinds of prejudice that must be checked both to learn from other peoples and to formulate a tenable conception of human diversity. Hence, he explains, through character "B" in the *Supplément*, how one's understandable partiality toward what is familiar can be shed by reading New World travel accounts, such as Bougainville's *Voyage*:

The account of Bougainville's voyage is the only one which has ever drawn me to any country other than my own. Until I read it, I imagined that nowhere could one be as happy as at home, and I assumed that everyone on earth felt the same: a natural consequence of the attraction of the soil, itself bound up with the comforts it affords and which one doubts finding elsewhere. (40)

For Diderot, the underlying humanity of two societies serves to make their comparative study cognitively possible, while their differences help to curb the biases that are inevitably rooted in one's own national character. Throughout most of the *Supplément*, however, Diderot would go beyond such well-meaning platitudes to transform the philosophical rela-

tionship between humanity and cultural difference in the course of re-describing Bougainville's Tahitians.

In an early work, *Suite de l'Apologie de l'abbé de Prades* (1752), Diderot speculated briefly about humans' primordial existence. Such early humans, he conjectured, possessed an extremely limited cognitive capacity, were ruled by instinct, and lived in herds, rather than in consciously maintained societies.⁵⁰ As he wrote later in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* (a commentary on Catherine II's proposed social and political reforms for Russia), "Men gathered together in society by instinct, just as weak animals form herds. There was certainly no kind of primitive agreement." (124) Despite such speculations, Diderot generally viewed the idea of a "pure" state of nature, a condition entirely free of human arts, inventions, and institutions, as a fruitless category for political thought. Human life, for Diderot, is too closely bound up with a shared social existence and with ingenuity and skill to justify theorizing at length about asocial beginnings and animalistic primordial conditions. As he notes in the *Supplément*, "the bleak and savage state of man . . . is so difficult to imagine and perhaps exists nowhere" (69). As we shall see, Diderot's ambivalence about the category of a primordial condition and its consequent insignificance for his political thought are crucial both for his understanding of New World peoples and for the development of his anti-imperialism.

Diderot indicates several features of Tahitian life throughout the *Supplément* that throw doubt on an idealized conceptualization of the New World. Far from portraying Tahiti as an idyll free of all social or political problems, Diderot denotes features of Tahitian society that expose both the inevitable injustices of social life and the fundamental vices of human character. Although he chose to omit certain aspects of Tahitian society about which Bougainville speculated in his *Voyage* (such as human sacrifice), Diderot nevertheless follows Bougainville's account in describing Tahiti as armed for conflict with neighbouring "enemies", as prey to nearby "oppressors" to whom Tahiti must pay tributes of their own men, and as victims of environmental disasters and public health tragedies, including "calamitous epidemics" (45, 64). Diderot in effect discredits many of the classic assertions about the peaceful and healthful character of New World peoples that the noble savage doctrine propagated. Although he tends to praise Tahiti and Tahitians' character in the *Supplément*, in part to indicate that a set of non-European social institutions and practices are capable of being well-ordered and just, Diderot's writings on human nature evince his scepticism toward entirely laudatory or pejorative descriptions of the human condition. In the *Encyclopédie* article "Hobbism", for instance, after contending that both Rousseau's and Hobbes's conflicting theories of human nature are equally astute but

one-sided, Diderot asserts that both "goodness and wickedness" are permanent elements of the human condition (28). It should come as no surprise, then, that Diderot does not characterize New World peoples as naturally good. As we shall see, Diderot argues that most of humans' potentially darker energies can be channelled into productive, nondestructive outlets if social institutions and mores are constructed and maintained such that human selfishness and the common good are not entirely at odds. Diderot's Tahiti, of course, is meant to be a concrete example—and thus a potent symbol—of such a society.

Diderot's Tahiti: Appropriating and Subverting Noble Savage Theory

I have argued that Rousseau's writings on New World peoples fall prey to the paradoxes of noble savage accounts. As we have seen, noble savage theorists, such as Lahontan, left unresolved a tension between describing Amerindians as, on the one hand, hard-wired, instinct-driven creatures and, on the other, as partly autonomous, cognitive creatures who both understand natural laws and consciously put them into practice. Rousseau's use of New World travel literature in the *Discourse on Inequality* reveals that he too moves back and forth between a purely natural, primordial, and indeed an animalistic account of New World individuals and an understanding of them as primitive, but recognizably human peoples in a praiseworthy middle stage of historical development. Diderot, on the other hand, disputes the view that Tahitians, or any other set of humans, could possibly live by the light of nature alone, whether understood as natural instincts or natural laws. Although noble savage theorists celebrate New World peoples, Diderot, by adopting the critical possibilities of the New World travel literature, yet subverting the basic idea of a noble savage, continues the tradition of cross-cultural social criticism while also preparing the way for an anti-imperialist political theory that would go well beyond the ultimately inconsistent and, at times, dehumanizing praise of New World peoples that the noble savage tradition offered.

Let us turn, then, to the details of Diderot's account of Tahiti in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*. I examine four key features of his interpretation of Tahitian society that demonstrate his subversion of noble savagery and that evoke broader themes in his political and moral thought: the constraints and opportunities afforded by climate; social welfare as the purpose of social organization; the knowledge and practical skills that are needed to sustain social life; and, finally, the relationship between self-interest and social (or 'general') goods.

Constraints and opportunities afforded by climate. Diderot incorporates the diverse influences of a variety of environmental factors on human behaviour and institutions in his presentation of Tahitian society. In a response to Catherine the Great's assertion that only the "savages" of the New World are dominated by their climate, Diderot argues forcefully in the *Observations sur le Nakaz* that all humans are affected profoundly by their particular environments:

I find it very difficult to believe that climate does not have a great influence on national character; that the American overcome by heat can have the same character as the inhabitant of the North hardened by cold; that a people who live in the midst of frozen wastes can enjoy the same cheerfulness as a people who can stroll in a garden almost the whole year round. . . . This permanent cause will produce its effect on everything, not excluding the productions of the arts, laws, food, taste, amusements, etc. (100)

Nonetheless, in the same work, he argues that [the form of government and its specific legislation] can trump the influence of climate and other external forces that partly mould humanity into its diverse cultural forms. Accordingly, he declares,

Manners [*moeurs*] are everywhere the result of legislation and government; they are not African or Asiatic or European. They are good or bad. You are a slave under the Pole where it is very cold, and a slave in Constantinople where it is very hot; but everywhere a people should be educated, free and virtuous. (85)

Political practices, then, traditionally conceived as comprising simply legislation and government, provide a partly nonenvironmentally determined, autonomous control over the affairs of our lives. Diderot often combines an emphasis on the human agency inherent in planning and maintaining social institutions with the determinative powers of a variety of structural or environmental factors. Accordingly, he employs climate in his analysis of Tahitian society, but interestingly reverses the prevalent assumption about its effects. Tahiti's warm climate gives rise to a lavish agricultural bounty, he notes, thus affording its inhabitants a healthy amount of leisure. The constant battle of feeding and providing for a polity, the daily struggle to afford basic sustenance, is reduced considerably because of Tahitians' immediate environment. According to Diderot, a tropical climate itself, then, far from being an impediment as Montesquieu had argued, may fortuitously help to generate and to sustain an ethically fulfilling and meaningful life for Tahitians (66). Concerning New World inhabitants' alleged cruelty, Diderot speculates that European travel writings may be mistaken in their accounts. Invoking the primacy of survival over all other considerations, Diderot argues that humans probably become cruel only when their preservation is threatened,

and that such behaviour may be more common in the New World than in the Old because of geographical reasons: due to their proximity to entirely nondomesticated surroundings, he surmises, there must be a frequent need "to defend themselves against wild beasts". On the whole, however, he concludes that the New World inhabitant is "gentle whenever his peace and security are left undisturbed." (39)

Notwithstanding the structural factors in Diderot's thought, the voluntarist features of social life are most crucial for his understanding of society; thus, as we shall see, the most detailed component of his treatment of Tahitian society concerns the social planning required to achieve prosperity and happiness. For Diderot, in contrast to Rousseau, it is not the stage in human development that New World inhabitants occupy that explains whatever happiness they enjoy, but rather their ingenuity, the conscious use of their will to transform their fortuitous circumstances into a felicitous social condition. Unlike Rousseau, who attributes the peacefulness of New World peoples to their precivilized existence, Diderot argues that a combination of immediate geographical and climatic causes with long-term, thoughtful social planning enhances both individual and collective welfare in Tahiti.

Social welfare as the purpose of social organization. Bougainville and his crew were so overcome by the lush beauty of Tahiti, the warm reception they were given, and the liberality of the Tahitians, in particular their sexual freedom, that they recalled the fabled Greek island Cythera.³¹ Describing Tahiti with the aid of a familiar mythological referent helped Bougainville confront the radically distinct lifestyle that was led on these South Pacific islands. It also indicates the aspect of Tahiti that was most immediately striking, and that indeed is explored at such great length in Diderot's *Supplément*—the seemingly rampant libidinal pleasures of an exotic locale, evocative not of any real place, but only of the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Tahiti, then, was the New Cythera, *la Nouvelle-Cythere*. Diderot himself might appear to write the *Supplément* as if to convince his readers that Tahiti is such a mythic, island paradise, embodying the instinctual natural virtues of a primordial human life. He writes, for instance, that Tahitians faithfully adhere to the laws of Nature, instead of obeying false and arbitrary rules and institutions.

Diderot, however, slowly reveals the significant social planning that he hypothesizes might underlie the behaviour that Bougainville observed in 1768. The reader of the *Supplément* learns in greater detail throughout the dialogue how Diderot believes the Tahitians have *consciously* created and sustained a relatively efficient and just polity. The free and easy sexuality that is first described in a dialogue between the French chaplain of Bougainville's crew and a Tahitian native, Orou, in the third section of

the *Supplément* is later exposed as a highly structured and socialized set of activities implemented in order to meet the goal of a steadily growing population. Diderot's interpretation of Tahitian life is generally congruent with Bougainville's two chapters on Tahiti in his *Voyage autour du monde*, but it adds much more detail about the mechanics of Tahitian social institutions in an attempt to unearth the sociology beneath Bougainville's surface impressions. On the whole, then, while Diderot's analysis is clearly inspired by Bougainville's first-hand account of Tahitian life, his conception of Tahiti is also an imaginative reconstruction of Tahitian society. Diderot himself understood perfectly well the partly constructed quality of the *Supplément* and of Bougainville's original account. In one of many ironic asides, character "A" notes dryly that the Old Tahitian's speech, written of course by Diderot though presented within the dialogue as part of a recently discovered supplement to Bougainville's *Voyage*, strikes him as oddly European in tone: "[t]he speech seems fierce to me, but in spite of what I find abrupt and primitive, I detect ideas and turns of phrase which appear European." (46) And earlier "A" asks his interlocutor suspiciously, "Are you falling prey to the myth of Tahiti?" (41) Concerning New World ethnography, "A" remarks that travellers are bound to present exaggerated descriptions of New World peoples:

Since we're all born with a taste for the exotic, magnifying everything around us, how could a man settle for the correct dimension of things, when obliged, as it were, to justify the journey he's made and the trouble he's taken to travel so far to see them? (39)

Diderot makes clear, then, his own awareness of the partiality both of his account of Tahiti and of Bougainville's *Voyage*. Given the brief description of Tahiti in the *Voyage*, Diderot seeks to envision the broad range of moral values and institutional structures that might have engendered the social practices and beliefs of Bougainville's Tahiti.

In Diderot's account, Tahiti sustains legal, economic, and social institutions to effect the ultimate goal of enlarging the population. Uniform social practices and public sexual morality are maintained by domestic education. Parents clothe young boys in a tunic and girls with a white veil. After puberty, elaborate public ceremonies emancipate the young from rules strictly prohibiting sexual encounters and confer upon them their status as fully responsible members of Tahitian society (54-55). Both physical and intellectual maturity are needed, argues Orou, for men and women to participate orderly and responsibly in the Tahitian social system. That the entire system is oriented with a view to generating and raising children is clear from the prohibitions of sex between men and women who cannot conceive children. Genetically infertile and elderly women wear black veils and women "indisposed by their monthly pe-

riods" wear grey veils (60). Both veiled women and the men who consort with them are punished by public censure. Legal sanctions, which include exile to the north of the island, keep the young apart from one another (62). In order to ensure that raising children would not create an undue economic burden, Diderot describes a Tahitian scheme of distributive justice in which one-sixth of every harvest is donated to the community as a whole. This communal food supply is then distributed according to the number of children in each family. Diderot argues that by enacting and maintaining such a policy, Tahiti fosters an economic system that provides tangible, material incentives for producing and nurturing children. Far from being based upon a set of institutions followed blindly due to custom or upon a subservience to natural instincts, Diderot's Tahitians consciously mould the young in deliberate ways, maintain social and legal sanctions, and run an economic program of distribution in order to encourage specific forms of social behaviour.¹² For Diderot, a carefully crafted social and political process—and at times a rather severe one at that, far from a stereotypically licentious and carefree "natural" life free from the pressures of "civilization"—is crucial for sustaining a social life that is congruent with humans' most elemental behavioural traits and desires, such as our sexual drives. It is this last aspect of Tahitian society that leads Diderot to note on occasion that Tahitians lead a more natural life than Europeans. The entirety of his account of Tahitian society makes clear that, in his view, Tahitians live 'by nature' only in the sense that they have created and maintained social institutions and norms that do not conflict severely with basic human desires. For Diderot, the paradigmatic example of a hegemonic and 'unnatural' set of norms, practices, and institutions, and thus one of the central rhetorical targets of the *Supplément* is the Catholic church in France.

Diderot argues that by attending to "the value of every newborn child, and the importance of population", Tahiti strives to ensure that its land will contain as many people as it can sustain (63). As he notes, in assessing the welfare of France and Tahiti or indeed that of any country, one should attend to its wealth in human resources; in comparing the social practices of any two groups or specific polities, Diderot's Tahitian character Orou attempts to convince the French chaplain that if a land can feed more people than it has, its mores are probably deficient and, by implication, it ought to be reordered toward the goal of a steadily rising population. (47–48) In characterizing population growth as one of the ultimate ends of social organization, Diderot was not alone. Despite a few opponents to this view who presaged what is now a widespread response to rapid population growth and its social effects (most notably Thomas Malthus, who published his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798),¹³ a staple feature of a broad range of eighteenth-century political thought

was its insistence on population as the standard of a nation's economic, social, and political health.⁵³ Demographic estimates served as indicators of the prosperity, as well as the political stability, of a country. In this view, a nation free of wars, internal persecution, famine, and plagues while booming in trade and industry would lead to a steady growth in population.⁵⁴ Politically, this focus on population ultimately reveals the centrality of social welfare for many *philosophes*. The exploits of leaders and the wealth of the aristocracy or church establishment are incidental in determining a nation's political achievement; instead, freedom from persecution, healthful living conditions, access to shelter and basic sustenance, and other features of basic human welfare constitute the true measure of a nation's success. In the context of the eighteenth-century French discourse on social welfare and political health, therefore, Diderot's argument in the *Supplément* about Tahiti's demography, as peculiar as this might seem to a contemporary reader, constitutes among the strongest possible *political* praise that one could give to a society. By sketching the social practices and institutions that might have achieved the seeming lack of poverty that Bougainville noted, Diderot suggests that Tahitians have organized themselves toward enhancing their collective welfare. If Tahiti is a paradise, he implies, it is in large part a paradise constructed and maintained by Tahitians themselves.

Knowledge and skills for social life. Diderot's arguments in the *Supplément* about the role that "advanced" knowledge ought to play in improving society at first appear to conflict with his broader social and political thought. On the one hand, Diderot celebrates Tahitian society because of what he perceives to be Tahitians' successful social planning and cultural values. It is hardly astonishing that the primary editor of the *Encyclopédie* would favour an interpretation of Tahitian society that emphasizes its rationally ordered structures, practices, and goals. At the same time, however, Diderot notes explicitly in the *Supplément* that an analysis of Tahiti demonstrates that a nation can progress without many of the "higher" sciences, such as physics or anatomy, which the *philosophes* lauded and investigated in detail in the volumes of the *Encyclopédie* (56). That the leader of a project premised on the view that cataloguing and disseminating the most advanced knowledge can benefit humanity at large is also able to champion, in the *Supplément*, a "primitive" society seems at first a contradiction.⁵⁵ Rousseau's thought, in contrast, offers a consistently critical view of the role that the arts, sciences, and technology have played in enslaving and tormenting Europeans and other 'civilized' peoples. His celebration of the New World in the *Discourse on Inequality* accords, therefore, with his earlier arguments in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*.

Coming to terms with this potential paradox in Diderot's thought reveals his balanced view of the role of advanced knowledge in social development. For Diderot, such knowledge is neither the panacea nor the curse of the modern age. Thus, he refrains from using Europe's level of technological and social complexity as a benchmark against which to assess the cognitive capacity or social organization of New World societies. He rejects the view, in short, that the spread of European sciences and technology, or, in general, of European 'enlightenment', will necessarily improve the condition of non-European peoples. Moreover, unlike Rousseau, Diderot did not view sophisticated technology or other advancements in human knowledge as necessarily degrading. Advanced knowledge neither necessarily corrupts nor necessarily liberates—instead, political and social institutions, behaviour, and practices are the crucial elements needed for a healthy polity (Advances in knowledge are useful only if their social costs and benefits are carefully weighed and ultimately integrated into an efficient and just political system). For Diderot, Tahiti is worthy of respect, therefore, *not* because it lacks sophisticated technology and science (thus, Rousseau would argue, avoiding the slavish interdependence that accompanies such human knowledge), but because it has indigenously developed a set of institutions and a national character that are durable, efficient, and just—*this is the proper work of politics*, in his view, regardless of a people's philosophical, scientific, or technological development. In the *Histoire des deux Indes*, Diderot contends that "[a]ll civilized people were once primitive; and all primitive people, left to their natural impulse, were destined to become civilized." (206) Human societies, he asserts, tend to become further differentiated and are characterized by increasingly complicated sets of institutions over time, yet such changes are not necessarily degrading. As we have seen, Diderot shares many of Rousseau's concerns about the social and political conditions of European nations, but Diderot ultimately does not praise Tahiti because it lies in a fixed stage of human history before civilization emerges. Rather, he views Tahitians as a people necessarily in flux; their measured growth, not their lack of development, becomes the key subject of his praise in the *Supplément*. The Tahitians, he argues, "remain unperturbed by too rapid an advance of knowledge." (66) Thus, Diderot argues that the progress of human knowledge should be kept at a level at which humans can reflect upon the social consequences of proposed scientific and technological advances. Diderot bemoans the fact that Tahiti will become Europeanized through the coercion of imperialism in part because of his fear that Tahiti will fail as badly as Europe in accommodating advanced knowledge within a robust social and political order. The failure is not inevitable but probable, given that Tahitians themselves will never have the opportunity to develop their institutions freely and methodically to

incorporate such knowledge, as they have successfully done in the past—instead, they will be forced to plunge headlong into the labyrinth of the ‘civilized’ world under masters not of their own choosing.

Relationship between self-interest and social goods. Tahitian society, as presented in the *Supplément*, is in part grounded on the principle that personal, even selfish, interests need to be satisfied in order for political stability to take root and for justice to flourish. In Diderot’s political thought, the assumption that human beings care primarily for themselves or their immediate friends and family, even in Tahiti, runs alongside his frequent claim that the general good must always be preferred to the particular. Thus, for Diderot, one of the primary goals of politics, properly understood, is to configure society such that the conflict between narrow interests and the general welfare is minimized, for “[y]ou can be sure that whenever a man is as attentive to his fellow-creatures as to his bed, health or peace of mind, his hut, harvests or fields, he will do his utmost to ensure their welfare.”⁵⁶ (63)

In common with many other *philosophes*, Diderot held the view that individuals are fundamentally oriented toward their own existence and advantage and that this fact must be taken as a given in any descriptive or prescriptive account of society, politics, and ethics.⁵⁷ In Diderot’s thought, both institutions and moral values play crucial roles in reconciling personal with social interests. Tahiti is a laudable society, in his opinion, not because Tahitians have transformed themselves into altruistic agents, but because their shared traditions and social institutions appear to channel self-absorbed individual energies into productive behaviour and attitudes that benefit the community at large. Diderot’s emphasis on uniting the general and individual welfare is a crucial component of his political thought that finds a rhetorically powerful home in the *Supplément*. While Rousseau’s Amerindians live in durable societies because of their good fortune in inhabiting a particular stage of anthropological development, Diderot’s Tahitians maintain an impressive society over time by consciously ensuring that it is based on “self-interest”, the sentiment that Diderot considers, throughout his political writings, to be altogether the most “energetic and durable” (61).

The New World as a Device of Social Criticism: The Overlapping and Rival Approaches of Diderot and Rousseau

Inspired in part by the noble savage themes in writings by Montaigne, Lahontan, and others (such as Fénelon), Diderot and Rousseau engage

in a thoroughgoing criticism of European societies by pointing to the technologically and institutionally simpler and, in their view, less corrupted New World. In addition to works on noble savagery, many other popular writings used the trope of judging Europe from a non-European viewpoint. Perhaps most notably, Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (published anonymously in 1721) offered what became a highly influential critical examination of French society from an ostensibly Muslim and Persian perspective. In general, the increasing stock of travel literature in the eighteenth century provided the grist for ever more radical analyses of European life, for more varied and insistent evaluations of European societies from an ethical perspective engendered in part by understandings of non-European peoples.⁶⁸ For Rousseau's and Diderot's philosophical anthropologies, this comparative dimension is most conspicuous in their treatments of human needs and property relations and the sentiment of love and the role of women in society. Although a number of Diderot's and Rousseau's criticisms of European societies are similar in spirit, upon closer examination, this aspect of their philosophical anthropologies also reveals the profound differences that exist between their theorizations of New World peoples. To be sure, both Diderot and Rousseau use the ethnographic literature about non-European peoples as a critical foil against which the injustices of European societies can be brought into view. Nonetheless, the manner in which they understand non-European peoples, even in those philosophical contexts in which they instrumentally serve a critical function that has more to do with Europe than with the non-European world, has an impact upon how robustly non-European peoples can be viewed as moral equals. The nature of Rousseau's criticism of European life often draws upon a highly exotic and naturalistic understanding of New World peoples, the pernicious (if inadvertent) consequences of which will be examined in the next section. Diderot, in contrast, offers a social commentary upon European societies that simultaneously humanizes non-European peoples and that therefore accords well with his deep concern about their subjected status, as we will see in the following chapter.

Human needs and property relations. Rousseau argues that the true needs of humans are as simple as basic sustenance and rest: food, drink, and sleep are enough to satisfy the savage human (135; cf. 143). The most basic physical needs, then, are natural to humanity; all other desires are socially constructed and often harmful. In arguing against Hobbes's contention that the state of nature is prone to violence, Rousseau asserts that Hobbes's chief error was to attribute to humanity the need "to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the product of Society and have made Laws necessary" (153). Recalling earlier noble savage writings,

Rousseau links the development of socially engendered passions not only to a corrupt set of social practices, but also to poor physical health itself. In this view, a natural human is a "free being whose heart is at peace and body in health" (152). The creation and stirrings of human passions lead to unstable and unjust societies as well as enervated, sick bodies. Rousseau, therefore, identifies old age as practically the only real cause of death among New World peoples. He argues that civilized societies engender such strong passions and superfluous needs that the public health itself is in danger. Rousseau praises the strong constitutions and physical vigour of New World peoples and contrasts the maladies brought on by the luxurious idleness and dangerously rich foods of the civilized rich as well as the harsh labour and meagre sustenance that is afforded occasionally, if at all, to the poor in civilized nations (138, 203–4). According to Rousseau, in order to acquire basic necessities, natural humans learned "to overcome the obstacles of Nature" (165). In time, the establishment of a relatively sedentary lifestyle created the leisure with which the first "conveniences" were acquired; this, he writes, was the "first source of evils" in human history (168). Both the body and mind were enervated, and new, unfamiliar, and ultimately illusory needs soon became perceived as basic necessities. Perversely, with the softened characters of newly sedentary peoples, the pain of even contemplating the loss of these new commodities grew stronger than the joy of having them. As a result of the psychological changes wrought by a growing materialism—especially an increasing vanity (*amour propre*), a tendency to judge oneself according to the gaze of others—wealth eventually became the standard of comparison among individuals and groups (188–89). Luxury, the crowning height of materialistic depravity, results finally in depopulation. Farmers, squeezed by taxes and unable to manage a subsistence wage, flee to the cities, leaving barren fields, only to become destitute and to join the growing ranks of the wretched urban poor—"[t]hat is how the State, while it on one side grows rich, grows weak and is depopulated on the other" (206).

In a similar vein, Diderot castigates many civilized desires as "superfluous" and "factitious" (43). Thus, a deep suspicion of ever increasing commodities, other material trappings, and the attendant flourishing of selfish and degenerate passions in modern Europe runs throughout both Rousseau's and Diderot's writings. The most primitivist side of Rousseau's interpretation of the New World, however, posits a simpler, arguably *natural*, and presocial life as a benchmark against which the material excesses and passionate willfulness of civilized nations can be measured. In contrast, Diderot lauds Tahitians' *artful* (that is, cultural) efforts at maintaining a community that appropriates its surrounding environment prudently, for the benefit of enhancing human welfare rather than for the

sake of material production itself. Diderot, of course, often describes Tahitians as engaged in a "natural" life, but, as we have seen, he clearly means by this that they have planned and sustained social relations in a manner congruent with what he considers to be elemental (or natural) needs and desires. He celebrates the importance that Tahitians have accorded to leisure in contrast to the torment of excessive toil or wanton luxury in France. Tahitians themselves, in this view, have determined what balance between work and leisure is most conducive to a healthy lifestyle and polity. For Diderot, the narrative of development from a primitive to a civilized society is thoroughly social from beginning to end—it does not presume that human problems arise with social activity, for he takes social life to be constitutive of the human condition. The character of social practices and institutions, not the very existence of sociability, is the crucial issue for Diderot's analysis of both European and non-European peoples. The psychological changes and technological momentum created by early efforts to make humans' environments habitable eventually foster social conditions that generate inflated needs and conflicting, unstable passions. As Diderot contends, these forces of historical change drive "[man] well beyond his immediate objective; so that when his need has elapsed he comes to be swept into the great ocean of fantasy from which he cannot pull out." (66) Thus, humans' efforts to survive in harsh surroundings foster a set of needs, desires, and passions that compel them disastrously to attempt to master Nature itself. Diderot argues that Europeans have impoverished their souls and societies by adopting such a domineering attitude toward their environment. Accordingly, he argues in his *Observations sur le Nakaz* that

it was the necessity of struggling against the ever-present, common enemy—nature—which brought men together. They became aware that they struggled to better effect together, than separately. The evil is that they went past their goal. They were not content to conquer, they wanted to triumph; they were not content to bring down the enemy, they wanted to trample him underfoot. (123-24)

For Diderot, the natural environment is an "enemy" only to the extent that it raises impediments against human survival and flourishing. His central concern is not that Europeans have cultivated and appropriated their surroundings, since all humans out of necessity do this, but that they have done so precipitously.

Rousseau's and Diderot's concerns about private property also highlight their different understandings of New World peoples. Diderot had read in Bougainville's account that individual homes and the ownership of basic goods exist in Tahiti, but, in Diderot's view, Tahitians' shared values and communal institutions counteract whatever egoistic psycho-

logical changes and social inequalities arise as a result of a system of private property. For Rousseau, however, the opposite fact protects the New World from rampant corruption and injustice: it is the lack of interdependence, not the communal linkages among individuals, that ensures a "free, healthy, good, and happy" life, despite the existence of some private property (171). For Rousseau, then, Amerindians escape the ills of Europe's property relations for reasons largely outside of their control, while in contrast, for Diderot, a combination of environmental factors and humanly chosen and sustained social activities and institutions explain Tahitians' greater liberty and equality. }

The sentiment of love and the role of women in society. Another criticism of European society through the comparative lens afforded by the New World concerns the status and the role of women. Diderot and Rousseau both contrast relationships between men and women and their social effects in the New World with those in European societies. Judging the latter in light of the purported superiority of the former is, however, one of the few similarities on this issue between them. Their writings reveal radically divergent positions on the status of women and about how encounters with particular New World peoples' moral values could inform European notions about sexual relations. ✓

The *Supplément* is as much a work on sexual politics as on politics conventionally understood. Returning to the concept of property and its connection to the New World, Diderot berates Old World societies for treating women as either the de jure or de facto property of men. This "tyranny", Diderot argues, is one of several ways in which human sexuality is twisted into an almost criminal act in contemporary European societies. One of the central claims of the *Supplément* is that Tahiti is in part founded upon, and thus not inconsistent with, humans' elemental desires and needs. Thus, Diderot portrays Tahiti as a society at ease with the personal and social dynamics of human sexuality. In Tahiti, Diderot asserts, women are not confused with property and, thus, intimate relationships are more liberated and relaxed. The empirical evidence furnished by Bougainville about Tahiti, then, demonstrates for Diderot that a healthy, well-functioning community can exist with sexual mores significantly different from what the Catholic church, European states and their censors, and prevalent European social customs dictate are necessary to preserve a basic moral order. Diderot argues that in treating women as propertied objects, European societies have

confused something which cannot feel or think or desire or will . . . with a very different thing that cannot be exchanged or acquired; which *does* have freedom, will, desire; which has the ability to give itself up or hold itself back forever;

which complains and suffers; and which can never be an article of exchange unless its character is forgotten and violence is done to its nature. (50)

The confused belief that reduces women to mere property, then, in addition to laying the groundwork for monogamy, rules of chastity, and other social practices that, in his view, violate humans' sexual passions, ultimately constricts liberty, thereby violating human dignity.

The subtitle of Diderot's *Supplément* foreshadows his position on the sources of European virtues and vices: "dialogue between A and B on the inappropriateness of attaching moral ideas to certain physical actions that do not accord with them". For Diderot, a whole host of purported vices and virtues are social constructs that are born of the mistaken impulse to restrict instinctive human desires that are often amoral. In the *Supplément*, a litany of such qualities of character are analyzed from the perspective of Tahitian social behaviour and mores. Diderot argues, for instance, that jealousy is exacerbated in civilized societies because of "false moral standards and the extension of property" to an entire class of human beings (68). He asserts that the most socially harmful consequences of jealousy and other personal vices are minimized in Tahiti because of the more liberal approach that it has chosen to adopt with regard to sexuality. In the old Tahitian's speech, Diderot contends that just as Christianity helped to breed shame and fear about sexual relations in Europe, it now unravels the healthy sexual attitudes of Tahiti through its missionary work (44).⁶⁹

Diderot takes to task not only religious institutions, but also the secular legal code (in particular civil laws concerning marriage) and social customs that are bound up with the formalities and proprieties of aristocratic society (70–71). Thus, in the *Supplément*, Diderot relates a popular eighteenth-century story about a New England prostitute, Polly Baker, who is charged with becoming pregnant as a result of dissolute morals; the narrative takes the form of a speech purportedly given by Polly Baker at her trial in Connecticut.⁶⁰ Laws and social prejudices, she argues, change the nature of innocent, harmless actions into criminal offences. Instead, actions that truly "disturb public tranquillity" should be rightfully considered unjust criminal behaviour. And so, she adds, laws should be enacted that punish irresponsible *men*, the bachelors who impregnate, deceive, and neglect women and who even drive many of them to prostitution, not the responsible mothers who raise their children despite the social calumnies heaped upon them. Diderot notes the irony that although it is widely acknowledged that the nation as a whole benefits materially from the birth of children, single mothers like Polly Baker nevertheless become impoverished (57, 70–71). The social engineering that subverts the nature of actions and deems them to be sinful, criminal, or

improper, Diderot implies, is a manifestation of the exploitative and unjust values that guide European societies. To be sure, Diderot's presentation of Tahitian life also exhibits its share of socialized communal values. But he insists that in Tahiti such habituated practices and social norms engender individual contentment and the broader social welfare much more effectively than in any European society because of an approach that seeks to make social institutions and their values compatible with the most basic human needs and desires. Just as Tahitian society arguably structures itself in accordance with, not against, self-interest, it also provides socially productive and nondestructive outlets for humans' sexuality and other fundamental drives and passions.

Rousseau elaborates a distinction between physical and moral love that manifests the profound differences between his and Diderot's conceptions of women and their position in society. "Savages", Rousseau argues, take part in physical love, a sentiment born of the most general sexual desires. Their limited ability to think abstractly and their inability to make comparisons, to focus vainly on appearances, beauty, or merit, preclude them from engaging in moral love, a passion unique to the civilized world that focuses humans' raw physical desires to a specific, preferred object. And so the Caribs, who have "departed least from the state of Nature", are the least susceptible to jealousy and "the most peaceful in their loves" (158). "Now it is easy to see", Rousseau adds in contrast, "that the moral aspect of love is a factitious sentiment; born of social practice, and extolled with much skill and care by women in order to establish their rule and to make dominant the sex that should obey." (158)

The critical ends to which Rousseau and Diderot deploy New World women also differ greatly. While Diderot's contentions about sexuality, love, and women sometimes reflect the conventional views of his time, Rousseau more typically exhibits the norms of his age. Diderot rejects the treatment of women as property in European societies, in which, he notes, it is clearly men who wield not only the most social, but also sexual power.⁶¹ In contrast, Rousseau asserts that women deploy moral love to subjugate men. Diderot emphasizes the equal dignity of the sexes in order to counter the objectification of women; Rousseau endorses the view that women are naturally inferior and, thus, properly constituted to obey men.⁶² Although Diderot and Rousseau, then, portray sexual relations in European societies as inferior to those found in the New World, they employ distinct moral vocabularies to explain such differences, and thus differ widely in their analyses and conclusions. Rousseau deploys Amerindians as instinctually loving creatures who are not yet ruled by the artificial sexual dominance of women, while Diderot chastises European patriarchal attitudes by celebrating Tahitians' consciously formed and

maintained sexual morality, one that, he believes, comes closer to affirming women's humanity. Overall, the contrast with Diderot's account of sexuality in New World societies is striking, for Rousseau's naturalized Amerindians can do *nothing but* engage in physical love. Diderot's Tahitians, on the other hand, form and maintain moral values and social institutions that accord with humans' sexual passions.

The intellectual cross-cultural encounters that New World travel literature brought about in Europe from the late fifteenth century onward yield an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, the rise of comparative social theory and a growing interest in foreign peoples for their own sake helped to create an awareness of the complexity of non-European societies.⁶³ On the other hand, the theme of the exotic noble savage remained strong throughout the eighteenth century, as the writings of Lahontan and Rousseau make clear. Diderot, however, even when playing the New World against Europe for his own political purposes, acknowledges New World peoples as conscious, fully rational, and cultural beings. Also, as we have seen, Diderot satirizes his imaginative reconstruction of Tahitian life. Such ironic moments indicate Diderot's self-awareness about the idealized representation of Tahitian society that he employs in the course of his social criticism of European practices and institutions.⁶⁴ Most importantly, the substance of his characterization of 'primitive' life is almost always at odds with the mechanical and naturalistic conception of New World peoples that one finds most often in the tradition of noble savagery. Ultimately, Diderot's vigorous anti-imperialism makes clear his ethical interest in non-European peoples for their own sake, and distinguishes him from those who, however inadvertently, present a nearly animalistic characterization of New World peoples. Diderot developed his multifaceted and subversive perspective of New World peoples for the *Supplément* at about the same time as his anti-imperialist contributions to Abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*—indeed, some passages in the latter are simply borrowed from the former.⁶⁵ Before turning to an examination of how Diderot's philosophical anthropology and social theory shape his anti-imperialist political thought in the next chapter, I first conclude with some further observations about the ethical and political consequences of theorizing 'natural humanity'.

The Dehumanization of Natural Humanity

Diderot deployed the noble savage strategy of thinkers such as Montaigne and Rousseau in criticizing Europe through the lens of the New World, but his characterization of New World peoples challenged the understanding of humanity and its relationship to culture offered by no-

ble savage thinkers. Moreover, he went far beyond most noble savage accounts in attending to the predicament of New World peoples themselves, especially in light of European imperialism. While only strains of this concern exist in Rousseau's thought, Diderot's writings resolutely attack the injustices committed against aboriginal peoples. Instead of focusing almost exclusively on the problems facing Europeans as the noble savage theorists did, Diderot details and decries the plight of New World peoples. Noble savage theorists occasionally criticized the corruption that Europeans could bring to 'natural' and 'innocent' peoples. The dehumanization brought about by these thinkers' exotic characterizations of Amerindians and others, however, undercut whatever possibilities existed in their thinking for cultivating a genuine cross-cultural sympathy with historically real, flesh-and-blood aboriginals who at worst were being systematically enslaved or massacred. The problems that motivated noble savage thinkers were almost always those of Europe—hence their need to place foreign peoples at the level of an idealized, 'natural' standard in order to decry European materialism, corruption, and injustice.

Rousseau and Diderot are among the eighteenth-century thinkers who developed a multidimensional social theory, one that approaches the study of societies by recognizing the complex interdependence of structural and voluntary features of human life.⁶⁶ The understanding of the human subject that such an account presupposes is that humans are *cultural agents*; that is, humans are partly shaped by and situated within cultural contexts, yet are also able to consciously and freely transform themselves and their surroundings. While Rousseau acknowledges this to be true for humans at particular stages of development, Diderot theorizes humans to be *constitutively* cultural agents. In their own ways, then, Rousseau and, under his influence, Diderot theorize the manifold and intricate relationships between our inherited institutions, practices, and beliefs and our ability to scrutinize and reconfigure them. Rousseau introduces the term "perfectibility" to philosophical discourse, arguing that this is one of the defining characteristics of humanity, while also formulating a subtle and profound analysis of the ways in which humans are psychologically moulded and constrained by technological and sociological factors not of their own choosing. Diderot, too, recognizes liberty to be a constitutively human trait, while also appreciating the costs and benefits of physiological, historical, and even geographic determinants. For Diderot and Rousseau, humans' partial autonomy is a universal feature of humanity in addition to being the ultimate source of particularity, of the multiplicity of human life. Their social analyses point to the interlocking web of voluntary and structural elements that comprise all societies. As we have seen, however, Rousseau tends to praise Amerindians and Hottentots for factors beyond their control—such as the inborn stirrings of

natural pity—while Diderot theorizes Tahitians as individuals who have consciously formed and maintained social institutions that are in accord with their collective goals and natural instincts. Overall, Diderot conceptualizes humans as such (and thus New World individuals) as cultural agents, in contrast to Rousseau. While Rousseau usually uses Amerindians to illustrate the concept of a universal human subject, the pure natural humans of his earliest state of nature, it is Diderot's thicker and more particularized understanding of Tahitians that paradoxically prepares the way for a universal, inclusive anti-imperialist political theory, one that embraces both Europeans and non-Europeans.

Diderot's application of a multidimensional social analysis toward societies such as Tahiti is linked to his moral respect for, and his impassioned anti-imperialist defence of, New World peoples. As we have seen, despite Rousseau's potential for an anthropologically acute understanding of Amerindians, it is Diderot who attempts to understand New World inhabitants as cultural beings. We saw earlier that the influential and archetypal noble savage theorist Lahontan had been able to favour colonial policies that were explicitly destructive of Amerindian societies while also lauding these societies' practices and beliefs because his appreciation of Amerindians was ultimately very thin. Lahontan's account of the Huron, for example, rested fundamentally upon a *decultured* description of their life; in spite of his stated belief in their humanity and his arguments that they possessed impressive cognitive powers, Lahontan effectively dehumanized Amerindians in light of his often naturalistic representations of them, which denied their status as cultural agents. I have argued that Rousseau's political thought also manifests this connection between deculturation and dehumanization. As the *Discourse on Inequality* demonstrates, Rousseau moves easily from discussing the "savages" of the original state of nature to the "savages" of contemporary New World societies. Given that the 'savage condition' amounts to what Rousseau himself considered to be a nearly animal existence, his use of the New World travel literature to theorize the earliest state of nature results in precisely the same curious result created by earlier noble savage accounts: those celebrated as the most purely human appear as inhuman, instinct-driven, and mechanical animals.

In addition to the disturbing ethical consequences of portraying New World peoples in this manner, many eighteenth-century political thinkers believed that the very concept of a 'natural human' was indefensible. Today, significant contemporary gains in our knowledge of humans' biological inheritance and its complex relationship to environmental factors—knowledge derived in part through developments in genetics and evolutionary biology—indicate the incoherence of even the hypothetical idea of a human being shorn of all cultural attributes. We now know that

humans, far more than other animals, are dependent upon extragenetic mechanisms—not merely environmental stimuli, but cultural signals that partly order and structure behaviour and expectations—because the genetic information humans inherit is far more diffuse than the narrower and more precisely ordered and effective genetic cues given to cognitively simpler animals. Cultural norms and expectations, in other words, provide humans with information without which they could not function. Evolutionary history in part explains our unique dependence upon cultural knowledge and may well demonstrate the centrality of culture to the human condition.⁶⁷ A variety of philosophers in the eighteenth century argued in a more speculative fashion that humans are unlike other animals in that they rely upon far more than their basic instincts and partly fashion the world themselves, thus living their lives according to the conventional worlds of their own making (and remaking). Those who defended the idea of human sociability as a constitutive element of humanity believed that humans not only *can* but *must* live according to more than their instincts, and the environmental stimuli that trigger them, in order to function coherently.

Natural humans, humans stripped of their cultural attributes, would thus be, as Clifford Geertz writes, “unworkable monstrosities with very few useful instincts, fewer recognizable sentiments, and no intellect: mental basket cases”, far from the placid and well-ordered natural humans described at length in the *Discourse on Inequality*.⁶⁸ Like many contemporary scholars, Geertz mistakenly identifies the reductive concept of a natural man with what he calls “the Enlightenment view of man”.⁶⁹ As I have argued (and will continue to argue with reference to the anti-imperialist political philosophies of Diderot, Kant, and Herder), there are important strands of eighteenth-century social and political thought that take humans to be intrinsically cultural agents who partly transform, and yet are always situated within, various contexts. Strikingly, anti-imperialist political theories in the Enlightenment era were almost always informed by such understandings of humanity.

Rousseau, then, followed the tradition of noble savagery in denying a crucial and indispensable feature of human nature: cultural agency, an element moreover that, at certain moments in the *Discourse on Inequality*, he appears to deny to a whole set of peoples—the indigenous inhabitants of the New World. To be sure, given Rousseau’s theorization of perfectibility, he too believes that humans, in many respects, make themselves. But in his conjectural history, Rousseau does not theorize human beings *from the outset*—that is, by their very nature—as social and cultural beings. As we have seen, this has profound consequences for his interpretation of New World peoples. Rousseau’s need to provide empirical examples for a supposedly hypothetical category transforms what

might have been merely a heuristic (if implausible) concept of natural humanity into an ethically troubling and inadvertently dehumanizing rhetoric, one that replicates the paradoxes of the noble savage tradition. Pace conventional understandings of Enlightenment philosophy, since the relationship of art, ingenuity, and freedom to human life was a lively topic of debate in the eighteenth century, a number of Rousseau's contemporaries attacked his concept of a natural human in precisely this manner. As Adam Ferguson argued, with reference to the New World and Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, and as part of his own conjectural history of humanity,

We speak of art as distinguished from nature; but art itself is natural to man. He is in some measure the artificer of his own frame, as well as his fortune, and is destined, from the first age of his being, to invent and contrive. . . . If we are asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? we may answer, It is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan. While this active being is in the train of employing his talents, and of operating on the subjects around him, all situations are equally natural. . . . But if nature is only opposed to art, in what situation of the human race are the footsteps of art unknown? In the condition of the savage, as well as in that of the citizen, are many proofs of human invention. . . .⁷⁰

As we have seen, Diderot theorizes along these lines that humans are intrinsically social and cultural beings and, accordingly, conceptualizes New World peoples as such. For the eighteenth-century thinkers who explicitly or tacitly challenged the tradition of noble savagery, a multi-dimensional social theory—one that attends to the complex interplay between our structural and voluntary characteristics (which Rousseau undertakes in his radical analysis of European societies)—was crucial for an understanding not only of 'civilized peoples', but a fortiori of *any* group of human beings. Since Diderot understood non-European peoples as *cultural* beings, he therefore afforded them more genuine respect as *human* beings, a regard borne out most comprehensively in his anti-imperialist contributions to the *Histoire des deux Indes*.

An understanding of New World (and other non-European) peoples as social and cultural beings served as a key catalyst of the rise of anti-imperialist thought in the late eighteenth century. The exotic beings that classic noble savage accounts presented were too unreal (in part because they were presented as fully 'natural') to be considered as flesh-and-blood humans with whom one could sympathize and on behalf of whom one would challenge European imperialism. Diderot was powerfully influenced by the social and political criticism that Rousseau's device of natural humanity made possible, and he incorporated much of Rousseau's

account of perfectibility and freedom into his increasingly humanistic political thought. But Diderot also challenged the view that humans were at bottom asocial, and rejected the view that humanity could be best understood by attempting to reveal a core, natural human that underlies the various cultural layers of human life. For Diderot, human beings are fundamentally social and cultural beings, and he thus interpreted Tahitian society in the *Supplément* as a set of constructed social norms and institutions that are amenable to conscious human transformation, rather than portraying Tahitians as natural humans who live by the light of nature alone. The moral and political significance of this is crucial, as an examination of Diderot's anti-imperialist writings in the following chapter will show.

Three

Diderot and the Evils of Empire: The *Histoire des deux Indes*

ABBÉ Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, the man celebrated throughout Europe as the author of *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* [*Philosophical and political history of European settlements and commerce in the two Indies*], was an iconoclastic Jesuit who edited and wrote parts of this extraordinary ten-volume work, a broad survey of global political and economic ties from the earliest Spanish conquests in the Americas to the colonial and commercial activities of, among others, the Danes, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English.¹ In addition to providing a synthetic history, the *Histoire* also offered commentaries on European and non-European societies and launched numerous attacks on both the slave trade and imperialism. The intellectual genesis of the *Histoire* was in many respects analogous to the *Encyclopédie* that Denis Diderot coedited with Jean d'Alembert, for it included contributions from many writers. Unlike the latter, however, all of the contributions to the *Histoire* were anonymous, with Raynal alone listed as author of the entire text. With Raynal taking the cover, his contributors were able to make heterodox arguments that would likely have landed them in jail if their authorship had been known. Diderot, in particular, seemed to relish the opportunity to craft controversial moral and political arguments without the threat of expulsion or a return to Vincennes, where he had been imprisoned for having written allegedly blasphemous material. Many of the radical contributions, and indeed most of the anti-imperialist arguments, were written (as we now know) by Diderot in the 1770s.² Predictably, the *Histoire* was banned by the *parlement* of Paris and all known copies were ordered to be burned. That Edmund Burke knew of the *Histoire* and held it in high esteem (he called Raynal "one of the finest authors of the age"),³ and that, significantly, both Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder seemed to have read the *Histoire* as well and appropriated its attacks on the practices and traditional justifications of European empires, should come as no surprise. Despite its renegade status, Raynal's *Histoire* was one of the most popular eighteenth-century 'forbidden' publications, having gone through an astonishing thirty editions in seventeen years.⁴

The 1780 edition of the *Histoire* was published as ten volumes of text

and one volume of maps and tables. The "two Indies" in its title refer to the East and West Indies, but this signifies almost everything east of Persia and south of Russia for the 'East Indies', and the entire Americas (not only the Caribbean islands) for the 'West Indies', all in addition to what was then known of Africa. Thus, the *Histoire* was no less than the history of Europe's interactions with virtually the entire non-European globe that had been traversed, and largely subjugated, by European explorers, missionaries, traders, armies, and imperial administrators from 1492 onward.⁵ Diderot's contributions to this ambitious work were significant, amounting to roughly 700 pages in the 1780 edition. His contributions ranged in size from a single paragraph to essays of over thirty pages, and comprised a broad array of subjects such as (to take a sample from hundreds of topics) the history of taxation in Europe and its relationship to modern commerce and society; the songs, dances, and other artistic practices and crafts of the indigenous peoples of Canada; the religious philosophy of the Brahmins in India; and the social structure of the Inca civilization. In contemporary terms, Diderot's contributions fall under a range of subjects from cultural anthropology and social history to political theory and economics. Linking them all is a provocative and subtle ethical sensibility that contributes greatly to our understanding of modern political thought. ✓

I begin here with an overview of some of Diderot's key claims about the nature of imperialism and his criticisms of the European imperial enterprise, the presuppositions and further details of which will be elaborated more comprehensively in the following sections. In Book IX of the *Histoire des deux Indes*, Diderot writes,

National character is the result of a large number of causes, some constant and some variable. This part of the history of a people is perhaps the most interesting and least difficult to follow. The constant causes are determined by the part of the earth which they inhabit. The variable causes are recorded in their annals, and are evident from their effects. While these causes act in contradiction to one another, the nation is unconscious [of itself as a nation]. It only begins to have a character suitable to it at the moment when its speculative principles accord with its physical situation. It is then that it makes great strides towards the splendour, wealth and happiness which it can expect from the free use of its local resources. (IX, 1)

National character, a much discussed and highly contested term in eighteenth-century political thought, is for Diderot a kind of political culture that is best represented symbolically by a *mask*, for it is simply a set of societal tools that structures behaviour through incentives and norms toward (ideally) ethical, peaceful, and productive ends. Diderot stresses that national character "almost never determines the actions of individuals."

Rather, the "mask" of national character serves as a political culture that more subtly shapes and influences moral and political perceptions, practices, and institutions (IX, 1). The plurality of masks that we find among all peoples and social institutions also indicates a shared, underlying feature of human life, the "general will of humanity" for norms of respect and reciprocity, which manifests itself diversely according to time and place. The problem with colonial empires, according to Diderot, is that "[t]he greater the distance from the capital [of the empire] the looser the mask becomes. At the frontier it falls off. Going from one hemisphere to another, what does it become? Nothing." (IX, 1)

In the noble savage literature, as we saw in chapter 2, a decultured (and sometimes a desocialized) individual is a 'natural man', a being who ought to be celebrated for his independence, physical prowess, and pure uncorrupted instincts. Under the influence of such writings, in particular those of Baron Lahontan, Rousseau often elaborates his contentions about humans in the earliest state of nature (despite his own claim that most 'primitive' peoples exist in a middle stage between the state of nature and civilized society) by describing the supposed attributes of Amerindians and other New World peoples. For Diderot, however, the figure that most embodies an unmasked human is the European imperialist. Bereft of the social and cultural bonds that normally would have humanized him and that might have moderated his outlook and behaviour, the imperialist runs wild in the New World, clamouring for profit, brutalizing fellow human beings, and destroying foreign nations. Just as Lahontan's Amerindians are, from an anthropological standpoint, amorphous and undifferentiated wholes, Diderot's colonizers are, from an ethical standpoint, virtually indistinguishable. Still, the colonizers are human enough to act voluntarily and so are morally culpable. Diderot thus reserves much of his most rhetorically powerful and harshest criticism in the *Histoire* for their actions:

Beyond the Equator a man is neither English, Dutch, French, Spanish, nor Portuguese. He retains only those principles and prejudices of his native country which justify or excuse his conduct. He crawls when he is weak; he is violent when strong; he is in a hurry to enjoy, and capable of every crime which will lead him most quickly to his goals. He is a domestic tiger returning to the forest; the thirst of blood takes hold of him once more. This is how all the Europeans, every one of them, indistinctly, have appeared in the countries of the New World. There they have assumed a common frenzy. . . . (IX, 1)

Diderot discusses three ethical principles of colonization at the opening of Book VIII of the *Histoire des deux Indes*. When a discovered territory is actually uninhabited (and not simply presumed to be so), it can

then be colonized legitimately. If the territory is only partly occupied, then unless the entire land is necessary for the indigenous group's survival, the uninhabited portion can be justly settled. But in this situation, he warns, it is imperative that the newly settled community live alongside its neighbours in a peaceable and nonthreatening fashion. Employing again the symbol of a once domestic tiger now in the wild, a beast wholly freed from its domesticating and humanizing social and cultural environments, Diderot argues that

[w]ith . . . reason, and with no offence against the laws of humanity and justice, that [indigenous] people could expel and kill me if I seized women, children and property; if I infringed its civil liberty; if I restricted its religious opinions; if I claimed to give it laws; if I wished to make it my slave. Then I would be only one more wild animal in its vicinity, and no more pity would be due to me than to a tiger. (XIII, 1)

Diderot astutely deploys the language of counteracting perceived future threats—a rationale that played a crucial role in justifications of imperial war and conquest—against the Europeans themselves by arguing that it is aboriginals who can justly attack colonists who settle a partially inhabited land in such a manner that the indigenous community's future safety and prosperity are in doubt. He stresses that not only actual injuries, but the likelihood of future incursions into an indigenous group's lands or potential disruptions of their ways of life legitimate aggressive responses. "Every people", writes Diderot,

is justified in providing for its present and future safety. If I set up a stockade, amass weapons, and put up fortifications, a people's deputies would be wise if they came and said to me: 'Are you our friend? Are you our enemy? If a friend, what is the purpose of all these preparations for war? If an enemy, you will understand why we destroy them.' And the nation will be sensible if it immediately gets rid of a well-founded fear. (XIII, 1)

Finally, in the case of a fully inhabited land, explorers should at most trade peacefully and nonexploitatively with the indigenous population, who in addition are under no ethical obligation to engage in commerce, especially in light of Europeans' proven tendency to be untrustworthy in their commercial dealings with non-European societies.⁶ Along these lines, presaging a similar argument by Kant (who was likely influenced by this section of the *Histoire*), Diderot explains that "[t]he Chinese may be bad politicians when they shut us out of their empire, but they are not unjust. Their country has sufficient population, and we are too dangerous as guests." (XIII, 1) It is obvious, Diderot then implies, that Europeans have failed to meet any of these principles. Accordingly, he ridicules the

absurdity of the New World conquests in which Europeans claim lands to be their rightful property not because they are uninhabited, but because they are unoccupied by anyone from the Old World.

Diderot's understanding of European imperial activities as well as of New World peoples led him to doubt whether peaceful and just relations between the Old World and the New could ever be established. Diderot's attempt to imagine how a more noble and beneficial relationship might have developed stresses the value of shared learning and cross-cultural interaction. Diderot envisions a situation that might have been, a meeting of the Old and New Worlds in which small numbers of Europeans would settle among New World peoples and exchange both commodities and ideas. In addition to such commercial and intellectual exchange, through intermarriages, an entirely new people might have been created who would represent the fruits of this peaceful interaction: the European "men would have married the women of the country, and the women the native men. Ties of blood, the strongest and most immediate of bonds, would soon have formed a single family out of the natives and the foreigners." (IX, 1) Diderot realized, of course, that the chance for such learning to take place and for such communities to form had long passed and would not likely be taken up in the future given that Europeans in the New World and other non-European realms continued to arrive with "the imperious commanding tone of masters and conquerors" (IX, 1).

To appreciate further the nuances of Diderot's anti-imperialist political thought, the central themes of his contributions to the *Histoire* that bear upon his critical judgements of empire must be investigated. Accordingly, I first examine Diderot's flexible moral universalism that allows him both to trumpet the freedom and dignity of all humans and to consider a wide array of cultural practices and institutions (of *moeurs*) in the non-European world as rational, defensible responses to local needs and concerns. This will involve an analysis of his idea of a general will of humanity in relation to his related arguments about human sociability, the partial incommensurability of diverse ways of life, and the ethical and psychological dimensions of travel across borders and forms of hospitality abroad. Then, Diderot's anti-imperialist arguments will be analyzed by focusing upon arguments that European imperialism has been catastrophic for non-European peoples; the special role that commerce and trading companies occupy in imperial exploits; the destabilizing effects of empire upon European countries; and the idea that Europe itself is so degraded ethically and politically, and that its few genuine achievements are so fragile, that it is hardly a model of society that should be exported by force to the non-European world.

The General Will of Humanity, the Partial Incommensurability of *Moeurs*, and the Ethics of Crossing Borders

For Diderot, the "general will of humanity", the most fundamental ethical attitude that humans generally hold in their relationships, derives its need and efficacy in part from what he takes to be a universal and highly potent source: the emotions of "indignation and resentment" that humans share not only among themselves but also with other animals and that lie behind the vast array of practices, norms, and institutions that invoke "social laws" and carry out "public retribution". Hence, the "principles of the prescribed law" of civilized nations, the "social practices of savage and barbarous peoples", and even "the tacit agreements obtaining amongst the enemies of mankind" (the codes of honour and respect that keep relations among pirates and brigands, for instance, relatively stable and predictable, however arbitrarily violent their actions may be toward the rest of humanity) are all social phenomena that attend to our fundamental sense of injustice and our need as social beings to construct norms of *respect* and *reciprocity* that in content can vary widely over various times and different places.⁷ The universality of the general will of humanity, the humanistic core of Diderot's moral thought, rests upon the similar desires that all peoples have to create workable rules of conduct that allow particular ways of life to flourish without themselves creating harsh injustices and cruelties. The struggle that all societies face to survive, adapt, and develop is the common feature among humans that forms the basis of a cross-cultural moral understanding, one that Diderot contends European imperialists routinely violate. This "similarity between the physical constitution of one man and another, a similarity which entails that of the same needs, pleasures, pains, strength and weakness", "the source of the necessity of society, or of a common struggle" (XIX, 14) underscores the physical vulnerabilities that draw humans together and that provide a common framework for the most basic ethical precepts (which themselves may well differ over time and place). Yet, morality as such does not flow from our physical natures unreflectively and deterministically; to be sure, Diderot writes of an innate principle of compassion (e.g., X, 5), but the general will of humanity, while it relates to humans' physical similarities and vulnerabilities, is a feature of life that humans recognize, discuss, and shape as they construct and alter their social and political institutions.⁸ For animals, as Diderot notes in the *Encyclopédie* article "Droit Naturel" ["Natural Right"], the general will takes the form of a brute sense of injustice; for humans, it manifests itself

in the conscious development and transformation of social laws and practices over time. Diderot's account of morality in his later writings of the 1770s onward show the great extent to which he moved away from a rigidly materialist ethics and embraced a humanistic morality that placed human freedom at its core.⁹

The general will of humanity is the core ethical disposition, then, that animates social and political institutions, rather than a determinative set of laws that is meant to produce the same or similar social practices and institutions. As Diderot argues, "all morality consists in the maintenance of order. Its principles are steady and uniform, but the application of them varies at times according to the climate and to the local or political situation of the people" (XIX, 14). As he contends in "Droit Naturel", humans' desire to be happy, their ability to reason, to communicate, to transmit their "feelings and thoughts" to each other, and their equal vulnerability in the face of natural calamities and the unjust "hazards" that humans can inflict upon one another all point to a shared basis: "a general and common interest", by which humans can legitimately seek to prevent injustices and to protect basic freedoms. It is within the context of these broader claims that Diderot asserts "the general will never errs", a sentiment that Rousseau would later appropriate and transform in order to theorize the general will of a self-governing community based upon collective sovereignty, rather than a more universal general will of humanity.¹⁰

Clearly, for such an account of universal morality (which all humans are said to share simply in light of being human) to be plausible, sociability must be taken as an elemental feature of the human condition. We have seen already, in Diderot's presentation of Tahitian society in the *Supplément*, which was composed at roughly the same time as his contributions for the third edition of the *Histoire*, that the 'naturalness' of Tahitian life turns out to be, in his view, the result of a relatively complex set of social norms and institutions that were constructed with specific ethical and social purposes in mind. In the *Histoire*, Diderot criticizes what is surely meant to be a description of Rousseau's state of nature:

From considering the few wants that men have in proportion to the resources nature affords them; the little assistance and happiness they find in a civilized state, in comparison to the pains and evils they are exposed to in it; their desire of independence and liberty in common with all other living beings; together with various other reasons deduced from the constitution of human nature; from considering all of these circumstances, it has been doubted whether the social state was as natural to humanity as it has been generally thought. (XIX, 2)

Along these lines, Diderot continues, some have supposed that humans were naturally isolated and that the eventual creation of government by

the founders of political authority was partly a response to an artificially created state of war. "Thus it is", he writes, again tacitly implicating Rousseau, "that the first founders of nations are satirized, under the supposition of an ideal and chimerical savage state." (XIX, 2) Diderot challenges what he views as a fantastical understanding of human nature; as he bluntly contends, "[m]en were never isolated in the manner here described. They carried within them a seed of sociability which tended continually to be developed." (XIX, 2) The deep bonds and reciprocal attachments between mothers and children that result from nurturing and mutual care, the many signs of communication and rudimentary forms of language, a variety of "natural events" that can "bring together and unite free and wandering individuals", and the accidental causes that get humans to meet and eventually to seek sustenance together all demonstrate that humans have a "natural tendency to sociability." (XIX, 2) Both settled and nomadic tribes are examples, in his view, of the mutual association that humans form for, at the very least, the purposes of survival. While for rhetorical effect, Diderot occasionally describes "men without society" as a foil to the socially complex, oppressive condition of civilized societies (e.g., XVII, 4), his extensive discussions of New World peoples and other nonsedentary peoples treat them explicitly as social beings with consciously created and maintained norms, customs, and collective practices. In the language that I have been using to summarize such claims, then, Diderot assumes that humans as such are cultural agents.

The social projects that exemplify the general will of humanity vary widely, according to Diderot, and represent a range of responses to the challenge of institutionalizing political rules and practices that foster the norms of respect and reciprocity. Diderot states repeatedly that different political institutions should be expected and may well be legitimate given differences in population, the extent of territory, the impact of a variety of local opinions, and external influences. For these reasons, it is simply not the case, he argues, that only the character of rulers can legitimately account for a plurality of political laws and practices. Perhaps only in the most absolutist and despotic governments, surmises Diderot, does the character of the ruler truly wholly shape the polity. Thus, "[t]he science of government does not contain abstract truths, or rather it does not rest upon one single principle that extends to all branches of public administration." (XIX, 2) The lack of a predetermined, universal theory of political authority and the law makes a detailed knowledge of local circumstances a prerequisite for sound and just governance. "The state is a complicated machine," he asserts, "which cannot be wound up or set into motion without a thorough knowledge of all of its components." (XIX, 2) As we will see, it follows for Diderot that imperial rule over far-flung territories is unlikely to yield just political institutions; foreigners

will be unlikely to know the local circumstances better than indigenous peoples themselves. Moreover, no universally valid, privileged political ideology exists that could guide a would-be conqueror. Sound moral knowledge is not the province of one ruler, one nation, or one continent; moreover, it manifests itself differently over time and place in such a way that even the same actions are treated legitimately in distinct ways. "It is everywhere known what is just and unjust," he asserts, "but the same ideas are not universally attached to the same actions." (XIX, 2) In elaborating this claim, Diderot examines the differing rules concerning sexual behaviour and modesty in hot countries versus cold climates, the killing of animals in India, and when the killing of humans is permitted by the Iroquois and Huron. Rather than treating such remarkable instances of ethical diversity as fundamentally inconsistent or irrational, he concludes that "[t]he means that are the most opposite in appearance all tend equally to the same end, the maintenance and prosperity of the body politic." (XIX, 2) None of this implies moral relativism, for the general will of humanity itself is a universal ethical touchstone that embodies cross-cultural norms of mutual respect and individual freedom; rather, Diderot appears to balance a commitment to a plurality of cultural values and institutions with a humanistic concern for the equal dignity of all individuals. At times, his commitments to equality and freedom lead him to engage in cross-cultural judgements that point to the evils of non-European institutions, such as the fixed inequalities and oppression that he detests in the caste system of India, which he discusses at length in Book I (I, 8). Such judgements (which he makes against an array of European practices and institutions as well), for reasons that will be further explored in this chapter, offer no grounding, however, to the view that foreign peoples should be placed under European imperial rule. Diderot's moral philosophy is obviously nonsystematic, and his scattered observations and arguments about ethical thought owe much more in spirit to one of his heroes, Montaigne, than to the systematic and deductive ethical systems of some of his fellow *philosophes*, in particular those of radical materialists such as La Mettrie and Helvétius (whose *De l'homme* [1773] Diderot criticized at length).¹¹ It is in part due to Diderot's intellectual disposition that he provides no formula or easy recipe to determine how to balance the inevitable tensions between his commitments to moral universalism and pluralism, but the more substantive reason is that such moral and political judgements, in his view, require a complex and highly contextual knowledge of local histories, geographies, social norms, and other factors, and are thus not amenable to straightforwardly applicable, abstract rules.

For Diderot, aspects of the wide range of practices and institutions that constitute human diversity are amenable to strict moral censure by all

humans, as they so clearly and egregiously violate the most basic norms of respect and reciprocity. Among them, as we will examine further in this chapter, are those associated with imperialism and slavery, the latter of which Diderot condemns at length in an influential section of the *Histoire*. Yet, in addition to such cross-cultural moral judgements, Diderot believes that a wide array of practices, institutions, and ways of life (pastoralism, hunting and gathering), as well as peoples themselves, are not condemnable in this manner, and in fact are, from a moral viewpoint, *incommensurable*. That is, there are no cross-culturally valid, defensible ways to rank order them definitively or to judge them either as simply superior or inferior. The pluralism that guides Diderot's survey of the relationship between the European and non-European worlds in the *Histoire* arises early, in a passage from Book I for instance, when he praises the multiplicity of religious worship that Hinduism appears to accept.

Brahma delights in the distinct form of worship observed in different countries. . . . He is the intimate of the Muslim, and the friend of the Indian; the companion of the Christian, and the confidant of the Jew. Those men whom he has endowed with an elevated soul see nothing in the opposition of sects and the diversity of religious worships, but one of the effects of the richness he has displayed in the work of creation. (I, 8)

Accordingly, Diderot often attacks the lack of anything even resembling such pluralism among European imperialists. In a contribution that details the earliest Spanish conquests of the Americas, after having discussed the achievements of the "Tlascalans", an indigenous people of Mexico who had formed a republic before being laid waste by the conquistadors, Diderot concludes that the Spanish viewed even such complex and highly structured societies contemptuously because of the "national prejudices" that coloured their sentiments, judgements, and characters.

Such were the people whom the Spaniards disdained to acknowledge to be of the same species with themselves. . . . They fancied that these people had no form of government because it was not vested in a single person; no civilization [*police*] because it differed from that of Madrid; no virtues because they were not of the same religious persuasion; and no understanding because they did not adopt the same opinions. . . . This national pride, carried to an excess of infatuation beyond example, would have inclined them to consider Athens in the same contemptuous light as they did Tlascala. They would have treated the Chinese as brutes, and have everywhere left marks of outrage, oppression, and devastation. (VI, 9)

As Diderot's many contributions to the *Histoire* make abundantly clear, this is a judgement he makes not only with regard to the imperial officers

of the Castilian crown, but against the dogmatism that informed every European nation engaged in conquest.

Part of the problem with such self-centred prejudices, in Diderot's view, is that they are so often based upon a willful ignorance of non-European societies. As he notes above, even other technologically complex and highly stratified societies like China—that, on the surface at least, resemble European countries—have been judged by Europeans to be patently inferior and backward. In a long section on China in the early editions of the *Histoire*, the unattributed contributor defends Chinese mores, social practices, and political institutions as part of a broader celebration of Chinese civilization. For the 1780 edition, Raynal inserted a following section, written by Diderot, that aimed to summarize the critical arguments made against Chinese civilization by European travellers and philosophers. Part of the point of this section was to present a broader range of views that readers could peruse in order to make a better informed set of judgements about the nature of Chinese society. But even these two sections put together would not be sufficient for the purposes of truly coming to terms with China. As Diderot writes,

The several arguments of the partisans and of the calumniators of China are now submitted to the judgement of our readers, to whom it is left to decide: for why should we be so presumptuous as to attempt to direct their judgement? If we might be allowed to hazard an opinion, we should say that although these two systems are supported by respectable testimonies, nevertheless these authorities do not bear the marks of a great character that would inspire faith. Perhaps, in order to decide this matter, we must wait until some impartial and judicious men, who are well versed in Chinese writing and language, are permitted to make a long residence at the Peking court, to go through all the provinces, to live in the country villages, and to converse freely with the Chinese of all ranks. (I, 21)

Given Europeans' limited sources of knowledge about China, and that such sources were often based upon information from bureaucrats and administrators in Peking, Diderot concludes that at most one could make only very tentative and provisional judgements about the nature of Chinese society. Such a critical and modest intellectual temperament, of course, was precisely the antithesis of the hubristic mind-set that Diderot believed was at work among the most powerful Europeans who dictated the terms of contact with the non-European world—from members of royal councils and directors of the Indies companies to the authorities of the church and its religious orders.

Diderot's attempts at crafting relatively balanced accounts of non-European peoples, however, fostered other problems. He was especially concerned to counter the view—which he thought might be implied by

his many sympathetic comments on hunting and gathering, and on pastoral and other nomadic, less structurally complex societies—that the ‘savage’ way of life was superior to the ‘civilized’ condition. In response to this anticipated reaction to his writings, he contends not that we are unable to judge aspects of foreign societies, but rather that there are such a wide array of features in any one society that it cannot be judged as a whole to be definitively better or worse than any other.

It is not, however, that I prefer a savage to a civilized state. This is a protest I have made more than once. But the more I reflect upon this point, the more it seems to me that, from the rudest to the most civilized state of nature, everything is nearly compensated, virtues and vices, natural good and evil. In the forest, as well as in [civilized, sedentary] society, the happiness of one individual may be less or greater than that of another: but I imagine that nature has set certain bounds to the felicity of every considerable portion of the human species, beyond which we have nearly as much to lose as to gain. (VI, 23)

To assert that peoples themselves could be rank-ordered or that collective ways of life that structure whole societies, such as pastoralism or hunting and gathering, are fundamentally inferior or superior overlooks the fact that peoples are inherently too diverse and complex to judge in such a manner. Specific individuals could be happy or unhappy in a particular society, and, as Diderot’s analyses of many European and non-European societies evince, particular institutions and practices in any society could be ineffective in promoting social goals or might reasonably be judged as manifestly unjust. However, whole peoples and the fundamental social choice of how to seek subsistence, in his view, cannot be treated as morally commensurable. As Diderot implies earlier, it makes no sense to assert baldly that pastoral societies are fundamentally inferior to agriculturalist societies or vice versa. Indeed, it would be absurd, he implies, to make such judgements about nomadic versus agriculturally based sedentary societies given that their development derives not from a supposedly objective rationality or reflection upon the abstract choice of how to organize a society, but rather upon the contingencies of the local environment. One “becomes either a shepherd or an agriculturalist, according to the fertility or barrenness of the soil he inhabits” and, for either collective way of life, a great deal of art and creativity will be involved in fashioning and maintaining such an existence, given that “humans are endowed with a power of accommodating” themselves “to the various modes of life that prevail in every climate” (I, 8).

Since Diderot militates so often against European political and religious institutions and other pernicious sites of social power and while he also comments at times upon the harshness of a nomadic lifestyle, he considers (most likely in order to respond to Rousseau’s argument about

the life "best for man") whether a middle ground between what was so often described as the 'primitive' and 'civilized' worlds would be the best possible condition for humans. As we have seen, Diderot himself occasionally engages in a wistful reverie about the life between the excesses of a corrupt and unjust civilized existence and the rustic travails of the most rudimentary societies that might have been created in the New World had Europeans not arrived with the intention of destroying indigenous societies and replicating their own, highly imperfect, institutions abroad. Diderot often characterizes history as an ultimately cyclical set of events and revolutions, and thus he notes frequently in the *Histoire* and elsewhere that the seemingly most stable and highly refined societies at some point collapse and disintegrate (the fall of the Roman empire was one of his favourite examples), just as simpler societies are by no means destined to stay the same, but rather are sure to develop more complex and hierarchically structured social and political practices over time.¹² In the final analysis, while he appears to be attracted to it, he ultimately expresses scepticism about the idea that a medium between these ways of life should be a goal toward which all humans should work.

In all future ages, savages will advance by slow degrees toward the civilized state, and civilized nations will return toward their primitive state; from which the philosopher will conclude that there exists, in the interval between these two states, a certain medium in which the happiness of the human species is placed. But who can discover this medium, and even if it were found, what authority would be capable of directing the steps of man toward it, and to fix them there? (IX, 5)

This happy medium between the two—perhaps fleetingly captured on occasion as part of the cyclical process of history that Diderot theorizes—cannot be identified with any precision; nor could it be used as a model for a stable society. It remains in his political thought ultimately as a pessimistic reminder that almost all existing societies are highly imperfect and that any gains made by them are fragile, an assumption that, as we will see later in this chapter, undercuts much of the imperial ideology that aims to 'civilize' non-Europeans.

The discussions of ancient trading routes and imperial ties throughout the *Histoire* underscore the extent to which Diderot understood the crossing of borders and the interactions of peoples with distinct histories, *moeurs*, and political institutions to be continuing phenomena, rather than developments that were distinctive to the modern age; even so, the fact that such connections became global from the sixteenth century onward, and the sheer scale of travel in the modern imperial age, appeared to Diderot to create unique conditions abroad for voyagers.¹³ Along these lines, he defines "hospitality" as "the offspring of natural commiseration"

and argues that it was practised universally in the ancient world; the arduous and less frequent travels in ancient times depended crucially upon the hospitality of those in foreign lands. "It was," he writes, "almost the only thing that attached nations to each other. It was the source of the longest lasting and the most respected friendship, contracted between families who were separated by immense regions." (IX, 5) With increased contact among peoples, such "instances of humanity" have decreased. For Diderot, it is not simply technological developments, such as the compass and improved navigation, but the development of "social institutions", modern "commerce", and "the invention of signs to represent wealth" that led travellers to create their habitation abroad on their own terms, rather than relying upon the hospitality of indigenous hosts. He argues that the interactions among diverse peoples in the modern world are brought about by explorers, traders, missionaries, and other travellers, who are often "industrious, rapacious" men and who form

settlements in all parts, where the traveller takes his place and commands and where he disposes of all the conveniences of life as if he were at home. The master, or the landlord, of the house, is neither his benefactor, his brother, nor his friend; he is simply his upper servant. The gold that he spends at his house entitles him to treat his host as he chooses; he cares about his host's money, not his respect. (IX, 5)

The position of humility adopted by many ancient travellers has given way, in his view, to those who arrive in foreign lands animated principally by the spirit of conquest. The newly institutionalized forms of cross-national commerce, such as the chartering of trading companies that act as quasi-sovereign entities abroad, are among the eighteenth-century travels that Diderot has in mind. The ancient ethic of hospitality, "that sacred virtue", he suggests, has become obsolete with the advent of more modern, and more aggressive, forms of travel, trade, and exchange.¹⁴

Diderot's anti-imperialist arguments sometimes focus at length on precisely these violent, unchecked passions that are unleashed among crusading voyagers given the peculiar social conditions in which they find themselves, and that lead, in his view, to the modern erasure of ancient norms of hospitality. Under global empires, the weakening of hospitality arises not only from the technological means of European colonists and merchants to create their own habitations abroad, but also from their lack of a set of humanizing characteristics that Diderot views as essential for basic human decency and that he sees at the heart of social life, both European and non-European. Hence, in his efforts to criticize European imperialism, he attempts to craft a moral and political psychology of the imperial mind-set, one key feature of which details the disorientation that occurs when those who cross borders are unmoored from the ethical

frameworks—from the general will of humanity—that normally would have grounded their perspectives.

For Diderot, understanding modern, global empires requires an analysis of the character of individuals who regularly cross borders and “are fond of going from one country to another” (V, 9). To be sure, sheer coercion and prejudice—as Diderot notes, a whole panoply of intolerable social and political conditions, from oppressive governments and lack of religious toleration to cruel systems of punishment—could drive people from their lands (V, 19). For those who, in some sense, voluntarily go halfway around the world, it is more difficult, in Diderot’s view, to discern the motivating factors behind such decisions. Given his view that people are inclined to be attached to their homelands or at least to more familiar lands because of a fondness for such societies, the ties of blood and friendship, acquaintance with the local climate and languages, and the variety of customary associations that we associate with places in which we have lived and worked, he suspects that very powerful inducements must exist to get people to leave their societies (V, 9).¹⁵ In part, he asserts that states and the proxies of states, such as the Indies companies, play a central role in stirring up interest in global commerce through their efforts to recruit voyagers; as a result, “[i]t is imagined that fortune is more easily acquired in distant regions than near our own home.” (V, 19) In addition to the political forces behind this phenomenon, he acknowledges that enterprising individuals exist in every age because of a natural energy and curiosity, and that not only the thirst for gold, but also the thirst for knowledge may impel some to travel (V, 19). Overall, then, Diderot concludes that “tyranny, guilt, ambition, curiosity, a kind of restless spirit, the desire of acquiring knowledge, and of seeing things, [and] tedium” have driven, and will continue to drive, a certain number of humans to the farthest reaches of the earth (IX, 5).

Whatever the reasons for their voyages, imperial voyagers and commercial travellers (who often, in Diderot’s view, lay the groundwork for imperial exploits) are potentially dangerous, for they suddenly find themselves outside the network of reciprocal relationships and expectations that had once given them the cultural contexts for their actions, beliefs, and values—for their *moeurs*. For Diderot, while such contexts obviously vary according to time and place, these differentiating national characters are the particular spheres within which more humanitarian, universal moral ideas develop, those that enable connections across the various lines of difference that appear to divide humanity. The general will of humanity itself, then, weakens sufficiently such that the most egregious behaviour characterizes European conduct abroad; it is most likely for this reason that Diderot employs the image of unleashed tigers that were once domesticated by their social contexts and thus animated at least

partly by the bonds of reciprocity, but now run rampant in the subjugated lands of the non-European world. As we have seen in his discussion of the changing norms of hospitality, crossing borders need not always produce such destructive and violent results. Indeed, Diderot theorizes that the ideal relations in the modern world among European and non-European peoples would not have to be restricted simply to trade, but could in theory also involve some forms of settlement in already settled lands. Such settlement, however, would not involve colonization; rather, Europeans should settle in settled areas of the non-European world only with the permission of the host society and in the spirit of ancient hospitality that has been so often abrogated by modern travellers. In a discussion of how the French should conduct themselves if they ever get to reestablish regular contact with India, Diderot writes that all such settlers should become "naturalized" into their host country (IV, 33). A wise people, he ultimately recommends, will never encroach upon the liberty or property of the host country or destroy their places of worship, but will conform to their customs and laws. Diderot was under no illusions, however, about the likelihood of such travel, and indeed many of his contributions to the *Histoire* document in vivid detail how far from this ideal Europeans have in fact conducted themselves abroad.

On the Cruelties Unleashed by Empire in the Non-European World

One of the primary methods that Diderot uses to argue against European imperialism is to detail what he considered to be the catastrophic effects of empire upon non-European peoples, and to attempt to offer explanations as to why Europeans engage routinely in such barbaric actions in the non-European world. In a typical passage, he summarizes the devastation of European imperial incursions abroad as the work of an evil genius.

Settlements have been formed and subverted; ruins have been heaped on ruins; countries that were well peopled have become deserted; ports that were full of buildings have been abandoned; vast tracts that had been ill cemented with blood have separated, and have brought to view the bones of murderers and tyrants confounded with each other. It seems as if from one region to another prosperity has been pursued by an evil genius that speaks our [European] several languages, and which diffuses the same disasters in all parts.¹⁶ (IV, 33)

The nineteen books of the *Histoire* describe and judge European contacts with the non-European world by dividing this history according to the activities of each imperial power. In the opening book, Diderot considers

at length the British experience in India. He denounces the devastation brought upon India by conquest and trade, and notes that this is particularly tragic given what he deems from a previous analysis to be the natural plenitude and gentle mores of the region. "The rage of conquest, and what is no less destructive an evil, the greediness of traders," writes Diderot, "have, in their turns, ravaged and oppressed the finest country on the face of the globe." (I, 8) From a consideration of the indigenous politics of India as the British began to make contact with Indian rulers, he concludes that internally weak, and thus especially vulnerable, countries eventually fall prey to conquerors, but that this produces an even worse barbarism. The clashing customs, manners, religions, and languages of conquering and conquered peoples, which have not coexisted over a long period of time, produce a kind of chaos whose effects several centuries cannot dispel (I, 8).

In a chapter entitled "Oppressions and cruelties exercised by the English in Bengal", Diderot focuses upon the 1769-70 Bengal famine and attempts to determine whether the English can be held morally accountable for it. After a grim description of the amount of misery and death that the famine brought about, Diderot blames the English for ignoring the desperate needs of starving Bengalis after a drought led to poor harvests. Although noting that it is difficult to determine the merits of the charge that the monopoly of the British East India Company is to blame, "no one", he contends,

will undertake to defend them [the English] against the reproach of negligence and insensibility. And in what crisis have they merited that reproach? In the very instant of time when the life or death of several million of their fellow creatures was in their power. (III, 38)

While on the surface this appears to be a purely natural disaster, Diderot argues that it was the failure of the British to respond effectively to the miseries of Indians during the drought that yielded the famine. Mere misfortune, then, was greatly compounded by what amounts to a form of passive injustice, the failure to intervene or to act when one has the power to stop or to prevent further disaster.¹⁷ As Diderot concludes, "it is not to be doubted that, if instead of having solely a regard for themselves, and remaining entirely in negligence of everything else, they had initially taken every precaution in their power, then they might have accomplished the preservation of many lives that were lost." (III, 38) While there was no revolt against the British, Diderot argues that the affected Indians would have been justified in doing so and could have made a powerful plea about their oppression under the English. Hence, he provides a speech in the guise of a downtrodden Indian (one of Diderot's many sympathetic rhetorical attempts to give voice to oppressed imperial

subjects) in which the English are described as onerous masters who seek only to enrich themselves and who at times seem to deny even that Indians are "human creatures". As Diderot's Indian exhorts,

Deprived of all authority, stripped of our property, weighed down by the terrible hand of power, we can only lift our hands to you to implore your assistance. You have heard our groans; you have seen famine making very quick advances upon us; and then you attended to your own preservation. You hoarded up the small quantity of provisions that escaped the pestilence; you filled your granaries with them, and distributed them among your soldiers. (III, 38)

All this compares unfavourably to what likely would have been the actions of the Mughal sovereigns. Indians' former rulers, he suggests, were more humane and less grasping; they would have sought assistance from neighbouring realms and opened up their own coffers in the thought that by preserving their subjects they were enriching themselves. In contrast, the English weigh down Indians with tyranny and indifference, offering nothing to help Indians' preservation while taxing them, managing their commerce, exporting their merchandise, and reaping benefits from their industry and soil, which pours resources into English factories and her other colonies. "All these things you regulate, and you carry on solely for your own advantage. But what have you done for our preservation? What steps have you taken to remove from us the scourge that threatened us?" (III, 38) On the supposition that "every sentiment of humanity was extinguished in their [English] hearts", as a result of the corrupting influences of absolute, imperial rule upon the English themselves, Diderot suggests that wrenching descriptions of the humanitarian catastrophes created or deepened by the English are unlikely to have any effect upon them. Only the comparison he made with India's former rulers, he contends, could possibly sway the English, since it appeals to England's reputation and national standing.

For celebrants of the English government and its relative moderation at home, the daily abuses by it (and by its trading company proxy) and "the entire loss of all principle", he notes, are especially curious and disturbing. Diderot suggests that even countries that have achieved a less despotic form of rule at home are virtually guaranteed to act despotically abroad when they amass far-flung imperial realms. The English might have arrived in India as traders, he writes, but they are now absolute rulers, and so it is nearly impossible for them not to do wrong. He argues along these lines that the great distance of India from their country, the different climate and its effects both upon ruler and ruled, and the accompanying unlikelihood of viewing Indians as fellow subjects, are among the causes of English oppression abroad. Whatever the sanctity and moderation of English jurisprudence at home, one could not rea-

sonably expect the British East India Company to restrain itself according to even some semblance of the rule of law, for, as he argues, the whole purpose of the company's activities in India was profit. Ultimately, the English government gave the company "the destiny of 12 million people" in order to increase Great Britain's revenue by "9 million livres per annum" (III, 38).

In his reflections upon the earliest phases of the Spanish empire, Diderot acknowledges that there is a certain grandeur to imperial exploits, though, in his view, they are outweighed by the sheer moral blindness of such enterprises. Hernán Cortés surely possessed great qualities that stand as shining examples of his distinctive character; yet, the entire enterprise in which he and his countrymen were collectively engaged was at bottom corrupt, and so his faults, in some sense, are those of his people. As Diderot concludes, "[t]his Spaniard was despotic and cruel, and his successes are tarnished by the injustice of his projects. He was an assassin covered with innocent blood; but his vices were of the times, and of his nation, and his virtues were his own" (VI, 12). Cortés's impressive personal qualities and skills were put to use, in Diderot's view, in a fundamentally unjust and necessarily violent cause. Founders are, in a sense, imperious figures, but he argues that one should distinguish imperial founders, who aim to subjugate and rule a foreign people with whom there are no or few preexisting bonds, with the "peaceable founder", who is thoroughly acquainted with a country, its geography, temperament, and genuine needs, and accordingly takes the time to foster the institutions and practices necessary to develop a stable, lasting, and just society (VI, 12). Thus, while what so many have viewed as the greatness of empire understandably inspires some admiration—arising, Diderot writes, from the sheer atrociousness of such a project—the accompanying horrors also lead one to "freeze with horror." (VI, 24) Thus, in light of his repeated expressions of astonishment and wonder at the extraordinary military and political successes of the conquistadors, Diderot notes explicitly that his goal in writing the history of such exploits is bound up with a moral duty to highlight the evils perpetrated by his fellow Europeans.

It has not been my intention to be the celebrant of the conquerors of the other hemisphere. I have not allowed my judgement to be so far misled by the brilliance of their successes as to be blind to their crimes and acts of injustice. My aim is to write history, and I almost always write it bathed in tears. (VII, 1)

Given his objective, not only to describe the relations between the European and the non-European world, but to make clear the injustices that have so often marked these relations, he warns his readers at the outset of Book VII to be prepared for a litany of further atrocities, some of them

to be committed yet again by the Spanish, but many more by the hands of the other European imperial powers.

We are here going to display scenes that are still more terrible than those that have so often made us shudder. They will be uninterruptedly repeated in those immense regions that remain for us [in the *Histoire*] to go over. The sword will never be blunted, and we will not see it stop until it meets with no more victims to strike. (VII, 1)

By the end, once the spectacle of European empire has run its course, there will be no people left to oppress. The globe itself, he implies, places a geographical limit to the wandering madness begun by the Spanish.

One of the great ironies, in Diderot's view, of modern European imperialism is that the conquests and injustices that once afflicted so many European societies as a result of the barbarian invasions have simply been repeated on a wider scale by those who were once subjugated peoples. "The Spaniards," whom he notes were "the descendents or slaves of the Visigoths, like them, divided among themselves the deserted lands and the men who had escaped their swords. Most of these wretched victims did not survive for long, doomed to a state of slavery worse than death." (VIII, 32) In part, Diderot refers here to the slavery of the soul, to the devastation of indigenous peoples' spirit to govern themselves effectively. Those Peruvians, he notes, who have managed to escape death or the brutal tyranny of the conquerors, have "fallen into the most degraded and brutal state" (VII, 27). Their religion, which once elevated their spirits, and the other institutions that formed the context for their thoughts and actions, have been decimated. What results, suggests Diderot, is the "listless and universal indifference" to which "it is in the power of tyranny to plunge humans." (VII, 27) In light of this, dispensing liquor to such nations, usually for ill purposes to begin with, he notes, has done as much harm to them as the use of arms; we must rank this "among the number of calamities with which we have loaded the other hemisphere." (VIII, 6) It is precisely because of the destruction of Amerindian nations in Peru and elsewhere, and the resulting condition of the "few men who remained there", that Spanish imperialists turned toward another continent, in order to keep their fields and mines in operation. "[B]ut this mode of substitution," writes Diderot, "which was dictated by the refinement of European barbarity, was more prejudicial to Africa than useful to the country of the Incas." (XII, 27) For Diderot, all this suggests that the state itself is a monopoly of brute power that tends to be exercised over ever more spheres of life. Empire only strengthens this power and further creates such opportunities; it should come as no surprise, then, that it would want monopolistic power even over the trade of human beings themselves. "The government, ever intent on lay-

ing taxes upon vices and virtues, upon industry and idleness, upon good and bad projects, upon the liberty of exercising oppression, and the permission of being exempted from them, made a monopoly of this base traffic." (XII, 27)

The causes of the ferocity of the Spanish conquest and the reasons why Spain did not simply engage in a mutually dependent trade with an independent Mexico and Peru—ignoring, in this respect, "the true principles of commerce"—are manifold, according to Diderot, and they have much to do with the curious nature of the imperial enterprise itself (VIII, 32). The ease of their early victories over various Amerindian peoples, the natural pride of conquerors, and in general their thirst for riches and the spirit of religious fanaticism, set them on their path toward further imperial activities. He also notes that fear and panic, in addition to the difficulty of stopping the carnage once it began, enabled the brutality brought about by conquest. Furthermore, the increasing power of Spain within Europe that its initial successes yielded provided a further impetus for extending their empire. Finally, Diderot considers the possibility that "the sentiments of humanity grow weaker the more distant we are from our native country", especially when humans become ferocious as a result of being disconnected to any of the social, legal, and political contexts that might otherwise have moderated their behaviour. In light of this, the Spanish failed to recognize in Amerindians the cultural agency that defines humanity itself, "the image of an organization similar to their own (a similarity which is the foundation of all moral duties)", which he calls elsewhere, as we have seen, the general will of humanity (VIII, 32). Diderot counsels against immediately granting liberty to the Spanish colonies, on the ground that a hasty departure would leave newly independent countries barely able to function, given the extent of the Spanish destruction of indigenous societies. While liberation is a moral necessity, Spain has a responsibility, he argues, to renew its lands and peoples—not as an act of civilization, it should be noted, but to avoid the further oppression that would result if the Spanish simply left the Americas in its destroyed condition—after which somewhat regenerated societies could then be run by truly free people. Posterity itself, he intones, in an invocation to Spanish monarchs, will not forgive them until they make productive the lands that they destroyed and return happiness and freedom to indigenous inhabitants. Only after such an effort of careful decolonization, he implies, will a revival of indigenous rule be meaningful (VIII, 35).

Given the development of African slavery to repopulate the Americas, Diderot worries that Africa might become "the scene of our cruelties, as Asia and America have been, and still are". (XI, 9) Rather than learn any lessons from the horrors of the earliest conquests of the Americas, the

imperial powers seem determined, he notes, to repeat their calamitous practices among the peoples of Africa. Yet again, Diderot believes, the dehumanization of ever more non-Europeans creates ripe conditions for the most barbaric cruelties.

Savage Europeans! You doubted at first whether the inhabitants of the regions you had just discovered were not animals which you might slay without remorse because they were black, and you were white. . . . In order to repeople one part of the globe that you have laid waste, you corrupt and depopulate another. (VIII, 22)

At first, he notes, Europeans viewed their slaves in the Americas and in Africa as virtually animals, but then over time they could occasionally accept them as potential fellow Christians, a fact that only "redoubles" the horror of slavery since, having acknowledged them as human, they continued to practise slaveholding.

Another form of self-serving blindness, in Diderot's view, which afflicts Europeans and leads to enormous suffering in the non-European world, concerns property. Diderot argues that Europeans fail to recognize that the right to property is universal. In a discussion about the origin of property, he argues that in the first ages of the world, all humans had a common right to everything upon the earth. Unfortunately, he notes, this is the understanding of property that Europeans have used in their dealings with Amerindians. This is the only standard of "public right" with regard to property that they appeal to during their imperial endeavours, though in this case entirely erroneously. Such a standard, he contends, can only be applied legitimately "to the primitive state of nature, which the European nations considered America to be when it was first discovered." (XIII, 13) Thus, the injustices committed against Amerindians began with the mistaken notion that America constituted an open region, free of legitimate property claims. The protection that property should enjoy, Diderot contends, is no less valid when one enters a distant territory than it is in one's own land.

Isn't the nature of property the same everywhere; isn't it everywhere founded upon possession acquired by labour, and upon a long and peaceable enjoyment? Europeans, can you then inform us at what distance from your residence the sacred title becomes abolished? Is it at the distance of a few steps, of one league, or of ten leagues? You will answer in the negative, in which case it cannot possibly be even at the distance of ten thousand leagues. Do you not perceive that while you arrogate to yourselves this imaginary right over a distant people, you confer it at the same time to those distant people over yourselves? . . . You hold the system of Hobbes in abhorrence among your neighbouring countries, and yet you practise at a distance this fatal system, which

makes strength the supreme law. After having been thieves and assassins, nothing remains to complete your character, but that you should become, as you really are, a set of execrable sophists. (XIII, 13)

The only form of political rhetoric, or sophistry, in Diderot's view, that European imperialists hold on to consists then of corrupted principles and half-baked theories that are intended merely to provide an excuse for the instigation and perpetuation of mass injustices, such as the expropriation of Amerindians' lands. No genuine understanding of property rights, he asserts, could legitimize such seizures of goods and lands, any more than Amerindians could legitimately claim Spain on behalf of their kings.

At times Diderot steps back from such analyses of specific injustices, such as slavery or violations of property rights, or of particular episodes in the history of European empires, in order to assess the more general pathologies of conquest. He regrets that

[h]istory entertains us with nothing but the accounts of conquerors who have worked to extend their dominions at the expense of the lives and the happiness of their subjects, but it does not set before our eyes the example of [even] one sovereign who had thought of restraining their limits. (XIII, 1)

The peculiarity of this, in his view, is that a thorough examination of the effects of empire reveal that it is fatal to the construction of a healthy, long-lasting polity. Is it at all proper, he thus asks, to found settlements at so much expense and with so much labour in other hemispheres? A "vast empire" and an immense population, he suggests, are "great evils" (XIII, 1). They both offer the surface impression of greatness, but they cause far more problems than are usually acknowledged. Very small states over time tend to increase in size without violent conquest, Diderot suggests, adding that very large states necessarily break down into smaller units.

The efficient and just rule of a body politic depends crucially, he implies, upon a territory and population that are self-sustaining and that can be effectively governed. There are, in this sense, natural limits to a healthy political society, which the creation of empires violates with pernicious results. Accordingly, he asks, "Is not this extension of empire contrary to nature? And must not everything that is contrary to nature have an end?" (XIII, 1) While the increase of European governments' power through conquest might be destined to end, Diderot fears that it may be the fate of states nevertheless to attempt vainly to govern vast realms. At such a great distance, he argues, the effects of laws of the 'mother country' upon imperial subjects can hardly be great, and their obedience will likely be weak. Over time, he predicts, they will cease to be interested in the affairs of the metropole. Moreover, drawing implicitly upon his understanding

of the general will of humanity, he argues that the absence of "witnesses and judges of our actions necessarily induce[s] corruption in our manners"; outside of the domestic context of social practices and institutions, then, colonists subvert the very ideas of virtue and justice, even as they are called upon to establish such foundations in order to build colonial societies abroad. Hence, the directors sent to govern colonies, he charges, are tyrants. The administrators and other officials who run the imperial enterprise lack the "spirit of patriotism", roaming as they do from one possession to the next (XIII, 1). By "patriotism", Diderot implies that they lack any attachment to a community of persons and to the rule of law that binds a community, rather than to a dogmatic attachment to a particular country and a corresponding hatred of foreigners. In this sense, then, his use of the general will of humanity and the language of patriotism mutually reinforce one another, for Diderot attacks a kind of profiteering, destructive cosmopolitanism while also viewing a wide array of cultural differences across societies to be the manifestation of a shared, cosmopolitan commitment to the norms of respect and reciprocity.

Diderot expresses astonishment throughout the *Histoire* about the sheer level of cruelty involved in the imperial enterprise. As he moves from the activities of the Spanish and Portuguese in the non-European world, and the widely discussed 'black death' that many of his contemporaries attached to Spanish rule abroad (but withheld from their own governments), Diderot turns his attention to the English, French, Dutch, and Danes. Will they be "less savage" in their activities in the non-European world than the Spanish and Portuguese who have been so roundly condemned by the Europeans of his day? "Is it possible", he asks,

that civilized men, who have all lived in their country under forms of government, if not wise, at least ancient, who have all been bred in places where they were instructed with the lessons, and sometimes with the example, of virtue, who were all brought up in the midst of polished cities, in which a rigid exercise of justice must have accustomed them to respect their fellow-creatures; is it possible that all such men, without exception, should pursue a line of conduct equally contrary to the principles of humanity, to their interest, to their safety, and to the first dawnings of reason; and that they should continue to become more barbarous than the savage? (X, 1)

The rest of the *Histoire*, of course, is meant to show precisely that the other European states who sought to become imperial powers proceeded in the same destructive, inhumane manner. As Diderot notes, the countries from which imperialists come are by no means the model of wise government and virtue. Yet, one would expect some semblance, he believes, of moderation to have been inculcated in countries that at least on

occasion practised the rule of law. That this was obviously not the case led Diderot to determine how such seemingly 'civilized' persons could unleash such furious horrors abroad.

This change of character in the European who leaves his country is a phenomenon of so extraordinary a nature, the imagination is so deeply affected by it, that while it attends to it with astonishment, reflection tortures itself in endeavouring to find out the principle of it, whether it exists in human nature in general, or in the peculiar character of the navigators, or in the circumstances preceding or posterior to the event. (X, 1)

Diderot then answers at length that all three of these reasons appear to be behind the inhumanity of Europeans' actions in the non-European world. Humans who are free from "the restraint of laws", he argues, tend to be more "wicked". When they are "far from the effects of public resentment . . . no longer awed by the presence of their fellow citizens, or restrained by shame and fear", a "spirit of depredation follows" that manifests itself with horrible violence (X, 1). This, he implies, results from the aggression and violence at the heart of human behaviour that is normally conditioned by domestic forms of habituation and restraint. In addition, those who travel tend to be dissatisfied with their lot in life, or they are sufficiently ambitious "to entertain a contempt for life, and to expose themselves to infinite dangers" in the hope of gaining power and riches. The expense of travel, the sufferings involved, and the need to justify such costly voyages all contributed to the rapacious and greedy attitude of voyagers. Hence, the specific character of voyagers themselves led in part to nearly ceaseless violence abroad. For them, the "New World" was thus "a rich prey to be devoured" (X, 1). Finally, in the ruling circles of Europe, divisions and competition among royal houses exacerbated, in Diderot's opinion, the cruel ambitions of imperialists abroad.

Moreover, there was little oversight of imperial administrators and travellers by governing officials in the metropole, who were often indifferent to what took place overseas (X, 1). In general, Diderot argues, the very idea of building empires is bound to be inconsistent with constructing and maintaining peaceful, just societies.

Is it possible even in our days to rule nations that are separated by immense seas from the mother country in the same manner as subjects who are situated immediately under the eye of the sovereign? Since distant posts are never solicited and filled, unless by indigent, rapacious men, without talents or morals, strangers to all sentiment of honour, and to every idea of equity, the refuse of the higher ranks of the state, must we not consider the future splendour of the colonies as a chimerical notion; and will not the future happiness of these re-

gions be a phenomenon even more astonishing than their first devastation? (X, 1)

Given the litany of bloodthirsty, greedy, and shortsighted European actions abroad that Diderot so often presents in the *Histoire*, he notes his frustration at the unwillingness of those with any power in the capitals of Europe to heed his warnings and to decolonize, even though it would ultimately be not only in the interests of humanity, but also in their own best interests. Given that the lot of both Europeans and non-Europeans is never truly improved by any of the imperial activities overseas, then breaking the chains that tie Europe to such colonies, in his view, is imperative. Such advice, he realized, would continue to be ignored by those who had much to profit in the short term from imperial aggression abroad. "I am much afraid that my voice has only exclaimed, and will only exclaim, in the desert." (X, 1)

Trading Companies and Conquest: On Commerce and Imperial Rule

For Diderot, the phenomenon of modern imperialism was increasingly a commercial affair. While it was clear that religious conversion, European geopolitics, and notions of improving or civilizing other peoples, among others, all continued to play significant roles in the imperial enterprise, Diderot understood that the growing importance of the European trading companies and of the profit-oriented, commercial side of empire demanded an analysis of the role of commerce in the global affairs of his day.¹⁸ Hence, in a discussion of the importance of global commerce in English society, Diderot jokes that

[t]he passion for trade exerts such influence over you [the English] that even your philosophers are governed by it. The celebrated Mr. Boyle used to say that it would be a commendable action to preach Christianity to the savages because, were they to know only as much of it to convince them of their obligation to wear clothes, it would prove of great service to English manufacturers. (X, 13)

While the eighteenth century is often interpreted as an age that celebrated commerce as a way of inducing peace and industry among otherwise aggressive and warlike European states,¹⁹ Diderot's view of commerce was ambivalent. On the one hand, it could indeed bring about relations among distant peoples and promote social ties and productive industry (I, intro.; XII, 24). On the other hand, it was the impetus behind so many of the cruel and destructive practices of the imperial powers, who either misunderstood or chose to ignore the true benefits

that a well-arranged global commerce could ideally promote. The whole range of Diderot's positive commentary upon commerce in the *Histoire* makes clear that the beneficial aspects of commerce usually refer to *commerce* understood broadly as communication, interaction, and exchange (not only of goods, but also of ideas). The English and French word *commerce* can mask the ways in which this concept refers both to communication or interaction and to economic barter, trade, and industry. In ancient and medieval writings, the Latin *commercium* was similarly multifaceted.²⁰ The idea that 'the Enlightenment' as such ultimately provided the justifications for modern market-oriented commerce masks the rich ambiguity of the concept of commerce that many of the most prominent eighteenth-century thinkers self-consciously exploited as they sought to analyze the emergence of global commerce in its multiple forms. Diderot's ambivalent understanding of commerce in the *Histoire* shapes his discussion of the relationship between travel, trade, profit, and empire, thereby providing another plank for his criticism of empire. His anti-imperialist arguments along these lines focus on the violent, unchecked passions unleashed among commercial voyagers and other imperialists due to their "thirst for gold" (IX, 1).

In a discussion about English traders in India, Diderot argues that the thirst for gold did not take hold at first, as the English usually formed small trading settlements with the consent of local Indian governments. The English numbers were small, and in this period, it seems, they often respected the ancient norms of hospitality. Diderot even goes on to state that the earliest expeditions to the East Indies were "nothing more than the enterprises of humane and fair traders" (III, 2). The escalation toward the blood-soaked frenzy of tigers returning to the forest began very shortly thereafter, and it was instigated, in his view, largely by the competition among European powers in the East Indies. The competition that was sometimes said in eighteenth-century writings to yield "frugality, economy, moderation, work, wisdom, tranquillity, order, and rule" brought instead a fierce desire to build exclusive commercial ties to the non-European world.²¹ "They thought that it was difficult to acquire great riches without great injustice, and that, in order to surpass or even equal the nations they had censured, they must pursue the same conduct. This was an error which led them into false measures." (III, 2) Such ambitions released the English from the ties of social norms and instead yielded the imperial mind-set previously described, not only with its rank injustices but also, as Diderot likes to point out, with a precarious hold upon the gains achieved by such violence, fraud, and deceit. While prosperity might come faster with injustice, he notes, the authority and the possessions that follow from it are fragile precisely because of the means used to acquire them. Thus, both out of a concern for indigenous nations

and for European nations' own welfare, Diderot asserts that he "can never be convinced that it is a matter of indifference whether we make our appearance before foreign nations in the character of infernal spirits, or in that of celestial beings." (III, 2) Empire had become an increasingly commercial affair—ultimately, "the passion for trade" was the instigating factor behind an increasing number of imperial ventures, and commerce was the "sole object" of the many wars and violent conflicts among imperial powers (X, 13).

The false confidence in a nation's powers that global commerce encourages, in Diderot's view, induces political instability and violence, as European states become increasingly hostile and arrogant toward one another. The idiotic rivalry among European nations, as he describes it, each of which appears to think that its prosperity somehow requires the poverty and weakness of all the others, is sadly not lessened by the painful experience of continual wars and animosities. Far from fostering the cooperative bonds of mutual commerce and practising *le doux commerce*, European nations at most pay lip service to the ideals of peace, while acting in direct contradiction to them. "[W]e hear on every side," he writes,

nations, especially commercial ones, crying out for peace, while they still continue to conduct themselves toward one another in a way that excludes them from ever obtaining that blessing. They will all aspire to happiness, and each of them would enjoy it alone. They will all equally hold tyranny in contempt, and they will all exercise it upon their neighbours. They will all consider the idea of a universal monarchy as extravagant, and yet most of them will act as if they had either attained it or were threatened by it. (XII, 14)

The battles and tensions over global trade and colonization exacerbate the already fragile relationships among European states, then, which even in the best of times could come apart easily because of the hazards intrinsic to international politics, with its lack of a common "tribunal" to which all nations could submit. After reflecting upon the social, economic, and political damage done to European nations themselves by the growth of commerce, Diderot concludes with a discussion about how commerce and imperial pursuits have ultimately weakened and subverted Dutch republicanism. This makes it more difficult, he regrets, for supporters of republicanism outside of Holland to make their case, and so the zeal for creating and maintaining empires abroad also weakens the chances for democratization in Europe. Diderot darkly concludes that it may be the case that "the destiny of every commercial nation [*nation commerçante*] is to be rich, careless, corrupt, and dominated." (II, 27)

For Diderot, economic monopolies over trading routes abroad and political monopolies over sovereignty within European societies went hand

in hand. Absolute authority in one sphere merged easily with tyrannical control in another. Indeed, the political character of his discussions of commerce stems from this connection; his criticisms of the monopolies of quasi-sovereign imperial companies are often only thinly veiled attacks upon the corrupt and unjust political authority of European sovereigns who lord over both the unfortunate inhabitants of European societies and the inhabitants of an increasing number of far-flung, non-European societies. Diderot contends that monarchs, ministers of state, and commercial chieftains, who already collectively exercise an overwhelming sovereign power, now seek to enlarge this power, while disingenuously justifying imperial strength abroad as a means to safeguard domestic security. Addressing European sovereigns, Diderot argues that the jealous and cruel ambition of European powers who seek to monopolize trading privileges and imperial rule is the real

motive for which you take up arms, and massacre each other! It is to determine which of you shall retain the exclusive privilege of tyranny, and the monopoly of prosperity. I am aware that you colour this atrocious project with the pretence of providing for your own security: but how can you be credited, when it is evident that you set no bounds to your ambition; and that the more powerful you are, the more imperious you become? (V, 4)

Diderot's tone throughout the *Histoire* on such matters is pessimistic; he continually describes European governments as largely unaccountable to the interests of their subjects and increasingly corrupted by wealth. Commenting upon the lively debates in England about whether the East India Company's charter would be renewed in 1780, he notes that everything seems to suggest that a renewal would be enacted by Parliament, despite the dreadful effects that such imperial and commercial power has had upon both the English and the Indian nations. The commercial profits that benefit the political class are large enough, he implies, to rule out any possibility of reforming the East India Company; thus, "[g]overnment, after having secured for itself the major part of the produce of these conquests, will again deliver up these regions to the oppressive yoke of monopoly." (III, 41)

In a 'speech' to the English that Diderot contributed to the *Histoire*, he not only lists a variety of the injustices committed against Indians and highlights the failed efforts of those who plead their case in England, but also prophesies that the English will continue to oppress India and should therefore expect to be avenged.

The horrid spectacle of so many immense regions pillaged, ravaged, or reduced to the most cruel servitude will be displayed before us again. The earth now covers the carcasses of three million humans who have perished through your

[British] fault or neglect [a reference primarily to the Indian famines in company territories in the 1770s, which Diderot discussed earlier in detail]: they will cry out to Heaven and to the earth for vengeance, and will obtain it. (III, 41)

Diderot balances such appeals to the commercial, imperial classes—arguing that based only on their self-interest, they should understand that they will eventually come to their ruin since they will be forced at some point to answer for their oppression—with the grim reality that, for now, they have bought with gold the silence of legislators and the courts. Diderot's final rhetorical appeal, when he has outlined the depths of injustice, is almost always to the selfishness of the powerful. However, in the case of commercial zealots who build empires abroad for European states, he knows that even this tactic may well be ineffectual, for global trade does not depend necessarily upon protecting commercial gains in any one region. Since new markets and new lands for pillage can always be found, global economic arrangements give powerful interests no incentive to cultivate any one relationship. Accordingly, Diderot characterizes the monopolists' "creed" as a paean to globalizing ventures that lack any rootedness in particular communities:

Let my country perish, let the region I command also perish; perish the citizen and the foreigner; perish my associates, provided that I can enrich myself with his spoils. All parts of the universe are alike to me. When I have laid waste, exhausted, and impoverished one country, I shall always find another, to which I can carry my gold. . . . (III, 41)

Diderot argues further that the metropole has little concern even for the European inhabitants of its colonies, and that their great distance from the halls of power, both imperial and commercial, mirrors the plight of rural inhabitants within European countries, who remain largely ignored, he notes, by those in cities (XIII, 41). Addressing colonists, he argues that they should "implore the assistance of the mother-country to which you are subject, and if you should experience a denial, break off your connections with it. It is too much to be obliged to support at once misery, indifference, and slavery." (XIII, 41) The absurdity of the situation, in Diderot's view, is that the most profitable colonies receive the fewest liberties and are often the most oppressed, for their masters are "commercial states" that accordingly rule in light of the most cruel spirit of administration; in large part, he contends, it is pure profit of the most short-sighted kind that drives them to heavy-handed rule (XIII, 41). Colonies that become independent, with their mixed populations of indigenous inhabitants, slaves (whom Diderot hoped would be freed or who would more likely free themselves by violence), and the descendants of

Europeans may well be the hope of the future, he suggests, if they can learn the proper lessons from Europe's disastrous commercial and imperial exploits. Thus, in an invocation to the people of North America, Diderot declares,

[L]et the example of all the nations which have preceded you, and especially that of the mother-country, serve as a lesson to you. Dread the influence of gold, which, with luxury, introduces corruption of manners and contempt of the laws. Dread too an unequal distribution of wealth, which yields a small number of rich citizens, and a multitude of citizens plunged in misery. . . . Keep yourselves free from the spirit of conquest. The tranquillity of an empire diminishes in proportion to its extent. (XVIII, 52)

The eventual independence of colonies, however, was not a solution to the problems associated with global commerce, as Diderot well understood. The manner in which global commerce itself should be reformed after having been steeped in blood, tyranny, and corruption from the discovery of the New World onward was, in some respects, an open question for him, for he never presents a systematic response to this issue in the *Histoire*. Still, he believed that a reform both of European states (to break their absolute sovereignty, and to make them more accountable to their subjects) and of the international order (to create a meaningful tribunal that would oversee the increasingly complex political and commercial disputes among nations) would be necessary first steps. He was, however, under no illusions about the likelihood of such developments. His pessimism about domestic political reform followed from his belief that the citizens of European states were pacified by the influx of commercial goods and were increasingly unaware, or tolerant, of the most egregious social and political injustices both at home and abroad. Europeans have become reconciled, he writes, to a "regular and constant system of oppression", and social and political debate has been reduced ultimately to what amounts to "the various ranks of slaves assassinating each other with their chains, for the amusement of their masters." (VI, 1) Yet Diderot also affirms that the spirit of barter and exchange is not fundamentally inconsistent with peace and tranquillity. In the future, he hopes, governmental sanctions will apply across borders "to the private engagements between subjects of different nations and . . . those bankruptcies, the effects of which are felt at immense distances, will become concerns of government." Although Diderot refers here primarily to commercial bankruptcies, their attendant moral bankruptcies, as we have seen, are also among the effects of a global commercial order; these, too, could perhaps be regulated by a set of transnational practices and institutions. The one certainty for Diderot is that global commerce has become the key framework within which international politics is practised; thus, "the

annals of nations must hereafter be written by commercial philosophers, as they were formerly by historical orators." (VI, 1)

Even without thoroughgoing institutional reforms, however, Diderot believes that it could be beneficial simply to transform the way most people conceptualized commerce both as a practice and as an ideal. In a discussion of what the French could hypothetically achieve in their trade with the East Indies, in the unlikely event that they recover the influence they once had there, Diderot explores at some length what nonexploitative commercial relations might look like not only in India, but in general (IV, 33). Diderot describes a relationship in which Europeans might form trading posts, but would do no more politically than to serve as the mediators of local disputes, in contrast to the Indies companies that served as the auxiliaries of some local political powers in their (sometimes manufactured) disputes with others. No trading posts should be fortified, local customs and religions should be respected, and the very idea of conquest should be banished from the minds of those who voyage to the Indies. As Diderot notes, "[t]o conquer, or to plunder with violence, is the same thing." An extensive and flourishing trade would no doubt involve competition with other European powers, but this could occur lawfully if the nature of exchange and trade was itself moderate and just, characterized by a "faithful observance of engagements" with indigenous peoples and other European nations and contentment "with a moderate profit".²² Settlers must become "naturalized" into their host country, in order to avoid becoming the 'tigers' free of any national character who cross borders with no ambition but wealth and destruction. It is thus absolutely crucial "to keep good terms with the indigenous inhabitants [*les indigènes*]" (IV, 33). In a final appeal to humanitarian norms, he writes, "Let us, therefore, no longer be imposters on our first appearance; servile, when we are received; insolent, when we think ourselves strong; and cruel, when we have become all powerful." (IV, 33)

From Diderot's perspective, however, non-European nations should not wait for the unlikely possibility that European states and their commercial proxies will reform themselves. The only examples of successful resistance to the most corrupting and unjust forms of commerce, in his view, are those of non-European nations that were strong enough to curtail interactions with untrustworthy European merchants and potential imperialists; as diplomatically harmful as this can be, he notes that it is a defensible and sensible strategy, one consistent with the norms of hospitality, as Kant also would later argue as part of his theory of cosmopolitan right. Upon entering an inhabited country, Diderot contends, what is due to one as a matter of justice and hospitality from the indigenous society is limited. The host country can justifiably curtail visitors' attempts to promote commerce and communication if it concludes that a

peaceful and moderate commerce is unlikely to result. Writing from the point of view of a European visitor, he writes that

if I am granted sanctuary, fire, water, bread and salt, then all obligations towards me will have been fulfilled. If I demand more, I become a thief and a murderer. Let us suppose that I have been accepted. I have become acquainted with the country's laws and *moeurs*. They suit me. I want to settle there. If I am allowed to do so, it is a favour done to me, and a refusal cannot offend me. The Chinese may be bad politicians when they shut us out of their empire, but they are not unjust. Their country has sufficient population, and we [Europeans] are too dangerous as guests.²³ (XIII, 1)

Most societies, however, were either decimated or weakened by their encounters with Europe or had already been conquered; shutting down commerce with European states was a strategy that few non-European realms could attempt. Moreover, as Diderot was well aware, less technologically complex nomadic societies, such as hunters and herders, were particularly vulnerable to the juggernaut of commerce and empire, and obviously lacked the military and political power that a nation like China could deploy. In light of this, he writes that tragically "one cannot help imagining that before three centuries have passed they ['primitive'—i.e., nomadic peoples] will have disappeared from the earth." (XV, 4)

The Disastrous Effects of Empire upon Europeans

It is only on rare occasions, according to Diderot, that conquest produces genuine benefits for imperial powers themselves. In what he describes as one of the great ironies of modern European history, various forms of oppression within Europe, including slavery and harsh feudal laws, were eased somewhat at the beginning of the crusades. The vassals of feudal lands were "almost reinstated . . . in the order of human beings" by being sold property by the lords to fund conquests abroad. As a result, a minimal right to property and some rudimentary forms of independence became instituted. Thus, "the first dawns of liberty in Europe were, however unexpectedly, owed to the crusades; and the rage of conquest for once contributed to the happiness of mankind." (I, 13)

Much more often, however, the imperial enterprise further strengthens governmental power, which already tends toward a dangerous expansion of authority (IX, 30). The character of imperial governance is such that the great distance of colonies from the metropole increases the already complex array of matters that governments must take account of, in light of which state power assumes further roles—with yet further opportunities for injustice. As a consequence, Diderot argues, empires lead in-

variably to abuses at home and abroad (VIII, 23). Along these lines, he presents the administration of the Caribbean colonies as a typical case, for it seems inevitable that they will continue to be administered in a harsh and absolute fashion. Their colonial administrators are either corrupt to begin with or they are made so by being given absolute power. Hence, in overseeing a system of laws that are, by their nature, not attuned to the interests and needs of its subjects, and given that they are rarely given the time to understand any of the local features of their constituency before they return home, disaster tends to follow both for them and for their colonial subjects (XIII, 56).

As we have seen, Diderot concludes that even the descendants of Europeans in colonies are poorly treated by imperial administrators who simply institute programs that are set in the metropole. Much of his criticisms of this kind stem from the view that the sovereigns in Europe are motivated primarily by a spirit of jealousy of other sovereigns' imperial power. Thus, they would be less affected if their colonies were destroyed by the sea, Diderot suggests, than if they were taken over by a rival power (XIII, 41). Now that new communities have been created by the cohabitation and mixing of various peoples, through settlement, slavery, and the remnants of indigenous populations, remarkable new societies might prosper in the future, in a manner that might even eschew the injustices of past imperial practices. But for this to occur, the masters of such societies could no longer be monarchs and royal councils thousands of miles away in Europe (XI, 31). At the moment, he notes, the descendants of Europeans in the Caribbean, for instance, have had their characters thoroughly corrupted by carrying out the most brutal functions of imperial rule, such as slaveholding (XI, 31).

The lack of judgement exercised by the most powerful classes in Europe disturbs Diderot, for a clear-headed assessment of imperial politics would reveal that the possession of colonies creates far greater problems for European countries than what are seen to be the impressive gains in riches and power, which only continue to dupe governments into expanding their imperial exploits. In a discussion about whether the acquisition of Canada has been advantageous or harmful to England, he argues that it is forgotten "that every domain, separated from a state by a vast distance, is precarious, expensive, ill-defended, and ill-governed" (XVI, 23). The politically powerful routinely fail to think about the long-term economic, political, and moral costs of empire in part because of the obsession for national glory that imperial enterprises stoke in the capitals of Europe. Hence, since they never consider "whether a miserable little island will not occasion cares and expenses that cannot be compensated by any advantage, they will suffer themselves to be dazzled with the frivolous glory of having added it to the national dominion." (XVI, 23)

These and many other lessons and dangers are lost upon those who are consumed by "the rage of extending their dominions". The dangers of an ever increasing state power in European countries, which already supported a framework of customs, practices, and institutions that weighed down most of its subjects, should be even more obvious in an age of empire, when the brute force of state administration covers extensive territories across the globe. Such developments further oppress European subjects, and Diderot concludes bleakly in a notable passage that the very idea of settled communities with fixed magistrates and a codified rule of law, indeed with all of the hallmarks of what are considered to be 'civilization', appear only to promote the interests of an increasingly haughty and aggressive elite.

Such are the effects of national jealousies, and of the rapaciousness of government, to which men, as well as their property, become prey. What our enemies lose is reckoned an advantage, what they gain is looked upon as a loss. When a town cannot be taken, it is starved; when it cannot be kept, it is burnt to ashes, or its foundations are razed. . . . A despotic government separates its enemies from its slaves by immense deserts to prevent revolts within one, and emigration from another. In such a manner has Spain chosen to make a wilderness of her own country and a grave of America, rather than divide its riches with any of the other European nations. The Dutch have been guilty of every public and private crime to deprive other commercial nations of the spice trade. They have frequently thrown whole cargoes into the sea rather than sell them at a low price. . . . England destroyed the neutral French inhabitants of Acadia to prevent them from returning to France. Can it be said after this that civilization [*la police*] and society were made for the happiness of mankind? Yes, for the powerful man; yes, for the evil man. (XVII, 16)

When Diderot wrote his contributions to the *Histoire* in the 1770s, France had lost most of its colonial possessions as a result of the Seven Years' War, and was reduced largely to its Caribbean plantations. Yet, his anti-imperialism by no means assumed the historical demise of the imperial project, for he clearly believed that while the balance of imperial power might shift among European states, imperial rule itself appeared to be firmly entrenched, largely because it served a variety of governmental, commercial, and clerical interests. Ultimately, however, empire came at a high cost not only to subjugated non-Europeans, but to Europeans as well, whose prospects for peace, economic stability, and freedom were under even greater threat, he maintained, than before the advent of modern imperialism.

While Diderot's concerns about the impact of empire upon European societies, and in particular upon European governments, fostered a deep pessimism about the nature of political rule itself, he also writes in the

Histoire of some positive lessons about politics that might be gleaned from the experience of imperialism. In a more hopeful vein, he writes that “[n]o society was ever founded on injustice”, that is, as a matter of principle (XVIII, 1). Such a polity would either be destroyed by what would naturally be its many enemies or by its own immorality. A society that is virtuous, in contrast, would do no injury to anyone, and it would be founded upon an impartial equity, stable laws, and an exercise of political power that would protect every group and all ranks. For such a peaceful and productive society, neighbours would rush to its defence. The unreal quality of such a polity, as far removed from reality as a society founded thoroughly upon injustice, should hence be considered as a kind of “imaginary excellence in politics.” (XVIII, 1) Politics, then, is inevitably imperfect, for it never truly occupies either of these extreme or idealized images; nonetheless, some societies may well be closer to one end of the spectrum than another. “These two sorts of government”, Diderot explains, “are equally unknown in the annals of the world, which presents us with nothing but imperfect sketches more or less resembling the atrocious sublimity or the affecting beauty of one or the other of these great portraits.” (XVIII, 1) While numerous factors influence where along this idealized spectrum any one society sits, the possession of imperial realms is a feature that virtually guarantees, according to Diderot, a condition of injustice for the society in question. Often the nations that are the most astonishing in their achievements—not simply within what could plausibly be described as their realm, but also (in light of conquest and the building of empires) in “the theatre of the world, [and thus] impelled by destructive ambition”—display “a greater resemblance to the former [societies founded upon injustice].” The nations, in contrast, that fail to achieve such grand proportions and spectacles are nevertheless, precisely because of their more modest goals and the vast injustices they have forsaken in concentrating upon local matters of social import, more likely to achieve at least some modicum of political justice. “Others, more wise in their constitution, simpler in their manners, more limited in their views, and enveloped, if we may use the expression, with a kind of secret happiness”, Diderot explains, “seem to be more conformable to the second [to the societies founded upon justice].” (XVIII, 1) Still, while historical experience, in Diderot’s opinion, demonstrates that the metropolitan societies of imperial powers corrode and move closer to pure conditions of injustice as a result of empire, ruling elites are unlikely to be swayed from conquest in light of this, since they are motivated primarily by the sheer possession of power.

The most powerful nations, Diderot suggests, are often insignificant in their origins. In a chapter on the early history of Denmark, which describes the variety of forest-dwelling peoples who eventually plundered

the Gauls in the quest of glory and a milder climate, he argues that such conquest is the single most important factor in determining the sheer power of states. "It would be difficult to produce one single instance of a nation, since the creation of the world", he notes, "that has either extended or enriched itself during a long interval of tranquillity, by the progress of industry alone, or by the mere resources of its population." (V, intro.) Because the brute force that a state, or a state in league with other religious and feudal institutions, can marshal over its own subjects and against other states appears to be the paramount goal of sovereigns, states engage in imperial exploits whenever the best opportunities of this kind arise. Given that arguments premised upon the welfare of Europeans would fail to stir the interests of the governing elites who sought, in Diderot's view, to solidify and expand their power, he turns not infrequently to arguments about the destruction and death that will inevitably befall European imperialists themselves. "Nations that are subdued long for a deliverer; nations that are oppressed, for an avenger; and they will soon find one", he warns (IV, 33). The prospect of Europeans—not only lowly soldiers and colonists, but a number of the most powerful among them—being massacred, he hopes, might help to establish, from selfish motives, the view that fostering a good character and reputation abroad best secures European interests. Both in his discussions of slavery and imperialism, Diderot turns to the violence that will overcome Europeans if they persist in their colonial efforts.

Diderot makes an appeal to European sovereigns to abolish slavery, only to chastise himself: "But what am I saying? Let the ineffectual calls of humanity be no longer pleaded with the people and their masters: perhaps, they have never been attended to in any public transactions." (XI, 22) Accordingly, he switches rhetorical tactics, aiming instead at Europeans' self-interest. In part, Diderot believes that arguments about the perils that empire create within European societies, let alone humanitarian arguments, are most likely ineffective because of the arrogance and cruelty of absolute monarchs and their corrupt courts. Moreover, the increasing importance of luxury goods that imperial activities and the slave trade furnishes also damages, he notes, the ability of the people to empathize with the plight of oppressed non-Europeans. The evisceration of human sympathy inherent in the emerging commercial practices of his day affects consumers, then, and not only, as one would expect, the manufacturers, traders, agriculturalists, and other producers and middlemen of the imperial economy. The zeal for profiteering abroad is matched by the consumption of steadily multiplying goods at home, most of which serves little social purpose, as Diderot notes often, and only fuels further corrupt and rapacious activities in the metropole and in the colonies. Thus, he finds that the kind of rhetorical tactics employed by his fellow

philosophes to rally readers to the cause of African slaves, for instance, would likely fail. The intermingling of cruelty and imperial commerce depicted in Voltaire's *Candide*—recall *Candide's* encounter with a dying fugitive slave, bleeding heavily and with of his two limbs hacked off in punishment for having escaped from a local plantation, who tells him that "this is the price of the sugar you eat in Europe"—may well make for a powerful image. In Diderot's judgement, however, the goods brought to Europe from the non-European world generally deadened any sympathetic response to suffering that such stories might otherwise stoke.

Before describing the traditional defences of slavery and repudiating each one, Diderot notes that arguments alone will fail to end the slave trade. In an age, he contends, in which human equality is constantly affirmed, Europeans appear nevertheless only to take pity and to become outraged at the treatment of fellow Europeans—for instance, those who have been taken captive in the notorious raids off the coast of Barbary.

Writings, which will become immortal, have established in the most moving ways that all humans are brothers. We are filled with indignation at the cruelties, either civil or religious, of our ferocious ancestors, and we turn away our eyes from those ages of horror and blood. Those of our neighbours whom the inhabitants of Barbary have weighed down with irons obtain our pity and assistance. Even imaginary distress draws tears from our eyes . . . especially at the theatre. It is only the fatal destiny of the Negroes that does not concern us. They are tyrannized, mutilated, burnt, and put to death, and yet we listen to these accounts coolly and without emotion. The torments of a people to whom we owe our luxuries are never able to reach our hearts.²⁴ (XI, 22)

In light of this phenomenon and what he took to be the deafness of all political powers to any arguments based upon moral considerations, Diderot concludes that slaves will most likely have to liberate themselves by violence. He predicts that this will eventually be achieved by a "great man", a "Black Spartacus", in a passage of the *Histoire* that would famously inspire the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who would later be described by others, and would then describe himself, as precisely this foretold avenger.²⁵ (XI, 24) Given Diderot's theory of the deadening effect of imperial commerce upon human sympathies, he replaces Voltaire's strategy of fostering pity for suffering slaves with the more searing image of blood vengeance, appealing to Europeans' wholly self-interested desire not to have their throats slashed open, a prospect that Diderot not only believes is just, but that he describes gleefully in some of his most provocative contributions to the *Histoire*.²⁶

In addition to resistance against slavery, Diderot also calls for and justifies the use of violence against Europeans engaged more broadly in imperial enterprises. One of the most vivid instances of an appeal to force,

once again in light of what he assumes will be the failure of all arguments and negotiations to deter imperial powers in their ventures, occurs toward the end of his analysis of Dutch colonial ambitions in southern Africa. After discussing the distinctive customs and practices of Hottentot society, Diderot bemoans the fact that they were being steadily overtaken, beginning in the seventeenth century, by the forces led by Jan van Riebeeck, the Dutch East India Company official who founded Cape Town. Given the many other interactions between European and non-European peoples that are surveyed in the *Histoire*, Diderot feared that peoples like the Hottentots would not use force against European visitors. Yet, only in violently resisting the Dutch would the Hottentots have any chance of preserving their society. Their lives might be beset with dangers in the African wilderness, but the Dutch will almost certainly deprive them of their liberty. Diderot argues that the "wild beasts that inhabit" the forests surrounding the Hottentots "are less formidable than the monsters under whose empire you are going to fall. The tiger may perhaps tear you to pieces, but he will take nothing but your life away." (II, 8) The Dutch arrive, he notes, in the manner of so many modern conquerors, portraying themselves peacefully as faithful allies, but concealing their true intentions. Their outlook is based entirely upon the benefits that they can procure for themselves, without any sense of even the most basic norms of decency and respect; these they will continue to deny the Hottentots, Diderot suggests, just as Europeans have denied all rights to non-Europeans in other continents. In addition to the greed for power and commercial benefits, the Dutch are inspired by the same grossly inegalitarian disposition as that of other Europeans who have ventured into non-Europeans' territories: the different climate, geography, physical attributes, customs, and institutions of the Hottentots will thus inspire not wonder and reflection, but rather the most base inhumanity and dogmatic prejudices. "Their attitude will be that of benevolence; their look, that of humanity: but cruelty and treachery reign in the bottom of their hearts. . . . You must either agree with their extravagant opinions," Diderot warns, "or they will massacre you without mercy, for they believe that the man who does not think like them is unfit to live." (II, 18)

One option for non-European peoples who are nomadic and likely to be subjected to imperial rule might be to flee—"Fly, Hottentots, fly!" Diderot exclaims at one point—but such strategies in the end will fail, for European explorers and conquerors will reach them eventually. The ideal response is to confront incoming Europeans directly with brute force, the only language they appear to understand. "Do not address them with representations of justice, which they will not listen to," he insists, "but speak to them with your arrows." (II, 18) Diderot even hopes that the Dutch colonialists will all be killed, if only the Hottentots

can see through Dutch false promises and accordingly steel their resolve for the battles that might save their liberty. "[T]ake up your axes," he counsels, "bend your bows, and send a shower of poisoned darts against these strangers. May there not be one of them remaining to convey to his countrymen the news of their disaster!" (II, 18) Knowing that such advice would disturb many of his European readers, Diderot nonetheless notes that his arguments are made not only in the guise of historical judgements against Riebeeck and other past imperialists, but toward those who seek to undertake and to defend such ventures currently and in the future. To those readers offended by his words, he remarks that such a reaction deserves a similar condemnation, for it arises from a sympathy toward murderous Europeans. "[Y]ou perceive in the hatred I have vowed against them [the Dutch imperial incursions into the Hottentots' territory] that which I entertain against you." The contemptuous attitude that Diderot holds against those who express some sympathy toward Europeans suffering abroad in the midst of their imperial activities seems only to reinforce his pessimism, for it fosters his belief that the work of writers alone will fall upon deaf ears. Thus, as a last resort, he routinely turns to violence, in the hope that Europeans' desire to live and to flourish might lead to behaviour that humanitarian arguments alone should ideally inspire. Even after colonization takes place, if violent resistance by indigenous peoples does not occur initially, it is inevitable that Europeans will be attacked and ultimately destroyed by the violent forces that they themselves unleash in such territories. If for no other reason than self-interest, he implies, Europeans should decolonize and rescind their imperial holdings; they can do so now, with the hope of forging peaceful and respectful ties of commerce and communication, or they will be made to leave by a series of bloody revolts against their imperial governance. "This is the decree pronounced by fate upon your colonies: you must either renounce your colonies or they will renounce you." (XIII, 1)

Europe: Not a Civilization Fit for Export

Some of Diderot's arguments that undercut the standard justifications of European imperialism concern not so much the activities of empire itself, but more generally the corruption of European civilization. Accordingly, he challenges European pretensions of civilizing others by criticizing many of Europe's religious and political institutions and practices as fundamentally unjust, and thus as unfit to be exported abroad. Diderot views "the fanaticism of religion and the spirit of conquest, those two disturbers of the universe" as equally problematic features of global relations. Some of his arguments about Europe's own woes are directed toward the

Catholic church specifically, but also more generally toward the power of religious elites. In this respect, he notes, the abuse of power that the Catholic priesthood engages in is indicative of the problems associated with religious clergy indigenous to the non-European world as well. The "sacred dialect" of Sanskrit in India, he argues, serves a familiar purpose: the laity is thereby deprived of the resources with which they might question the prerogatives of clerical power, which in this case is housed among the Brahmins. Thus, "the spirit of the priesthood is everywhere the same; and that at all times the priest, either from motives of interest or pride is desirous of keeping the people in ignorance." (I, 8) Still, Diderot notes that many individuals of great talent and virtue enter such professions and do not directly engage in deceiving and tyrannizing their "fellow creatures". (I, 8) It is not religious doctrine as such, but the abuse of the enormous social and political power that religious elites wield that Diderot most often attacks in the *Histoire*. Hence, at the end of a critical discussion of church policy during which Diderot calls for the end of the sale of indulgences and, more broadly, for a broad reform of church policy, he argues that the tenets of the faith, however absurd from his own standpoint, would not bother anyone if the church were in fact a positive influence upon society. As he writes, "[y]our spirit of intolerance, and the odious means by which you have acquired, and still continue to heap, riches upon riches have done more injury to your opinions than all the arguments of incredulity." (VIII, 28) Given that Diderot's quarrel with the church in the *Histoire* is primarily social and political, rather than about theological doctrine, his criticisms focus not upon ideas that missionaries propagate abroad, but upon the significant ideological and material support that religious institutions provide to the imperial enterprise. In this respect, his analysis of religious power differs somewhat from his satire of church doctrines on the liberty of women, marriage, and sexuality in the *Supplément*. Commenting upon the Pope's grant of Peru to Spain, Diderot notes that the papacy does not have legitimate control over such matters in the first place; he concludes that the choice between "submission to the European monarch, or slavery; baptism, or death" amounts to a contract that should horrify anyone with any sense of morality and justice (VII, 2). The establishment of European religious power in the non-European world, he finds, simply replicates abroad the injustices that it has sown and continues to sow in the Old World. Diderot argues that the church forces indigenous peoples to be impious by demanding that they give up their gods, and encourages them to break their bonds with their own "legitimate sovereign". The indigenous king who voluntarily accedes to such papal injustices abandons his country, political power, and religion "to the mercy of an ambitious despot . . . and [to] the most dangerous system of Machiavellism." (VII, 2)

Challenging such abuses of religious power is difficult for the same reason that reforming governmental power is ineffective. Toward the end of a brief history of asylum, including houses of worship, for alleged criminals and outcasts, Diderot notes that such safe havens are sometimes abused. "The most dangerous of asylums, however, is not that into which a man may make his escape," he asserts, "but that which he carries about with him, that which accompanies and invests the guilty person, which serves him as a shield. . . . Such are the ecclesiastical habit and character." (VI, 13) For Diderot, the use of privileged power to hide oneself from laws and judgements that ought to be made equally without regard to rank is the common thread that binds clerical and sovereign institutions. The ideal that "justice is equally and without distinction due to every citizen" cannot easily be put into practice, given the corrupt advantages that the powerful hold in order to distance themselves from reform and critical scrutiny (VI, 13). Religious power in particular is perhaps the most difficult to challenge when it is synonymous with state power. Drawing upon the English travel literature about India, Diderot notes that Brahmins in Calicut unusually possess sovereign power directly. Such forms of theocratic rule, he argues, tend to become "the worst of all governments, because the hand of the gods adds to the weight of the sceptre of tyrants. . . . The orders of the despot are changed into oracles, and the disobedience of the subjects incurs the stigma of a revolt against Heaven." (III, 15) But even when clerical institutions are not formally conjoined with sovereign power, the close relationships among the two in European societies create an enormously complex and domineering set of institutions that can easily thwart attempts at change. When state power and religious power are in league with one another, he contends, humans are oppressed, and when they conflict, even the most minimal norms of justice are set aside in order to settle their differences. Religious powers, he argues, are only satisfied with state power if the government uses the "axe" that they have sanctified against practices, people, and all that they have deemed sinful or heretical. As he writes, "when the latter [state, or sovereign power] has conquered and enslaved the world, the former [religious authority] interposes and prescribes laws in its turn: they enter into a league with each other, humanity falls prostrate, and submits to its chains" (III, 15). These two parties, one under the banner of the sovereign and the other under the standard of superstition, as Diderot describes them, fight against decent social and political norms and against each other until the blood of innocent persons streams in the streets. The dynamics that result both from the conjoined and from the rival powers of states and churches play themselves out in the non-European world. Imperial rule in the non-European world, from this perspective, is simply an extension of this seemingly omnipotent coalition of

secular and divine power. The spread of European civilization amounts, then, to the spread of a particularly corrupt and unjust constellation of sovereign and religious powers; having sown injustice within Europe for hundreds of years, their combined strength now brutally dominates the rest of the globe.

Most of Diderot's arguments about the inadequacy of European societies, and hence the absurdity of asserting that an ideal of the European way of life should be actively promoted by force abroad, concerns the injustice of European political institutions, rather than its religious activities and powers. Indeed, as we have just seen, it is the political dimension of religious power, and especially those moments when clerical force and governmental authority reinforce one another, that most disturb him. Thus, first and foremost, he maintains that Europe's social and political degradation in particular should not be exported abroad. It would be understandable, he writes, and there "might" even be "some excuse" to be made on behalf of Europeans (though he is careful to avoid claiming that they would be wholly excusable), if Europeans had arrived in southern Africa with the intention of leading Hottentots into a "more civilized kind of life" or encouraging *moeurs* "preferable" to those in Europe (II, 18). Such an enterprise might well have been well intentioned, however morally dubious ultimately, but Europeans have done worse by either attempting to spread their own highly imperfect, and by no means superior, mores and practices abroad or even engaging in outright brutality simply to satisfy their avarice. With regard to the Hottentots, for instance, he asserts that the Dutch arrived in their territory merely to drive them out of their homeland and, when possible, to use the Hottentots "in the place of the animal who ploughs the ground under the lash of the farmer's whip" (II, 18).

Many of Diderot's moral arguments about the Hottentots are a response to a common question that underlay imperialist ventures: could such a wandering lifestyle of herders, so remote from the sedentary, fixed, and refined institutions and practices of European societies, give the Hottentots any real happiness, and, if not, would not their condition be improved by the introduction of a 'civilized' life? He responds in part by asserting that Europe's own ills do not place it in the position to judge the Hottentots as fundamentally 'unhappy'. One would have to be not only thoroughly "prejudiced in favour of the advantages of our social institutions", but also a total "stranger" to the sufferings in Europe to make such comparative judgements about nomadic and sedentary lifestyles (II, 18). In response to Europeans who view the rustic lives of the nomadic Hottentots as animalistic, focusing upon elements of their lives that were seen to be especially distasteful—that they clothed themselves, for instance, in animal entrails—Diderot asserts that the hatred, evil, and

duplicity of Europeans abroad, in addition to the general corruption that pervades their politics, disgusts his reason more than the Hottentots' "uncleanliness" disgusts his fellow Europeans. He argues at length that Europeans tend to overlook their own similar, or even worse, problems when they condemn others' faults. Thus, referring to Europeans' criticisms of the Hottentots' supposedly vulgar religious practices and simple-minded beliefs, he writes,

You [Europeans] smile with contempt upon the superstitions of the Hottentots. But do not your priests poison your minds in your infancy with prejudices that torment you during life, which sow divisions in your families, and arm your countries against each other? Have not your ancestors destroyed each other several times in defence of incomprehensible questions? (II, 18)

Encounters with non-European peoples, he implies, ought to be an occasion for sustained and critical self-reflection about the shared problems and injustices that face diverse peoples. Instead, he contends that Europeans' blindness toward their own faults leads to an arrogance that fuels their aggression in the non-European world. In order to deflate such pride, he contends that the advanced knowledge of the arts and the fixed system of laws that instills pride in many Europeans often create problems at least as great as their benefits; moreover, much of this would be of no use to the Hottentots, given the type of life that they choose to lead. Diderot criticizes imperialists for speaking the language of virtue abroad and asserting that they are the agents for spreading such virtues despite the fact that their societies fail to practise them or to live by them in the course of satisfying their colonial ambitions. Their hypocrisy stems not only from the injustices that imperial ventures unleash, but crucially also from the deep flaws in the institutions and practices of European societies, which many Europeans fail to recognize.

Hence, Diderot often engages in a blistering assessment of European societies themselves in a work that is otherwise largely focused upon the activities of Europeans in the non-European world, for this approach undercuts imperial arrogance. Some of Diderot's criticisms along these lines target royal absolutism and, more broadly, state power as such, and on these occasions non-European societies are at times taken equally to task; his other criticisms focus on the particular ills of European politics or upon the precarious role that Europe has come to occupy in global politics. Commenting upon the monuments that sovereigns commission to celebrate their own glory, he argues that very few of them would exist if only truly public-spirited monarchs were so honoured. Indeed, he suggests, if all the inscriptions on such monuments were truthful, they would consist mainly of a litany of oppressions, murders, and injustices (V, 3). Frederick the Great of Prussia, he notes, has often been celebrated for his

strong rule and patronage of the arts, winning praise from German philosophers, who at times overlook his bloody exploits, but he is overall a rare breed, a ruler who is, in many respects, a "patriot king" (V, 10). Most rulers, however, make "no distinction between truth and error, justice and partiality, good and evil, consider the principles of morality merely as metaphysical speculations, and imagine that human reason is swayed entirely by interest." (V, 10) The monarchs of France, in particular, he implies, are no exception to this general assessment. In a lengthy address to Louis XVI, Diderot complains of the great problems facing France and the lack of any political will to confront such issues. From oppressed and destitute farmers who are routinely extorted by feudal and governmental taxes, to desperate poverty in the cities and the unnecessary luxuries of the military class, the nobles, and the royal house, he attacks the corruption and the excessive wealth of a tiny and powerful few (IV, 18). Such contributions to the *Histoire* serve to repudiate the view that Europe represents a higher, more just, and happier existence. While it also, of course, provides him with an opportunity to further a number of his criticisms of European social and political life that he had undertaken in earlier writings (such as his observations on Catherine II's proposed reforms in Russia), given his view that imperial activities abroad are, in some respects, extensions of pathologies at home, such judgements about European life and politics are part of his broader anti-imperialist agenda.

Diderot suggests that many of the roots of Europe's domestic injustices derive from once understandable (and, in some cases, perhaps even justifiable) rules and institutions that outlasted their original social purposes. In this sense, he appears to believe that an appreciation of injustices in the non-European world illustrates the sources of inequality and misery that all societies share in some form. Thus, in a discussion about the beleaguered lives of the lowest, pariah castes of India, Diderot offers a conjecture about how such indignities may have arisen. In contrast to the "half barbarous governments" of Europe, he argues that Indians' more moderate system of legislation spared the lives and did not shed the blood of "malefactors", but instead banished them from respectable community (I, 8). This unjustly applied to the children of such individuals as well, and thus over time their outcast status became institutionalized, ultimately bearing no relationship to the injustices that provided at least some justification for the initial banishment. Such a speculative account is characteristic of Diderot's intellectual disposition in the *Histoire*, and thus alive to the apparent paradoxes of history and to the possible sociological origins of contemporary practices and institutions. It also underscores the extent to which he engages non-European societies in a sympathetic, but critical spirit; thus, his anti-imperialist arguments in the *Histoire* usually do not rest upon a naïve veneration or idealization of

non-European peoples. With regard to the caste system more generally, then, Diderot argues that in a land rich with resources and a people with an otherwise compassionate moral system (which, in his view, makes Indians "averse to persecution [from each other] and the spirit of conquest"), it is a particular tragedy that there exists at the heart of Indian society such a "barbarous inequality". In attempting to determine how such a moral order could have formed, Diderot notes that the answer is most likely rooted in the same principle that has been the source "of all of the calamities that have befallen the inhabitants of this globe." (I, 8) In this case, he argues that the original hierarchical distinctions constituted a moral "error" that over time became generalized to encompass every station of Indian life; it became the basis of "an entire system of politics and morality". In such a condition, humans' innocent propensities begin to contradict their sympathetic inclinations toward each other; thus, only "perpetual violence" can enforce the moral order, which itself creates resentment and discord.

As a matter of moral psychology, Diderot contends that people, even the lowliest victims, tend to blame nature rather than humans themselves for the miseries of life. People begin to believe that a number of social injustices are built into the fabric of social and political life itself, or are somehow preordained or natural, rather than viewing them as thoroughly conventional and thus subject to reform; "such is the picture of all the people of the earth, excepting, perhaps, a few societies of savages." (I, 8) Diderot's cautious qualification stems from his belief that there could be a few, less complex societies that order their social practices almost seamlessly with the most basic needs and desires of human communities such that rank injustices and pervasive conflicts between natural needs and social resources are minimal. Such is the picture of Tahiti that Diderot knowingly constructs in the *Supplément*; even there, as we have seen, such a society is by no means natural in any stereotypically utopian sense, but is rather made up of creative, cultural beings who consciously form and maintain such collective lives. Still, Diderot appears to believe that some peoples who practise relatively simple and well-ordered lifestyles *might* not suffer from the tragic slavishness that characterizes the vast majority of human societies. In a passage marked by Rousseau's influence, Diderot regrets that "[a]bsurd prejudices have perverted human reason, and even stifled that instinct that teaches animals to resist oppression and tyranny. Multitudes of the human race actually believe themselves to be the property of a small number of men who oppress them." (I, 8)

The injustices that mark European societies and that inculcate the belief that oppression is a sorry fate that is somehow inevitable or even justifiable led Diderot to bouts of pessimism. Throughout his contribu-

tions to the *Histoire*, moments of dark cynicism recur that call into question whether Europe could reform itself in the future. At times, he fears that the great revolutions that brought spectacular periods of change in the ancient world will become less common over time because the "several nations of the earth, after repeated shocks . . . seem at length totally content with the wretched tranquillity of servitude." (VI, 1) An increasing number have become reconciled with the abuses of political authority at home and with rampant injustice abroad. Diderot suggests that overthrowing or establishing governments, or avenging the natural rights of humanity, are no longer—even rhetorically—the goals of great struggles and battles; rather, political projects now only gratify the caprices of a few powerful men who want to further their realms by adding another few towns. European political elites, he argues, never seek the happiness of their people, but instead desire to augment their riches and security by raising large armies, fortifying frontiers, and encouraging increasingly violent forms of trade. Hence, he regrets that "Europe, that part of the globe that has the most influence over the rest seems to have fixed itself on a solid and durable basis. . . . The period of founding and subverting empires is past." (VI, 1) Such pessimism about the strength and durability of injustice practised both at home and abroad by European powers, and consequently the seeming intractability of imperial governance as a form of political rule, never leads Diderot to suggest that European empires should be seen as inevitable, nor does he ever relent from his searing criticism of the imperial enterprise. In part, the moments of tragic despair about the plight of European societies in the *Histoire* help to explain the scepticism that Diderot held for any claim that Europe was in a position to educate or to improve the world through imperial rule. Ultimately, however, his frustrations about the cruelties of European politics do not fully represent his analysis of the strength of the imperial order, for in less pessimistic moments, he discusses the fragility of anything humanly made, even the seemingly permanent institutional bases of entire civilizations.

Diderot argues that the process of "civilization"—the construction, maintenance, and development of social and political institutions and processes in a sedentary, agriculturally based society—tends to make peoples lose their virtue, courage, and love of independence. As we have seen, much of his criticism along these lines concerns the growing power of the state and the abuse of public, or publicly sanctioned, forms of legal, social, and clerical power. Diderot contends that the oldest civilized societies are those of Asia, which were thus the first to undergo despotism (V, 34). In contrast with the tradition of theorizing oriental despotism as a fixed category that resulted either from climate or the despotic character of the peoples of Asia, Diderot's argument that despotic gov-

ernments and societies are never destined to last follows from his belief that no form of political rule can entrench itself permanently. All arbitrary power, he argues, hastens its own destruction; revolutions are bound to occur under such conditions, and they eventually restore at least some modicum of liberty (V, 34).²⁷ In addition, seemingly powerful civilizations will one day unravel and end up in ruins. Reflecting upon the destitute condition of modern Peru, and its fall from grandeur to a debased and impoverished colony, Diderot contends that even the greatest civilizations are powerless against the unforeseen, contingent character of historical change. Europe too, he asserts, will see upon its soil, arising "upon the ruin of our kingdoms and our altars", new peoples and new religions (VII, 28). Europe's reign over the world will not be permanent, as if it were the crowning glory, or the end, of history:

But as commotions and revolutions are so natural to mankind, there is only wanting some glowing genius, some enthusiast, to set the world again in flames. The people of the East, or of the North, are still ready to enslave and plunge Europe into its former darkness. . . . A city that took two centuries to decorate is burnt and ravaged in a single day. . . . You nations, whether artisans or soldiers, what are you in the hands of nature, but the sport of her laws, destined by turns to set dust in motion, and to reduce the work again to dust? (XIX, 12)

The apparent fatalism of such comments about the cycles and flux of history, and the delusion of believing that any human institution or practice could last throughout the ages, never led Diderot to doubt that humans themselves are responsible for altering their social and political conditions for the better. ✓

Hence, Diderot exclaims that writers should attempt to "revive those rights of reasonable beings, which to be recovered need only to be felt!" (I, 8) Philosophers are key to this task, he argues, for they can publicize the sources of injustice and appeal to government officials, the "slaves" who act as agents of royal, clerical, and commercial masters. By performing this function, Diderot proclaims that the people can then over time "reassume the use of their faculties, and vindicate the honour of the human race." (I, 8) Diderot often acknowledges, however, the unlikelihood that such results would follow from the writings of the *philosophes*, in large part because powerful elites shelter themselves from any critical commentary. Thus, it often seems like "folly", he finds, to address "our discourse to deaf persons, whom we cannot convince of anything, and whom we may offend" (VI, 25). Diderot's hopes appear to have focused instead on the new societies being formed outside of Europe, those that brought various peoples together into thoroughly new national communities. He notes, for instance, that the intermixture of peoples that results ✓

from trade, travel, and empire, make it impossible to try to keep the blood of a nation or even a family "pure": "The purity of blood among nations, if we may be allowed the expression, as well as the purity of blood among families, cannot be more than temporary, unless kept up by whimsical or religious institutions." (V, intro.) The inevitable mixture creates a new people with a distinctive character. If ever the new peoples outside of Europe attain independence, they could, Diderot asserts, form societies that might learn the right lessons from Europe. Thus, he calls upon young "Creoles" to come to Europe to collect information about ancient mores and to take note of the productive spirit that Europeans had lost. They should "study our weakness, and draw from our follies themselves those lessons of wisdom that produce great events." (XI, 31) Strikingly, for Diderot, it is primarily Europe's mistakes from which the non-European world could profit. Pointing to the damage done both to the Americas and to European societies as a result of European imperialism in the New World, he asserts that "America has poured all of the sources of corruption on to Europe. To complete its vengeance, it [America] must draw from it [Europe] all the instruments of its prosperity. As it [America] has been destroyed by our crimes, it must be renewed by our vices." (XI, 31) Perhaps the only real hope that Diderot ultimately held was for the non-European world to seize independence themselves, and in a future post-imperial age to foster societies and transnational relationships that would avoid the brutality of Europe's modern imperial practices.

Since the bold attempts of Columbus and of Gama, a spirit of fanaticism, until then unknown, has been established in our countries, which is that of making discoveries. We have traversed, and still continue to traverse, all the climates from one pole to another, in order to discover some continents to invade, some islands to ravage, and some people to spoil, to subdue, and to massacre. Wouldn't the person who put an end to this frenzy deserve to be reckoned among the benefactors of humanity? (XIX, 15)

Diderot's anti-imperialist arguments range from criticisms about the injustices of profit-oriented commercial enterprises abroad, and attacks upon the role of the church and missionaries, to arguments based upon the damage done to European societies by constructing and maintaining empires abroad and the impossibility of fairly and efficiently governing far-flung imperial realms, as well as claims that Europe's half-barbarous societies are hardly the model for any other country to adopt. In addition, Diderot's arguments often proceed by describing at length what he viewed to be the horrific devastation visited upon non-European peoples, and by attacking what he took to be the error of judging foreign prac-

tices and institutions, such as those of hunting and pastoral peoples, only by the standards of one's own society. The basic elements behind the various arguments of Diderot's anti-imperialist political theory include the idea of a basic human dignity that all humans share, in part because of their individual freedom, sociability, and ability to reason and communicate about justice. Along these lines, I have argued that his concept of a general will of humanity is the ethical touchstone of a number of his political arguments. The second key component concerns the idea that humans are fundamentally cultural agents—that is, that they are social creatures who craft, maintain, and reform social and political practices and institutions. As we have seen, Diderot develops this understanding with regard to Tahitian society in the *Supplément* as well; in the *Histoire*, this contextualized and pluralistic understanding of humanity plays a key role in his characterizations of non-European peoples and in his arguments against European empires. A third key feature of Diderot's anti-imperialism balances his commitment to cross-cultural moral norms with the view that whole peoples, as well as many of their practices and institutions, are morally incommensurable; that is, they cannot be rank ordered as definitively inferior or superior. Each of these elements alone undercuts imperialist conceits, but taken together they form a philosophically powerful response to defenders of European empire. Diderot's anti-slavery and anti-imperialist political thought was widely read and discussed by his contemporaries, for Raynal's *Histoire* became one of most popular underground books of the eighteenth century. It is not surprising, then, that Kant and Herder appear to have read it; as we will see, their anti-imperialist political philosophies are, to a remarkable degree, cut from the same cloth. They too treat humans as cultural agents and interweave commitments to moral universalism and moral incommensurability in the course of their arguments against European imperialism.

Chapter One

Introduction: Enlightenment Political Thought and the Age of Empire

1. In the concluding chapter, I address the question of whether one can meaningfully write of 'the Enlightenment' or whether there is a substantive meaning that we can attach to the term 'Enlightenment' that would make sense across multiple Enlightenments.

2. I use the terms 'empire' and 'imperialism' in a broad sense to indicate either the formal or the informal rule of one society over another society, especially (but not only) those cases when the metropole and the colonized territories are distant, such as European imperial rule over non-European peoples. In some cases, empire involves extensive settlements and the introduction of many colonists from the metropole, while in others relatively few individuals from the metropole are present in the colonized territory. In some cases, a colonized society is ruled directly by another government; in others, imperial rule is relatively indirect, through (for instance) military officers, religious authorities, and / or directors of imperial trading companies. Diderot, Kant, and Herder were critics of both formal and more informal imperial rule over non-European peoples. On the range of practices, institutions, and forms of rule associated with 'empire', 'imperialism', and 'colonization', see Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961); M. I. Finley, "Colonies—An Attempt at a Typology", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (1976): 167–88; J. S. Richardson, "Imperium Romanum: Empire and the Language of Power", *Journal of Roman Studies*, 81 (1991): 1–9; Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: A Short History of European Migration, Exploration, and Conquest, from Greece to the Present* (New York: Modern Library, 2001). On the political languages and narratives that accompanied, and helped to support, the rise of modern European empires, see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500–c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

3. In the eighteenth century (and, indeed, today as well), the boundaries between Europe and the non-European worlds were hotly contested, for 'Europe' could signify a relatively small set of Western European countries or, more expansively, all of what was traditionally conceived to be Christendom. See J.G.A. Pocock, "Some Europes in Their History" in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge and Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002), 55–71; and Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

4. All scholars who work on the question of empire in modern European polit-

ical theory benefit from Anthony Pagden's valuable scholarship, but a book-length study of anti-imperialist political thought in the age of Enlightenment remains a lacuna in the scholarly literature, an especially curious one given its historical and philosophical distinctiveness.

5. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); and Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1988).

6. For instance, in some of Michel de Montaigne's essays, which I discuss in chapter 2.

7. See Francisco de Vitoria, "De Indis" in *Political Writings*, eds. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 233-292; Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In defense of the Indians: The defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, late Bishop of Chiapa, against the persecutors and slanderers of the peoples of the New World discovered across the seas*, ed. Stafford Poole (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

8. See, for example, Jeremy Bentham, *Colonies, Commerce, and Constitutional Law: Rid Yourselves of Ultramarina and other writings on Spain and Spanish America*, ed. Philip Schofield (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Condorcet: Selected Writings*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976); Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 2: 556-641.

9. Edmund Burke, *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 5, *India: Madras and Bengal, 1774-1785*, and vol. 6, *India, the launching of the Hastings impeachment, 1786-1788*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981 and 1991). See also Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); and David Bromwich, introduction to *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, by Edmund Burke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1-39.

10. See, for instance, Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

11. See Nicholas K. Robinson, *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); and especially Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

12. Benjamin Constant, "The spirit of conquest and usurpation and their relation to European civilization" in *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 45-167.

13. On this shift within British and French political thought from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, see Jennifer Pitts, *The Turn To Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

14. This feature of Enlightenment thought is beginning to be appreciated more fully, and not simply in the conventional manner of viewing Paris as the centre from which such thought radiated. See, for instance, Fania Oz-Salzberger,

Translating the Enlightenment (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), on the impact of Scottish philosophy upon the German intellectual tradition; Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), on the intellectual relationships among a diverse group of modern thinkers across generations and nationalities; and J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* and vol. 2, *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), on the cross-currents among Arminian, English, Scottish, and Parisian Enlightenment.

15. On the concept of ‘culture’ and its history, see Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, “Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions”, *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology*, 47 (1952); Raymond Geuss, “Kultur, Bildung, Geist”, in *Morality, Culture, and History: Essays on German Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 29–50; K. Anthony Appiah, “The Multiculturalist Misunderstanding”, *The New York Review of Books*, 9 October 1997; Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); and James Swenson, “A small change in terminology or a Great Leap Forward? Culture and civilization in revolution.” *MLN*, 112 (1997): 322–48.

16. Edmund Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs” [1791], *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 4 (London: J. C. Nimmo), 176.

Chapter Two

Toward a Subversion of Noble Savagery: From Natural Humans to Cultural Humans

1. The term ‘le bon sauvage’ was not typically used by the thinkers under study here, although the term was used in French from the sixteenth century onward. Instead, they write of ‘les sauvages’, ‘l’état sauvage’, or ‘la vie primitive’, and so on. In English, the term ‘noble savage’ appears to have been coined by John Dryden in *The Conquest of Grenada* (1670): “I am as free as Nature first made man / Ere the base laws of servitude began / When wild in woods the noble savage ran”. I use the term in this chapter, then, as a label for what can be retrospectively described as a tradition of thought about a variety of non-European (usually nomadic, or ostensibly nomadic) peoples, though such a ‘tradition’ was not always, of course, understood as such and was internally diverse. The kinds of portrayals I examine above, however, generated an intense series of debates in print and in conversation from the sixteenth century onward among a wide array of thinkers about whether the lives of ‘wild men’, ‘savages’, and ‘primitives’ were more just, more ‘natural’, and happier than the lives of cultivated Europeans. In this sense, writings that extol noble savagery were often seen to have a cohesion that, in effect, amounted to the view that there was an identifiable tradition of thinking along these lines that one could contest or support.

2. David Brion Davis, “At the Heart of Slavery”, *The New York Review of Books*, 17 October 1996, 54.

3. See Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak, eds., *The Wild Man Within*:

An Image in Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); and Arthur Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997; originally 1935). For a survey of the range of positive and negative portrayals of Amerindians and South Pacific Islanders, see P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 187-226, 258-98; and V. G. Kiernan, "Noble and ignoble savages" in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 86-116. On the development of exotic representations of Amerindians, see Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 354ff; and Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: E. Droz, 1934). See also J. H. Elliot, "The discovery of America and the discovery of man", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 58 (1972): 102-25; Melvin Richter, "Europe and the Other in Eighteenth-Century Thought", *Politisches Denken* (1997): 25-47.

4. On the religious roots of noble savage perspectives, see Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et Histoire au siècle des lumières* (Paris: François Maspero, 1971), 25-64; and Geoffrey Atkinson, *Les relations de voyages du XVIIe siècle et l'évolution des idées: Contribution à l'étude de la formation de l'esprit au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Edouard Champion, 1924), 63-81.

5. Amerigo Vespucci, *Letters from a New World*, ed. Luciano Formisano, trans. David Jacobson (New York: Marsilio, 1992), 49-50.

6. Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, ed. and trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 153. Hereafter references to this work are given in parentheses in the text.

7. See the subtle reading along these lines by Edwin M. Duval, "Lessons of the New World: Design and Meaning in Montaigne's 'Des Cannibales' (I:31) and 'Des Coches' (III:6)", *Yale French Studies*, 64 (1983): 95-112.

8. See Arthur J. Slavin, "The American Principle from More to Locke" in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, vol. 1, ed. Fredi Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 147-149; and William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Act 2, Scene 1):

Gonzalo:

. . . no kind of traffic

Would I admit: no name of magistrate:

Letters should not be known: riches, poverty,

And use of service—none: contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard—none:

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil:

No occupation, all men idle, all:

And women too, but innocent and pure:

No sovereignty. . . .

9. Given the gendered language in this passage, such natural titles presumably include those given to men in particular to inherit property equally only among

themselves. As we will see, the relationship between the sexes in New World societies was of great interest to Lahontan, Rousseau, and Diderot.

10. For a treatment of the theme of Stoicism in Montaigne's treatment of New World peoples, see David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 75-101.

11. To this might be added Montaigne's general comment upon New World peoples as such in "Of Coaches": "Most of the responses of these people and most of our dealings with them show that they were not at all behind us in natural brightness of mind and pertinence", although this could also be interpreted as a comment upon their native intelligence and innate capacity, rather than upon the impressiveness of the exercise of their faculties in social life (693).

12. John Locke, *An Essay concerning the true original, extent, and end of civil government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), §49. See Herman Lebovics, "The Uses of America in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 47 (1986): 567-81.

13. Baron de Lahontan, *Dialogues Curieux entre l'Auteur et un Sauvage de bons sens qui a voyagé et Mémoires de l'Amérique Septentrionale*, ed. Gilbert Chinnard (Paris: A. Margraff, 1931), 95; see also 116. Cf. Montaigne (156). Hereafter references to Lahontan's *Dialogues* are given by page number in parentheses in the text; translations are mine.

14. For an analysis of the dialogic device used by Lahontan, see Roger Mercier, "Image de l'autre et image de soi-même dans le discours ethnologique au XVIIIe siècle", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 154 (1976): 1417-35.

15. On Lahontan's use of 'natural religion' in the *Dialogues*, see Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 123-26.

16. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 107. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Writings on China*, ed. and trans. Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago: Open Court, 1994). See also Walter W. Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment" and Donald F. Lach, "Leibniz and China" and "The Sinophilism of Christian Wolff", all in *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, ed. Julia Ching and Willard G. Oxtoby (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1992).

17. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, 5 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-95), 3:11. On the connections between the concept of despotism and understandings of the Far East, see Melvin Richter, "Despotism" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Scribner, 1973); and Franco Venturi, "Oriental Despotism", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24 (1963): 133-142.

18. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], in *Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 84.

19. Baron Lahontan, *New Voyages to North America* (London: H. Bonwicke, 1703), vol. I, 270 (“A Discourse of the Interest of the French, and of the English, in North America”), and 182 (Letter XXIII, 25 October 1692).

20. Hereafter references for Rousseau’s writings are given in parentheses in the main text and are from the standard Pléiade edition: Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (1964). Unless otherwise noted, translations are from the following two editions: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and other early political writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

21. Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* (1990), 5:394. Cf. Rousseau’s comments about travel and education in his *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 450–71.

22. In “Of Cannibals”, Montaigne argues exactly the opposite point concerning the professions that are most likely to yield a less subjective travel narrative (151–52). The better educated and more intellectually refined the traveller, he argues, the more likely the resulting travel accounts will be embellished with distorting analyses and judgements.

23. On the structure of Rousseau’s theorization of the state of nature, see Victor Goldschmidt, *Anthropologie et Politique: Les principes du système de Rousseau* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1974), 231ff.

24. Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 12–32.

25. Francisco de Vitoria, “On the American Indians” (1539) in his *Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 239–51.

26. For a discussion of some of the early modern origins of climate theory, see M. J. Tooley, “Bodin and the Medieval Theory of Climate”, *Speculum*, 28 (1953): 64–83. For a comprehensive discussion of the history of geographical and climatological accounts of humanity, see Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), especially 551–622.

27. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. and trans. Anne Cohler, Basia Miller, and Harold Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 234 (Book 14, chapter 2).

28. For a representative and vivid account of one such phenomenon, see Roger Shattuck, *The Forbidden Experiment: The Story of the Wild Boy of Aveyron* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980).

29. For a thorough examination of this aspect of Rousseau’s thought in the context of historical and contemporary anthropological and genetic theories, see Robert Wokler, “Perfectible Apes in Decadent Cultures: Rousseau’s Anthropology Revisited”, *Daedalus*, 107, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 107–34.

30. On Rousseau’s use of Prévost’s collection of travel literature, see G. Pire, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les relations de voyages”, *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 56, no. 3 (1956): 355–78.

31. Only one experiment, Rousseau attests, could unequivocally settle the orangutan issue, but it would only be taken up by the “crudest observers” and, in any case, would perhaps require more than one generation to verify the results. Rousseau thus suggests obliquely that the sure demonstration of his hypothesis would require a human and an orangutan to attempt sexual reproduction. However, before knowing with certainty that orangutans were human, the test could not be “tried in innocence” (211).

32. See Arthur O. Lovejoy, “The Supposed Primitivism of Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality”, in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), 14–37; and Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 277–82.

33. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “La Découverte du Nouveau Monde”, in *Œuvres complètes* (1961), 2:828.

34. See Jerome Schwartz, *Diderot and Montaigne: The Essais and the shaping of Diderot’s humanism* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1966).

35. François de Fénelon, *Telemachus, son of Ulysses*, ed. and trans. Patrick Riley ([1699] Cambridge University Press, 1994); see especially 108–14 (on the inhabitants of “Bétique”). Rousseau was also deeply influenced by this aspect of Fénelon’s thought.

36. “Lettre de Voltaire à Jean-Jacques Rousseau” (30 August 1755) in Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3:1379.

37. For an influential example of such a reading, see Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, 276–77.

38. Here I am in agreement with Wilda Anderson, *Diderot’s Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 127–67.

39. On this aspect of Rousseau’s thought, see Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 22–32; Asher Horowitz, “‘Laws and Customs Thrust Us Back into Infancy’: Rousseau’s Historical Anthropology”, *The Review of Politics*, 52, No. 2 (Summer 1990): 215–41; Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau’s Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 49–58. See also J. A. Passmore, “The Malleability of Man in Eighteenth-Century Thought” in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), 21–46.

40. Unless otherwise noted, quotations of Diderot’s writings in this chapter are from Denis Diderot, *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

41. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 5, *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malsherbes*, ed. Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman, and trans. Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 575 (Letter to Malsherbes, 12 January 1762). See also Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712–1754* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 226–29.

42. Rousseau, *Collected Writings*, 5:295.

43. Rousseau, *ibid.*, 5:326.

44. As Rousseau writes in the *Confessions*, the passage “about the philosopher who reasons with himself while blocking his ears in order to harden himself to the moans of an unfortunate man is of his [Diderot’s] making, and he provided me with others still stronger that I could not resolve to use.” Rousseau, *ibid.* On both the friendship and the rift between Rousseau and Diderot, see Jean Fabre, “Deux Frères Ennemis: Diderot et Jean-Jacques”, *Diderot Studies*, 3: 155–213; see also George R. Havens, “Diderot, Rousseau, and *Discours sur l’Inégalité*”, *Diderot Studies*, 3: 219–62.

45. See Arthur M. Wilson’s definitive intellectual biography, *Diderot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 841, n. 63.

46. This theme is made explicit immediately in the subtitle to *Madame de La Carlière*: “Sur l’inconséquence du jugement public de nos actions particulières” [“On the inconsistency of the public judgement of our private actions”].

47. Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes de Diderot*, vol. 2, ed. Jules Assézat and Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 206, 203.

48. The *Supplément* first appeared in the privately circulated periodical that was edited by Diderot’s friend Friedrich Grimm, *Correspondance Littéraire*, in 1773 and 1774. Diderot continued to make changes and additions to these early versions. The *Supplément* was first published posthumously in 1796. The two French editions that I have consulted are Denis Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann (Geneve: Droz, 1955); and Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville, publié d’après le manuscrit de Leningrad*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Paris: E. Droz, 1935). The Dieckmann edition of the *Supplément* will be the basis for what is becoming the standard critical edition of Diderot’s writings: *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann, Jean Fabre, and Jacques Proust (Paris: Hermann, 1975–). The volume of Diderot’s political writings in this edition is still forthcoming. (As indicated in note 40, all citations of and quotations from the *Supplément* are from Diderot, *Political Writings*).

49. On the sophisticated literary configuration of Diderot’s *Supplément* and the philosophical opportunities it affords him, see Dena Goodman, “The Structure of Political Argument in Diderot’s *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*”, *Diderot Studies*, 21 (1983): 123–37; and Goodman, *Criticism in Action: Enlightenment Experiments in Political Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 169–229. See also Claudia Moscovici, “An Ethics of Cultural Exchange: Diderot’s *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*”, *CLIO*, 30 (2001): 289–307; and Ralph Leigh, “Diderot’s Tahiti”, *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, 5 (1983): 113–28.

50. Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Dieckmann, Fabre, and Proust, 4:334. In this work, Diderot even cites New World “savages” as examples of such creatures, a view that he jettisons in later writings such as the *Supplément* and his contributions to the *Histoire des deux Indes*.

51. Bougainville, Louis Antoine de, *Voyage Autour du Monde: Par la frégate la Boudeuse et la flûte l’Étoile* ([1771] Paris: Club des Libraires de France, 1958), 137. On European understandings of Tahiti and, more generally, of the South Pacific, see Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Roy Porter, “The Exotic as Erotic: Captain Cook at Tahiti” in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 117–44; and Alan

Frost, "The Pacific Ocean: The Eighteenth Century's 'New World'", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 152 (1976): 779-822.

52. See M. L. Perkins, "Community Planning in Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*", *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 21 (1974): 399-417.

53. See Frederick Whelan, "Population and Ideology in the Enlightenment", *History of Political Thought*, 12, no. 1 (1991): 35-72.

54. Demography also furnishes the standard that Rousseau prescribes in *On the Social Contract* as the one valid criterion of political welfare per se, regardless of the many historical and institutional differences among polities: "What is the aim of the political association? It is the preservation and prosperity of its members. And what is the surest sign that they are preserving themselves and prospering? It is their number and their population. . . . All other things being equal, the Government under which the Citizens, without resort to external means, without naturalizations, without colonies, populate and multiply is without fail the best: that under which a people dwindles and wastes away is the worst. Calculators, it is now up to you: count, measure, compare." (419-420, Book III, chapter 9: "Of the signs of a good government")

55. See Diderot's article "Encyclopédie" from the *Encyclopédie* (partly reprinted in Diderot, *Political Writings*, 21-27) for his understanding of this massive, multivolume project.

56. Twice in the *Supplément* Diderot raises the difficulty of formulating cross-culturally valid criteria of judgement for assessing the political health of societies. In each instance, he points to the conjunction of the common good and individual utility.

57. On self-interest and its relationship to virtue in eighteenth-century French philosophical writings, see Mark Hulliung, *The Autocritique of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 9-37.

58. In addition to travel writings, actual historical visits by New World individuals to Europe in the eighteenth century provoked an intense interest in foreign peoples. For instance, as Diderot notes in the *Supplément*, a Tahitian named Aoutourou accompanied Bougainville on his journey back to France and spent a few weeks in Paris, attending operas and some of the salons before embarking on commercial trading ships back to Tahiti. See Bougainville's account of Aoutourou's visit in his *Voyage autour du monde*, 148-151.

59. Some of Diderot's arguments along these lines recall (and may have been influenced by) Lahontan's arguments about Huron women.

60. The Polly Baker story appeared in English journals in 1747, originating purportedly with Benjamin Franklin, and later was included by Abbé Raynal in the *Histoire des deux Indes*. For an extended treatment of this popular eighteenth-century story, see Max Hall, *Benjamin Franklin and Polly Baker: The History of a Literary Deception* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

61. Despite such arguments, Diderot's comments about women (for instance, in the essay "Sur les Femmes") are on the whole a curious mix of egalitarian and hierarchical views. For a discussion of Diderot's arguments in the context of the *philosophes'* writings about women, see Sylvana Tomaselli, "The Enlightenment Debate on Women", *History Workshop*, 20 (Autumn 1985): 101-24. See also A. Sfragarò, "La Représentation de la femme chez Diderot", *Studies on Voltaire and*

the *Eighteenth Century*, 193 (1980): 1893-99. Cf. Mary Trouille, "Sexual/Textual Politics in the Enlightenment: Diderot and D'Épinay Respond to Thomas's Essay on Women", *The Romantic Review*, 85, no. 2 (March 1994): 191-210.

62. In an early fragment, Rousseau writes: "Let us begin by considering women deprived of their freedom by the tyranny of men, and men the masters of everything . . . everything in their hands, they seized it by I know not what natural right which I could never quite understand, and which may well have no other foundation than main force." (*Oeuvres complètes*, Pléiade ed., 2:1254) By the time of the first and second *Discourses*, however, Rousseau had rejected such a view and endorsed instead a natural hierarchy between men and women.

63. See Melvin Richter, "The Comparative Study of Regimes and Societies in the Eighteenth Century", in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

64. The question of whether one can nonethnocentrically practise anthropology, and how one can assess varying interpretations of foreign peoples, is, of course, an ongoing debate, the genealogy of which can be traced to many of the early modern debates over New World peoples. A particularly telling and heated skirmish in cultural anthropology along these lines concerns competing accounts of why Captain Cook was killed by Hawaiians in 1779. See Gannath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); and Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for example* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

65. See Michèle Duchet, "Le 'Supplément au voyage de Bougainville' et la collaboration de Diderot à 'L'Histoire des deux Indes'", *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, 13 (1961): 173-87.

66. I borrow the term 'multidimensional social theory' from Steven Seidman, *Liberalism and the Origins of European Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 33. Seidman argues that although many sociologists have viewed the development of multidimensional accounts of society (which theorize the symbiotic relationship between human agency and social structure in a methodologically sophisticated fashion) as a nineteenth-century revolt against the presuppositions of social contractarianism and other theories that were considered to presuppose methodological individualism, the roots of a multidimensional social theory can in fact be found in a variety of eighteenth-century Enlightenment writings.

67. As Clifford Geertz has noted, a significant overlap exists between protohumans' cultural history and humans' phylogenetic development. Since *Australopithecines* (pre-*homo sapiens*) began making tools, engaged in social practices such as organized hunting and lived in familial/social units (thereby leading a rudimentary cultural life), *homo sapiens* originated and developed physiologically within a cultural context. Accordingly, "culture, rather than being added on, so to speak, to a finished or virtually finished animal, was ingredient, and centrally ingredient, in the production of that animal itself." (47) In brief, from this perspective, the structure of our brains and our complex nervous system are partly cultural products. Thus, because "our central nervous system—and most partic-

ularly its crowning curse and glory, the neocortex—grew up in great part in interaction with culture, it is incapable of directing our behaviour or organizing our experience without the guidance provided by systems of significant symbols.” (49) See Clifford Geertz, “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

68. *Ibid.*, 49.

69. *Ibid.*, 34.

70. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger ([1767] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12, 14.

Chapter Three

Diderot and the Evils of Empire: The *Histoire des deux Indes*

1. The *Histoire* was first published in 1772 (with an imprint of 1770). It was published in extensively revised and enlarged forms in 1774 and 1780. There were numerous editions that followed with further alterations. All of Diderot’s contributions can be found from the 1780 edition onward. Anthony Strugnell is now at work on a modern critical edition of the *Histoire*, which will be published by the Voltaire Foundation. Since this edition has not yet been published, there is no standard edition that is used to cite the *Histoire*; moreover, volume and page numbers differ from edition to edition. Thus, I have cited Raynal’s *Histoire* by book and chapter in parentheses in the text (the *Histoire* is divided into 19 books, a division that is consistent across most editions). I have used the following edition: Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 10 vols. (Genève: Jean-Léonard Pellet, 1780). A small selection of Diderot’s contributions to the *Histoire* has been translated into English; see Diderot, *Political Writings*, ed. Mason and Wokler, 169–214. The translations of the *Histoire* in this essay are usually mine, since most are from passages not included in the Mason/Wokler selection; in some cases, I have drawn upon their edition, sometimes altering their translation in light of the French text.

2. The philological work that has been done on the *Histoire* is complex and although we do not know the author of every passage, the cache of Diderot’s manuscripts in the Fonds Vandeul (the collection of Diderot papers at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris) that came to light in the 1950s has alerted scholars to his contributions. Thus, until fairly recently, although Diderot’s participation in the *Histoire* had been rumoured since the 1770s, there was no evidence that could indicate what his specific contributions may have been. For a comprehensive analysis of these manuscripts that links them to sections of Raynal’s *Histoire*, see Michèle Duchet, *Diderot et l’Histoire des deux Indes ou l’Écriture Fragmentaire* (Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1978). I have used this study as my guide to locate all of Diderot’s contributions. On the issue of various contributors and their relationship to the anti-imperialism of the *Histoire*, see Yves Benot, “Diderot, Pechmeja, Raynal et l’anticolonialisme”, *Europe*, 41 (1963): 137–53.

3. Edmund Burke, letter to Richard Champion, 13 June 1777, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958–78), 353.

4. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1996), 22–82.

5. See J.G.A. Pocock, “Commerce, Settlement and History: A Reading of the *Histoire des deux Indes*”, in *Articulating America: Fashioning a National Political Culture in Early America, Essays in Honor of J. R. Pole*, ed. Rebecca Starr (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 15–44. See also Anthony Strugnell, “Post-modernism versus Enlightenment and the problem of the Other in Raynal’s *Histoire des deux Indes*”, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 341 (1996): 169–82; and William R. Womack, “Eighteenth-century themes in the *Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes* of Guillaume Raynal”, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 96: 129–265. For insightful collections of essays on the *Histoire*, see Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Manfred Tietz, eds., *Lectures de Raynal: L’Histoire des deux Indes en Europe et en Amérique au XVIIIe siècle*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 286 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991); Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink and Anthony Strugnell, eds., *L’Histoire des deux Indes: Réécriture et polygraphie*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, vol. 333 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995). Forthcoming dissertations by Anoush Terjanian (Johns Hopkins University) and Sunil Agnani (Columbia University) will shed further light on this rich and influential, yet still understudied, text.

6. As Diderot writes, “The [commercial] exchanges should be free. If I want to seize by force what is refused me, or to use violence to have something which is not wanted forcibly accepted, then I could legitimately be either put in chains or driven away. If I get hold of the foreign commodity without offering the price for it, or I take it away by stealth, I am a thief who can be killed without remorse.” (XIII, 1)

7. Diderot, “Droit Naturel”, in *Political Writings*, 10.

8. Thus, a “universal morality” is not simply “inherent in the nature of man, [but] is also inherent in the nature of societies” (XIX, 14).

9. A fine study of this turn in Diderot’s thought is Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot’s politics: A study of the evolution of Diderot’s political thought after the Encyclopédie* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973). See also the essays in Peter France and Anthony Strugnell, eds. *Diderot, les dernières années, 1770–84: Colloque du bicentenaire, 2–5 Septembre 1984 à Edimbourg* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

10. Rousseau criticizes the universal dimension of Diderot’s account of the general will in what has come to be known as the “Geneva Manuscript”, an early draft of *Du Contrat Social*. See Rousseau, *The Social Contract and other later political writings*, 153–59. For an account of Diderot’s influence (both positive and negative) upon Rousseau’s theory of the general will, see Robert Wokler, “The influence of Diderot on the political theory of Rousseau: Two aspects of a friendship”, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 132 (1975): 55–111. See also Jacques Proust, “La contribution de Diderot à l’Encyclopédie et les théories du droit naturel”, *Annales Historiques de la Revolution Française* (1963): 257–86. For a comprehensive history of the concept of the general will in modern French religious and political thought, see Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

11. The *Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Hévétius intitulé L'Homme* (see Diderot, *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. P. Vernière [Paris: Garnier, 1956]) is a work that most clearly marks his split with materialist philosophy, which was further deepened by the increasing humanism in later works, including parts of the *Supplément* and especially his contributions to the *Histoire*. See D. C. Creighton, "Man and Mind in Diderot and Helvétius", *Publications of the Modern Language Association* (1956): 705–24. Diderot's heightened commitment to humanistic concepts and principles in his later thought may have aided the development not only of his anti-imperialist thought, but also of his increasingly tolerant and inclusive arguments about Jews. On the latter subject, see Leon Schwartz, *Diderot and the Jews* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981).

12. Cf. Lester G. Crocker, "Diderot and the Idea of Progress", *Romanic Review* (1938): 151–59.

13. On the idea of customary moralities in Diderot, see Arthur M. Wilson, "The concept of 'moeurs' in Diderot's social and political thought" in *The Age of Enlightenment: Studies presented to Theodore Bestermann*, ed. W. H. Barber (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), 188–199.

14. The European discourse about the relationship among travel, commerce, and the rights of hospitality can be traced to the pre-Socratics as well as to the classical epics; as Anthony Pagden has argued, the right to hospitality is tacitly invoked in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and it reemerges crucially in the early modern theological debates about communication and the interaction of peoples abroad in light of the conquest of the New World. As I will show in chapter 5, Immanuel Kant subverted the traditionally imperialist tendencies of such arguments by using the idea of cosmopolitan right (a right to hospitality) to attack European imperialism. See Anthony Pagden, "Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism", *Constellations*, 7, no. 1 (March 2000), 3–22.

15. On this theme of travel and empire, see Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World*, 156–69.

16. Cf. Book XI, chapter 1: "We have seen immense countries invaded and laid waste; their innocent and peaceful inhabitants either massacred or loaded with chains; a dreadful solitude established upon the ruins of a numerous population; ferocious usurpers destroying one another, and heaping their dead bodies upon those of their victims."

17. On the distinction between active and passive injustice, and between misfortune and injustice, see Judith N. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), chapter 2.

18. See Boyd Stanley Schlenker, "Religious Faith and Commercial Empire" and Patrick K. O'Brien, "Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire, 1688–1815" in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall, respectively 128–50, 53–77 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

19. The classic study of modern intellectual history along these lines remains Albert Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), recently republished in a twentieth anniversary edition with a foreword by Amartya Sen.

20. In German, such shades of meaning can be made explicit, as with *Verkehr*

and *Wechselwirkung*, which are both generally translated into English as *commerce*. Thus, as we will further see in chapter 5, Immanuel Kant moves between the two terms, sometimes using *Verkehr* (a term that he sometimes uses to denote contract, trade, or market-based interactions) and other times drawing upon the broader *Wechselwirkung* to indicate the communicative and interactive aspects of commerce. Politically, such nuances allowed Kant both to attack the injustices of imperialism as the horrid practices of “the commercial states of our part of the world”, while also celebrating the future potential of the “spirit of commerce” in fostering peace among nations, a spirit also more narrowly described by Kant at one point as “the power of money” (Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–], 8:358; 8:368). Kant’s use of the Latin *commercium* as well as its German offshoots is foreshadowed (and indeed may have been influenced) by Diderot’s varied understanding of the concept of commerce in the *Histoire*.

21. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* [1748], Book V, chapter 6, on the “spirit of commerce”. Montesquieu was well aware of many of the injustices of imperial rule, although he was not a thoroughgoing opponent of European imperialism in the manner of Diderot. It should also be noted that, in *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu could display a nuanced sense of both the benefits and the potential costs, sometimes quite severe, in terms of disorder and inequality, of commerce. Thus, while he is still primarily remembered along these lines as a celebrant of commerce, he may well be more accurately placed with thinkers such as Diderot, aware of both the promise and the perils of modern commerce, though perhaps without quite the same level of ambivalence that we find in the *Histoire*.

22. In Book VII, chapter 24, Diderot paraphrases Cassiodorus, the sixth-century historian and monk, to make a related argument: “To acquire gold by sacrificing men is a crime. To go in search of it across the perils of the sea is a folly. To amass it by corruption and vices is base. The only profits that are just and honest are those that are acquired without injury to any person; and we never can possess, without remorse, what we have obtained at the expense of other men’s happiness.”

23. Cf. Immanuel Kant: “China and Japan (*Nipon*), which had given such guests a try, have therefore wisely [placed restrictions on them], the former allowing them access but not entry [*den Zugang, aber nicht den Eingang*], the latter even allowing access to only a single European people, the Dutch, but excluding them, like prisoners, from community with the natives” (Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 8:359).

24. Cf. Book XIX, chap. 15: “The insatiable thirst for gold has given birth to the most infamous and atrocious of all trades, that of slaves. People speak of crimes against nature and they do not cite slavery as the most horrific. The majority of European nations are soiled by it, and a vile self-interest has stifled in human hearts all the feelings we owe to our fellow humans.”

25. See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd rev. ed. ([1938] New York: Vintage, 1963), 24–25, 171, 250. Diderot’s famous passage was a revision of an earlier contribution to

the 1774 edition that had prophesied a “Black Spartacus”. Diderot’s contribution for the 1780 edition closely paraphrased an anti-imperialist passage in Sebastien Mercier’s popular novel, *L’An 2440*, in which an eighteenth-century Frenchman wakes up to find himself in the year 2440. In a Paris square, he sees a statue of a black ‘liberator’; the pedestal describes the figure as the man who liberated the New World from European oppression, at which the Frenchman cries in joy. See Yves Benot, *Diderot: De l’athéisme à l’anticolonialisme* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970), 212–15.

26. For instance, later in Book XI, chap. 24, Diderot writes in the voice of a slave who addresses slaveowners and the defenders of slavery: “Men or demons, whoever you are, do you dare to justify the attacks on my independence by the law of the strongest? What! The person who wants to make me a slave is not guilty, but is making use of his rights? What are these rights? Who has given them such a sacred character that they can silence my rights? By nature I have the right to defend myself; by nature you do not have the right to attack me. If you think that because you are stronger and more clever than me you have authority to oppress me, do not complain if my swift arm tears open your chest to find your heart. Do not complain when you feel, in your cut-up intestines, the taste of death, which I have stirred in with your food. I am stronger or more clever than you; it is your turn to be victim. Now expiate the crime of having been an oppressor.”

27. Anatole Feugère, “La Doctrine Révolutionnaire de Raynal et de Diderot d’après l’*Histoire des Indes*”, *Mercur de France* (1913), 498–517.

Chapter Four

Humanity and Culture in Kant’s Politics

1. Citations from the *Critique of Pure Reason* refer to the standard ‘A’ and ‘B’ pagination, and the quotations are from Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996); I have also consulted Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Citations of Kant’s other writings in this and the following chapter are from the standard Prussian Academy edition (volume followed by page number): Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–). Quotations from the *Idea for a Universal History, Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History*, and Kant’s reviews of Herder’s *Ideas* are from Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Quotations from *What is Enlightenment?*, the *Groundwork*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, *Theory and Practice*, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, and *The Metaphysics of Morals* are from Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Quotations from *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and *The End of All Things* are from Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni. Quotations from the *Critique of Judgement* are from Immanuel Kant,