

WHIG ETHNOLOGY FROM LOCKE TO MORGAN

THOMAS R. TRAUTMANN

I come to the notion of whig ethnology through further reflection on the life and writings of Lewis H. Morgan. The central project of Morgan's life emanated from his astonished discovery of the profound differences between the Iroquois kinship system and his own. I continue to believe that the great comparative study through which he sought to illuminate that difference, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871), is a work of rare originality, even of genius, that played a decisive role in consolidating anthropology by defining, indeed inventing, kinship as an object of study. It is one of the few works of nineteenth-century anthropology that remains a living text—his *League of the Iroquois* (1851) is another—and it still has much to teach us.

The special quality of Morgan, as it seems to me, is that the originality of that work is contained within a life and body of writings many aspects of which appear

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conventionally Victorian. In a number of respects, Morgan seems to us a representative type of his age, resolvable into his historical and cultural milieu. There is his lifelong adherence to the Presbyterian church; his attachment to the Whig, and then to the Republican, parties; his strong opposition to slavery (believing it repugnant to the Anglo-Saxon love of liberty); his conviction that Americans were more Anglo-Saxon than the British, being classless and republican; his belief that American capitalism would avoid hereditary privilege and class warfare through open access to economic advancement; and his progressive evolutionism. There is also the fact, the significance of which I wished to know, that Morgan possessed two copies of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, one of them inherited from his father.¹ It is not my contention that all of Morgan's accomplishments can be attributed to his context; but much can be known about him through it, and I did not feel that I knew that context more than a few metres below the surface level of cliché. 'Whig ethnology' is a concept by which I hope to integrate the significant aspects of this context in its historical depth.

One of the problems with the concept of whig ethnology is that anthropologists have no idea what I have in mind, so that as a title it is certain to be a dead loss. Historians to whom I have mentioned the idea, on the other hand, catch on right away. This is because they have been obliged to read Herbert Butterfield's book, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1965, first published 1931), or have at least learned by example to use the slogan to which the burden of the book has been reduced in intramural warfare.

Whiggish history really has two distinct but related meanings. In the first place it is the kind of history writing that was the dominant mode in nineteenth-century Britain and America. It is characterized by a whig or liberal outlook of a reforming kind and a cheerful optimism, sustained by a belief that history is guided by a law of progress; it is highly given to moralizing and is distinctly Protestant. It is one of the disappointments of Butterfield's book that he largely assumes we know what he is talking about and does not explicate the whig interpretation of history as an expression of Anglo-American Protestant culture. Other writers have made good the lack, most notably J. W. Burrow (1981). From him we learn that the defining type whom Butterfield does not name is almost

1. On Morgan's life generally, see Trautmann 1987. The defence of American capitalism occurs in his *Diffusion Against Centralization* (1852). Morgan's library was bequeathed to the University of Rochester, and his inventory of it (which Karl Kabelac and I are preparing for publication), in which the two copies of Locke are mentioned, is in the Morgan Papers there. Morgan is made more interesting for us by the ways in which he departs from the Victorian type. Thus, although he was a churchgoer and supporter of the Presbyterian church throughout his life, he did not formally become a member because of his inability to profess Christ. Again, though he defended American capitalism in his early life, toward the end of it he declared, at the close of *Ancient Society* (1877: 552), that a mere property career is not the final end of man, and that the future would see the revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient system of clans exemplified by the Iroquois.

certainly Thomas Babbington Macaulay, whose belief in progress was so robust that he beheld the English scene made beautiful by industrialization: 'seaside boarding-houses and rumbling factories embellishing landscapes once squalid with timber and thatch' (ibid.: 48). That kind of thing.

Whiggish history tends to divide the actors of the historical drama into the good guys who are fighting for the future and the bad guys who are reactionary obstacles to progress. It is this feature that leads to the second meaning of whig history, the one on which Butterfield dwells. Abstracting its formal characteristics from its specific cultural matrix, Butterfield constructs whiggish history as a structural type of history writing in order to attack it. The leading characteristic of this type is its presentism, its telling the story of the past from the point of view of the values of the present. Butterfield's work is a polemic against this kind of moralizing history, in favour of specialist research that does not pass moral judgements, a depoliticized technician's history, a history of 'is' and not of 'ought'. Whiggism in this second sense is a word of reproach; if you want to insult a historian, call him or her 'whiggish' and see what kind of reaction you provoke.

I confess I do not find Butterfield very convincing in his main argument, namely that history should be a charmed circle of understanding within which all sins are forgiven. The attempt to expunge moral reasoning from history, or from the human sciences in general, in order to make them scientific seems to me futile; but that is another story. What is much more interesting to me is the whig interpretation as a specific cultural form, the story that Butterfield takes for granted and declines to analyse more deeply.

Now, the whig interpretation of history is a reading of British and American history under the idea of a law of progress, involving the story of liberty, the story of knowledge and the story of property. It is also an interpretation of the history of European civilization in general, more especially the march of progress from the Reformation to the present. I believe the 'whig interpretation of history' in its culturally and historically specific sense is a good and useful concept, and that it is good and useful to extend it to whiggish ideas of non-European nations and their relation to European civilization. This whig interpretation of the non-Western world I want to call 'whig ethnology'.

Whig Ethnology

The story of whig ethnology has its own time frame, coming to a culmination in the 1870s, when anthropology came into existence as a specialist discourse with its own subject-matter and its own technical means of investigating it. The age of Tylor, Maine, McLennan, Lubbock and Morgan was when the whig interpretation of history was at its height, and the social evolutionism of these thinkers is clearly

an extension to the whole of human history of the whig interpretation of European history. We can see the Anglo-American anthropology of the late nineteenth century as a kind of secularization of whig ethnology, and whig ethnology as the immediate ancestor of the British and American national traditions of the anthropological discipline.

Starting-points can be decisive. Evans-Pritchard (1981), for whom the French tradition is very important, commences his history of anthropological thought with Montesquieu. The latter's *L'Esprit des lois* was of immense importance in Britain, especially for the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment, and indeed Montesquieu is treated as something of an honorary Whig by his northern British admirers. As such, he must be a figure of major importance in the story of whig ethnology; but he does not define its starting-point.

Sahlins (1976), to take another example, makes Hobbes the apical ancestor of anthropology, for his sense (in sympathy with Evans-Pritchard's characterization of the Nuer system as 'ordered anarchy') that the problem of society is the problem of creating order among human populations whose propensity is to resist restraint. Constructing such an intellectual lineage, or any other, for one's sense of where the core of anthropology is to be found is perfectly legitimate. But if what we want to know is the story of whig ethnology we will not begin with Hobbes, whose inclinations are royalist, but with the English Revolution of 1688, and with John Locke, whiggism's first theorist. In this essay I should like to give a brief version of that story, severely condensed, by juxtaposing the writings of Locke and Morgan on American Indians, from either end of its natural period. But first I should like to develop the concept somewhat more fully.

The essence of whig ethnology is the idea of progress, which supplies the fundamental logic for its classification of nations extended across space and time. The idea of progress is of course characteristic of the whole of Europe in the Age of Reason, not only of Britain. Europeans for the first time felt confident about themselves, in relation to their own past and in relation to other nations. They believed they had become civilized. Civilization is a notoriously vague notion, but one that includes, always, a hint at least of the great reformation of manners that came about at the end of the age of feudalism, summed up in the word 'civility'. The aristocracy began to soften the warrior style of life by studying books of politeness, learning to dance, and using perfume, if not actually bathing. But civilization referred especially to the 'revival of letters' that attended the recovery of Greek literature, and to the expansion of commerce, and consciousness, that attended the great voyages of discovery, above all the discovery of the New World.

We speak, then, of an ethnology of expanding horizons, the necessary condition, it would seem, for a belief in scientific knowledge as cumulative, growing in bulk and refinement, in science as 'future wisdom'. This is different in kind from an ethnology of shrinking or stable or slowly widening horizons, more given perhaps to kinds of knowledge whose perceived task is to recover and preserve ancient wisdom. The ethnologies of late antiquity and of medieval

Europe were decidedly unself confident. It is inadequate, surely, but perhaps not excessively unfair to describe them as, more or less, the endless rehashing of what could be found in biblical and Latin authors. Into this mould was poured new matter from traveller's reports of non-Christian nations that inspired wonder and often feelings of inferiority and envy. The Muslims of the *Chanson de Roland*, for example, are hateful people who live in sumptuous palaces of marble far superior to those of their Christian antagonists. By the eighteenth century, however, Europeans are confident that their learning has outstripped that of the Greeks and Romans, and that of all Asia as well. The entire scaffolding of nineteenth-century social evolutionism is in place. There are already the three stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization, or the fourfold series of hunting and fishing, herding, agriculture and commerce, in both cases with Europe at the top. There is also the identification of the cultures of non-Europeans with the culture of Europe's past. The consciousness of European progress was, at the same time, a conviction that the rest of the world had not advanced as far as Europe had.

Whig ethnology, then, is one variant of this European story of progress, the variant that came to be dominant in Britain. The peculiarities of the whig version of the story of progress are mainly two: the whig version is built around the story of liberty, especially British liberty, and it identifies the growth of Protestantism with the advancement of liberty. Each of these two terms requires some comment.

In the English Revolution of 1688, Parliament successfully asserted its right to choose the king, setting aside the Stuart heir, who showed an alarming fondness for Catholicism, and inviting the Protestant William of Orange to become king. Parliamentary supremacy and the cause of Protestantism were united in a single victorious struggle against the claims of royal absolutism. Propagandists for royal absolutism, such as Robert Filmer (in his *Patriarcha*), had attempted to show that royal power was God-given, natural and unlimited, and Hobbes' contract theory (in *Leviathan*) was to similar effect. The answering propaganda of whig theorists, beginning with Locke, took one of two forms. Locke himself argued that liberty was natural and original to the human condition and that encroachments upon it by kings constituted despotism or tyranny contrary to nature. Other whigs argued that the British constitution and its liberties went back to an ancient, specifically Anglo-Saxon past, and had survived successive royal encroachments by Norman and Tudor monarchs. (In this case, British liberty tends to be seen as a peculiarly British formation.)² Under both arguments the achievements of the English Revolution were interpreted as the restoration of an ancient condition of liberty, not as the creation of liberty for the first time. Whigs opposed unlimited monarchy, but they were not, in their first age, believers in democracy. Their ideal was what they achieved, a monarchy limited by Parliament.

The Protestant element in whiggism defined itself in opposition to Catholicism by means of the distinction between religion and superstition. Where Catholics had applied the label of superstition to folk religion unsanctified by the Church,

2. On the varieties of the Whig doctrine of liberty, see Burrow 1981: 21-28.

Protestants applied it to Catholicism and argued that it was supported by self-interested priests, or 'priestcraft'. Protestantism viewed itself, in flattering contrast, as true religion purified of superstition and rescued from priestcraft. This, too, was essentially a restorationist view and not a progressive one. But in the English Revolution, Protestantism and liberty were identified in a single success story. Although Protestantism had at various times opposed free speech and supported royal absolutism, it now became possible to read its own past as part and parcel of a great story, beginning with Luther, of the growth of liberty, the purification of religion, and the advancement of knowledge.

Protestantism, so conceived, is in its essence identified with liberty and science. The whig interpretation of European history, then, is this great story of liberty, true religion and knowledge. It was probably because of the conjunction of liberal and Protestant projects in the English Revolution that the Enlightenment in Britain was far more Christian and far less sceptical (excepting always Hume and Gibbon) than was the case in France—a point of considerable consequence when we are devising methods by which to clarify what we mean when we say that anthropology is the child of the Age of Reason. Nevertheless, we have to recognize that atheism was now, perhaps for the first time, not merely a theoretical zero of Christianity, but an actual option, and that there were undercurrents of resistance to the consensus position in Britain.

The intersection of these two dimensions of whig thought define its proper home as Protestant Britain and, by extension, Protestant British America.³ This world, of course, was not self-enclosed; on the contrary, its boundaries were permeable, its horizons enlarging. But while it participated in the great movements of European thought and was greatly affected by such continental thinkers as Montesquieu and Rousseau, whig ethnology had a coherence distinctively its own, drawn round its defining themes. Again, while whiggism was British and Protestant, it was neither Irish nor Catholic. Indeed, for Catholic Ireland whiggism was not good news: as Macaulay somewhere notes with regret, England's liberty was purchased at the price of Ireland's.

Even at the level of pure ideas, coherence is never easily achieved. In this brief characterization of the whiggish view readers will have seen that there is a certain dissonance between the notion of progress and the doctrine of ancient liberty, to which we should add the tension between belief in ancient wisdom (scripture) and future wisdom (the book of nature, science). We shall examine this matter more closely below.

The Locke-to-Morgan story of whig ethnology I will present has the advantage of brevity, achieved, however, by the drastic expedient of retaining only the beginning and end of the story and throwing away the middle. Inevitably, such

3. Butterfield (1965: 4) notes, uncharitably, that the majority of the great patriarchs of history writing 'seem to have been whigs and gentlemen when they have not been Americans'. I should suggest a comma after 'whigs', for whether they were gentlemen or not, the Americans were also whigs, after their own fashion.

simplification will create a false sense of direct development from the A to the Z of whig ethnology. An adequate telling—which this decidedly is not—would have to take a great many other developments into account. The big issues, it seems to me, are mainly five: the theory of economic stages, as developed especially by such enlightened Scots as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and John Millar; the language-led ethnology of Sir William Jones and others; the study of race, including the Jeffersonian Samuel Stanhope Smith and the great British ethnologist James Cowles Prichard; kinship (Morgan); and religion (Tylor).⁴ Many of these figures contributed ideas that have proved to be of enduring value, which makes them especially appealing. The story of whig ethnology could, of course, be told as another exercise in ‘unmasking’ the conjuncture of ethnology and colonialism, but experience of this mode suggests that the question of value would have to be set aside at the outset. Evading the question of the value of what has been achieved would, to my taste, make the exercise far too easy to be interesting. I believe it is more useful to put the tension between its effects for good and for ill at the centre of the story of whig ethnology.

The issue of race is perhaps the most difficult to clarify. Tentatively, I am inclined to put it in this way: whig ethnology holds that savagery is the past of civilization and that civilization is the future of savagery. Europe is civilization in its fullest development, in relation to which all non-Europeans are in some sense put in the wrong. The association of dark complexion with non-civilization is taken as empirical fact, and in this the whiggish view has some of the same effects as racism. At the same time, it is important to be clear that it is distinct from racism proper, in particular from the ‘scientific racism’ that claims, by appealing to the authority of science, that the mental capacities of the races differ. Scientific racism enjoyed a steady growth in the nineteenth century, but in tension with Protestant religion and whig ethnology and as an undercurrent of resistance to them. For Protestants, it violates the biblical story of human unity; for Whigs, it eats at the heart of the story of progress. The whig view is essentially environmentalist, in that it argues that humans are at bottom the same and that they differ because of differences in education and experience. One of the characteristic products of this view is the theory of liberal imperialism that emerges under British rule in India: British rule, though despotic (and un-whiggish), is justified in so far as it raises the level of civilization in India, and prepares it for liberty.

I hope I have made the idea of whig ethnology reasonably clear. Now I should like to give some of the complications, so that readers can better judge whether it is interesting. To do so, I shall examine the ethnology of John Locke and of Lewis Henry Morgan. Locke’s works are well known, but for Morgan I will use, besides his well-known Iroquois writings, a not very well known piece with the intriguing title ‘Montezuma’s Dinner’.

4. Such a telling will have the great advantage of Stocking’s excellent *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), which covers much of this territory. Bowler’s *Fossils and Progress* (1976) makes good use of the notion of a whig interpretation in reference to nineteenth-century palaeontology.

The Ethnology of John Locke

Locke's two greatest works were published in 1689, the year following the English Revolution. They are the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and his political tract, the *Two Treatises on Government*.

Locke was no ethnographer, but he was an avid reader and collector of narratives of travel in the non-European world, and his knowledge of it was perhaps as good as any that could be got from books at the end of the seventeenth century. He had 275 or so books of voyages, travels and geography in his library, which has been called 'a very remarkable collection' for the time (Laslett 1971: 27). They figure largely in a notebook of extracts from his reading on what Laslett (*ibid.*) calls social or comparative anthropology and what Locke himself called ethics.

A huge, four-volume collection of voyages and travels in his collection contains an introductory piece called 'The Whole History of Navigation from its Original to this Time' (Anon. 1704) (the 'Original' being Noah's ark) that has often been attributed to Locke. Although the attribution is questionable, it is morally certain that he read it and probable that its substance coincided with his outlook.⁵

'The Whole History of Navigation' dwells particularly on the discovery of America by Columbus and on the practical and philosophical implications of the New World for Europeans. America is greater in extent than Asia, Africa and Europe severally, we are told, and not much less than the three put together. It is the greater for the silver-mines of Peru and Mexico and the gold-mines of Chile, and their equal in the other blessings of nature. America is a world by itself, concealed from the rest for over 5,000 years—that is, for the greater part of human history, according to biblical chronology. The author wondered how it could be so large and yet remain hid so long; the wit of man, he says, cannot conclude how people first came to it and made it so well inhabited, and why no others could find the way since. The fertility of its soil is stupendous, 'producing all sorts of fruits and plants which the other parts of the world afford, in greater perfection than in their native land, besides an infinity of others which will not come to perfection elsewhere' (Anon. 1704: xxxvi).

This seems of a piece with the fascination for America we find in Locke's work, reference to which he makes repeatedly in the *Second Treatise* and occasionally in the *Essay*. It is not too much to say that in the *Second Treatise* he wished to theorize the place of America in world history, and that throughout his

5. This text was first attributed to Locke in the third edition (1744) of the *Collection of Voyages* (originally brought out by his publishers Awnsham and John Churchill in 1704) and was included in editions of Locke's *Works* beginning with the ninth (1794). De Beer rejects the attribution (cited in Attig 1985: 163). Laslett thinks it likely that Locke advised the Churchills in the production of this huge collection even if he did not edit it; he certainly seems to have lent them books from his library for the purpose (Laslett 1971: 19).

writings the many references to non-Europeans indicate a desire to speak ethnologically in order to speak universally. In the *Essay*, for example, all sixteen of the authorities quoted in the 1705 edition have to do with comparative anthropology and comparative religion (Laslett 1971: 28). Let us therefore look at Locke's ethnology, first in the *Essay*, then in the *Second Treatise*.

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

For Locke, human knowledge has two sources. Primary ideas are formed by impressions upon the senses acting upon the mind as a more or less passive matrix much as a seal upon wax or chalk on a blank slate. Secondary ideas are formed by the mind in active mode, sorting primary ideas by comparison, abstraction and so forth, creating concepts more or less artificial and peculiar to the language in which they are expressed—in short, creating classes. Thus the growth of knowledge has the character of discovery and making. What he specifically denies, vehemently and at length, is the notion that the mind has innate ideas that are stamped upon it, such that, as in the Platonic conception, the acquisition of knowledge is a kind of 'remembering' of soul-knowledge rather than the 'discovery' of an outer world. This was a considerable departure from accepted views and was much attacked as tending to undermine traditional proofs of God's existence. Indeed, Locke deploys his ethnographic knowledge in his demolition job upon the belief that knowledge of God is innate, showing by reference to authority that there exist whole nations of atheists (1975: 87).

In spite of the pugnacious spirit of that demonstration, Locke's purpose is wholly pious, and he means neither to undermine the scriptures nor to rationalize natural science in an anti-religious cause. But of these two kinds of knowledge, scriptural-religious and natural-scientific, the first has the disadvantage of being the cause of interminable arguments about the meaning of the sacred text, though the text be true, and the second, concerning nature, has, he thinks, inescapable limits; he is not, then, a cheerleader for his scientist friends Boyle and Newton. What he aims to do in the *Essay* is to establish practical knowledge, that is, moral philosophy. He optimistically reckons that it is possible to discover by dispassionate reasoning moral truths as certain as theorems of geometry and, like geometry, commanding the agreement of rational men. This moral philosophy will contain his political theory and his ethnology.

There is a method of linguistic research, associated with Noam Chomsky, that some wag has named 'English, for example'. Anthropology, as conducted in a philosopher's study, necessarily follows the method of 'me, for example'. Thus Locke's generalizations about human understanding draw, in the first place, upon his own, that is, upon the understanding of an Englishman of a certain time and situation. That this method has disadvantages will be obvious. For example, I cannot help thinking that his notion of the mind of the newborn as a blank slate could only have been entertained by someone who had no children of his own. However that may be, in his attempt to speak of the human in general, he is at

pains to consider the mental operations of persons at a distance from his station: children, idiots, 'naturals', labourers and savages—not that they are interchangeable, rather they have in common that they fall short in some way of the 'rational man' who is the standard of Locke's discourse.

This Lockean rational man inhabits a world a good bit different from our own. Let us briefly inspect its main features. Human beings have a history that unfolds itself in the brief, biblical duration that amounts to exactly 5,639 years prior to the publication of the *Essay* (1975 [1689]: 194). Human mind has a middling rank in the scale of mind in which the beings of the world are ranked into a hierarchy of powers, the several ranks so closely linked together, without discernible gaps, that it is not easy to discover the boundaries between them (*ibid.*: 446-7, 666). There are in all probability as many intelligent beings superior to man and ascending upward to the infinite perfection of the Creator as there are inferior beings descending by gentle degrees below. Locke surprises us by speaking of life on other planets, whole, other worlds of sentient beings (*ibid.*: 555). The boundaries between species are hard to discern and likely to be of man's making. Locke considers, among other problems that make classification uncertain, the problem of apparently rational talking animals, such as Baalam's ass in the Bible and Prince Maurice's rational parrot, the latter a very droll story which I highly recommend and reluctantly pass over in the interest of brevity (*ibid.*: 333, 456). He also considers reports of men with tails.

How are savages positioned within this world? We might expect that Locke would treat the races of the human kind as separate species in the scale of mind, but this he clearly does not do. It is, he tells us, an English child's error to consider the Negro not a man because a skin of white or flesh colour in England is part of the child's complex idea of what he calls man (*ibid.*: 607). Throughout his text it is clear that savages are examples of the species man. What, then, is the nature of the difference between the savage and the civilized?

The difference, of course, is to be found in knowledge, in the lesser knowledge of the savage. Since knowledge is not innate, the savage condition is not so; knowledge is founded on experience, and it is the narrower, more limited experience of the savage that makes his knowledge what it is and less than that of the civilized. Experience means especially productive interactions with nature, and it is a low level and constricted range of experience that makes a savage.

Locke's doctrine of language is developmental. Civilized languages have a vocabulary that is copious, the product of wide horizons of experience, while savage languages are 'scanty' (*ibid.*: 433). In an intriguing passage Locke speaks of having conversed with some Americans who, though 'of quick and rational Parts enough', could not count to a thousand and had no distinct idea of that number, 'though they could reckon very well to 20', so that for the larger numbers they would indicate the hairs of their head to express a great many. This inability, then, is not due to a want of rational capacity but, as Locke says, because their language is scanty and 'accommodated only to the few necessities of a needy simple Life'. Unacquainted with trade or mathematics, they had no word for a

thousand (ibid.: 207). Languages, for Locke, are constructed from experience, words expressing complex ideas being the built-up effects of interactions with nature or reflexes of human custom.

Locke is a strict environmentalist. The level of knowledge for any individual will depend upon the richness of the human environment in which he is placed, not upon heredity: 'Had you or I been born at the Bay of *Soldania*, possibly our Thoughts, and Notions, had not exceeded those brutish ones of the *Hotentots* that inhabit there: And had the *Virginia* King *Apochancana*, been educated in *England*, he had, perhaps, been as knowing a Divine, and as good a Mathematician, as any in it.' The difference between the Indian and a 'more improved Englishman' lies in the fact that the exercise of his mind is bounded within the limited 'Ways, Modes and Notions of his own Country' (ibid.: 92). What separates the savage from the civilized condition is not mental capacity based on race, but a history of the development of productive powers. In America, abounding in all sorts of natural plenty, the ignorance of useful arts is due largely to ignorance of iron; and were the use of iron lost among us, we should soon be 'reduced to the Wants and Ignorance of the ancient savage *Americans*, whose natural Endowments and Provisions come no way short of those of the most flourishing and polite Nations' (ibid.: 646).

The child, the savage and the labourer do not know the maxims that the schoolmen wrongly suppose innate, from a common cause, a limited experience of life: 'their Notions are few and narrow', drawn from the small number of objects with which they have most to do: 'A Child knows his Nurse, and his Cradle, and by degrees the Playthings of a little more advanced Age: and a young Savage has, perhaps, his Head fill'd with Love and Hunting, according to the fashion of his Tribe.' Labourers, who make up the greatest part of mankind, are 'enslaved to the Necessity of their mean Condition', their lives worn out in the quest for the mere provisions for living. Their opportunities for knowledge and enquiry are as narrow as their fortune, and their whole time and pains are devoted to stilling the croaking of their own bellies or the cries of their children. It is 'Leisure, Books, and Languages, and the Opportunity of Conversing with variety of Men' that make the rational man, and these the labourer cannot have. We meet the unity of the child, the savage and the labourer frequently in the social evolutionists of two centuries later.

Thus, by excluding innate knowledge Locke excludes a racist treatment of savages in the strict sense. By making knowledge a result of experience and especially of productive interactions with nature, his is a doctrine of *developmentalism*. It is knowledge of iron, it is navigation and travel, it is commerce that makes knowledge grow, and lack of them that puts the child, the savage and the labourer in a state of ignorance. Knowledge is progressive discovery, not remembering what is eternally true and imprinted on the soul.

This is the story of knowledge in Locke. I turn now to the *Second Treatise*, to see its relation to the stories of liberty and of property.

The Second Treatise (On Civil Government)

'Thus in the beginning all the World was *America*, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as Money was any where known' (49).⁶ The *America* of this passage excludes the empires of Mexico and Peru; it is 'in the middle of the inland Parts of *America*, where [a man] had no hopes of Commerce with other Parts of the World' (48). This *America* excites Locke's imagination, because it is 'still a Pattern of the first Ages in *Asia* and *Europe*' (108); thus, in his developmental view of history, *America* becomes the past of Eurasia, the savage an ancestor of the civilized, the whole, just barely, a theory of stages by the positing of the minimum of two stages in sequence.

Locke's purpose in the First Treatise had been to refute the theory of the royalist Filmer that the rights of kings were ancient and natural, having been derived by hereditary descent from Adam; and further to show that it is, rather, popular liberty that is ancient and natural. The Americans are useful to his theory because they are closest to the zero of developmental history. They are 'rich in Land and poor in all the Comforts of Life', liberally provided by nature with a fruitful soil, yet because they have not improved it by their labour they 'have not one hundredth part of the Conveniences we enjoy: And a King of a large and fruitful Territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day Labourer in England' (41).

However, the true zero of the story is not a developmental stage but a condition, the state of nature prior to the compact by which humans enter into civil society, a condition of natural liberty and full agency that individuals partially cede, but which nations continue to enjoy, in their dealings with one another, after their creation. It is in this state that individual agents create property by mixing their labour with the things found in the common of nature, that is, by mere appropriation, prior to any laws of property; and from it that, even after the creation of polities, they continue to appropriate when, for example, they take fish from the sea. The state of nature is admittedly conjectural and a product of theory, not surviving evidence, because records begin only some time after civil government is formed; and individuals abandon it very early in history because of its manifold 'inconveniences', of which the critical one has to do with the protection of private property. Locke treats the American Indians as close to this state, lacking money, which creates differentials of wealth, but possessed of kings. We find, then, one-man rule in the earliest history of commonwealths. But *America* provides evidence that the people, though they commonly prefer the heir of the deceased king, yet exercise their natural right to pass over the heir if they find him in any way weak or incapable. Moreover, the kings of the Indians in *America* are little more than generals of their armies and exercise very little dominion in peacetime (105, 108).

6. References to the text of the *Second Treatise* are to the section numbers of the 1988 edition.

America, then, as the pattern of the first ages in Asia and Europe, lends no credence to Filmer's proof that absolute monarchy is natural and ancient but, on the contrary, shows a limited kingship and the popular exercise of natural rights in choosing kings. This is the case, more precisely, of those Americans who, 'living out of reach of the Conquering Swords and spreading domination of the two great Empires of *Peru* and *Mexico*', enjoyed their own natural freedom and controlled the succession of their kings (105). In short, the American Indians were whigs and enjoyed a mixed constitution as did the English, except in Peru and Mexico, where empire and conquest encroached unnaturally upon liberty.

Summing up this all too brief account, we find Locke's ethnology entwined with the three master stories: of knowledge, of liberty, and of property. The stories of knowledge and of property are parallel and causally linked. Starting from the assumption of a homogeneous human understanding of which there are no racially differential varieties, the growth of knowledge and language arises through experiences of nature, especially the productive interactions of making, commerce and travel. The incremental accretions to national wealth through private improvement and industry in history proceeds in tandem with the growth of ideas and language, and appears to be both its condition and its effect. The story of knowledge and the story of property, then, is a developmental or progressive one.

The story of liberty, on the other hand, presents quite a different profile; indeed, since it is present in the state of nature and at the very outset of history, and since it is never cancelled but only usurped, it cannot be said to have a history at all, but to permeate history as a constant, uniform substance. It is the usurpations—despotism, tyranny or absolute monarchy—that arise in history, against nature. Tyranny has a beginning, but liberty is timeless.

Lewis H. Morgan

Turning now to Morgan, nearly two centuries hence—raised on Locke and whiggism of the American variety—we find him in his early researches on the Iroquois bringing that whiggism to the field.

Locke's knowledge of Indians had been wholly mediated by books, and for the most part he constructed his whiggish view of them out of Jesuit sources, in the absence of a Protestant missionary endeavour of any moment. In following years, the whig ethnology of the American Indians began to grow. Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Nations* (1743) likened the League of the Iroquois to the United Republic of Holland and republican Rome; Adam Ferguson's highly favourable picture of the Iroquois and Hurons recalled the Scottish highlanders and Sparta (1966 [1767]). Neither of these portraits, however, penetrates very deeply

into Indian social structure; they are views from above, which treat of political institutions without getting at the kinship structures on which they are based.

Morgan had consulted books of history on the Iroquois, but he found them wanting. One book he read had an Iroquois chief succeeded by his son, while the surprising fact that Morgan found in his fieldwork was that the Iroquois are matrilineal, their chiefly offices descending within matrilineal clans, in principle, that is, from mother's brother to sister's son. Morgan, unlike Locke, was not well read in the older ethnographies; he had read Coldon and Charlevoix, but had he also read Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains* (1724)—as Tylor was unkind enough to point out—he would not have thought his discovery of Iroquois matriliney original. However, it was certainly to the benefit of anthropology that he abandoned the library for the good people of Tonawanda to learn about what he called, in the title of his famous 1851 monograph, *The League of the Iroquois*.

Morgan's Iroquois fieldwork finally laid bare the structure of the Iroquois league. The critical find was the list of the 50 'federal' chiefs whose councils constituted the league itself. They came from each of the five nations, namely, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca. These nations were composed of eight matrilineal clans called Wolf, Bear, Turtle etc., and each of the 50 chiefships were the property of particular segments of particular clans of particular nations. The senior woman of the clan segment chose the chief; and since membership was matrilineal, a chief could not be succeeded by his own son, who belonged to the clan of the wife. Clan segments owned agricultural fields and lived in longhouses, eating from a common pot. At the base of the Iroquois league lay the family, Morgan found, and it was very different indeed from the family as he knew it (Morgan 1851; Trautmann 1987: ch. 3).

To these ethnographic findings, Morgan brought a whiggish interpretation. Much like Locke, he found the Iroquois to be whigs, but they were American-style whigs. Where Locke admired a mixed constitution of kings limited by popular liberty and found it in the Indians of Virginia, Morgan, living in a republic, found elected chiefs governing democratically, by discussion and consensus. The perfect democracy of the Iroquois, however, was not based upon personal property, for they had none of consequence, but upon the kinship base of matrilineal clans and the elective chiefships of clan segments. Land was, rather, clan owned, not private; and clanship governed what he called 'communism in living'—living, that is, not in nuclear families but by clans, in longhouses, eating from a common pot once a day, the men before the women. It is, indeed, a fierce love of liberty that leads the Iroquois to design their institutions in such a way as to outlaw private property in land and to base them upon the family relationship in the peculiar matrilineal form that prevents the son from succeeding the father and so prevents the growth of tyranny and hereditary privilege. Thus the whig doctrine of Locke exchanges its abstract, philosophical character for the empirical content of Iroquois fundamental institutions, which are, then, interpreted in the light of the whig doctrine of the natural character of liberty.

Thus in every political respect the Iroquois are worthy forerunners of the American republic and differ from their Euroamerican betters only in their underdevelopment of knowledge and property. Unlike Locke, however, who assimilates the Mexicans to the idea of empire and despotism, Morgan finds them too to be whigs. This is the conclusion of a strange and wonderful article with the strange and wonderful title of 'Montezuma's Dinner' (Morgan 1876).

Morgan's article on the Aztecs is a full-throated polemic, and for that reason a very good read. The objects of his wrath are the historians, as with his earlier attack upon the trustworthiness of the historians of the Iroquois—in this instance later writers, both Spanish and American, and more especially Morgan's senior contemporaries, Prescott and H. H. Bancroft, as well as eye-witness accounts of the conquest, including those of Cortez and Bernal Diaz. All use the language of feudal Europe to describe the Aztecs (the language of kings, emperors, lords, palaces and the like) and deploy the concepts—highly charged in the whig lexicon—of despotism and empire. So, laconically, had Locke, as we have seen.

As against that way of approaching the Aztecs, Morgan's article insists that a science of American ethnology can only be based on the direct study of living societies. We must, he says, do as Herodotus did and visit native tribes in their villages, studying their institutions as living organisms. Only then will Indian society become intelligible, because its structure and principles will be understood. Indian societies belong to the stages of savagery and barbarism, and their institutions, inventions and customs find no analogues in those of civilized nations. In short, out of the library and into the field.

The illustrative case is the daily meal of Montezuma, described by the conquerors and enlarged upon by subsequent writers. Every day some 600 lords dined with the emperor, some 300 dishes being prepared and kept warm on chafing dishes of burning charcoal, served to them by some 300 pages in a vast palace.

Morgan believes that even the Spanish eyewitnesses misconstrued the import of what they saw, and he makes bold to put them right by means of comparative knowledge of living Indian societies, especially, of course, the Iroquois. The Aztecs, he avers, were a confederacy of three tribes, probably further subdivided into clans. The office of chief was probably hereditary in specific clans. Montezuma had a council of chiefs who were not advisors but rather the effective co-rulers; Montezuma himself was perhaps a war chief, certainly not a king or emperor. It is likely that the Aztecs and their chiefs were matrilineal, with succession passing to brothers and nephews (i.e. sisters' sons). We have, then, a gentile or clan-and-kinship-based society fundamentally different from political society based on territory and property.

Ownership of land among the Aztecs, he continues, was in common, and there was no knowledge of ownership in fee simple. The obligations of hospitality were weighty, to the point that they tended to equalize subsistence. Thus the Spaniards were not lodged and fed out of a centrally controlled stock, but billeted upon a whole clan. The daily meal was divided from a common pot—communism in living. Indian houses, too, were characterized by a communal architecture and

composition: Montezuma's house was not the palace of a king but a joint-tenement house (of a clan). As among the Iroquois, it was the custom to eat but one meal a day, the men eating first, the women and children after. The parallel with the Iroquois is complete, and the difference is only of scale, not of structure.

Many of Morgan's rereadings of the conquerors' testimony are offered as possibilities rather than certainties, and one of them—the matrilineal descent of the Aztecs—is certainly wrong. But the great virtue of this scholarly exercise of cut and thrust is that it served to reorient the study of American civilizations away from a European frame of reference, and towards an Americanist framework of comparative ethnology. The benefits of Morgan's excellent programme lie in its method and conceptualization, not in his conclusions. Later scholars, such as the Meso-American specialist Adolph Bandelier, who was truly Morgan's student, would put it to work with good effect (see Waterman 1917 and White 1940).

Meanwhile, it is for us to note that Morgan's Aztecs have been transformed from earlier renderings in terms of opulence and empire into democrats and socialists of an early, underdeveloped type, the first appealing to Americans, the second to Marx and Engels, and neither, it would seem, to his British contemporaries, or in all likelihood to Locke.

Conclusion

To conclude what, as yet, has no proper conclusion, allow me to hazard a few comments about what seem to me the most significant features of the ethnology I have been trying to evoke, leaving untouched the many other features that provide, together, nearly endless mental provocations. Whiggish developmentalism, then, including the strong form—the belief that the historical process is guided onward and upward towards forms now best exemplified by Protestant Anglo-Saxons, through the slow, steady pressure of an immanent law of progress, governs the story of knowledge and the story of property. It is intrinsically environmentalist, not racialist; yet, as in other, European versions of the idea of progress, it has the effect of putting non-European nations in the wrong and of justifying European domination under the notion of tutelage, this being the theory of liberal imperialism. What an examination of Locke and Morgan on the American Indians shows, however, is that the shape of whiggish ethnology is not the simple rising edge of an inclined plane or a parabola. For in respect of liberty there is no history at all, let alone a story of development; at best, history intrudes upon an original and permanent state of liberty as a series of episodes of loss through despotism, and recovery through revolutions, which must, to this way of thinking, have the character of restorations. The Indians play a complex role in the whiggish story, then, both as underdeveloped, ignorant savages, but also as

fierce libertarians. There is a certain romanticizing here, but it is different, for example, from that of Rousseau, who uses noble savages to denounce civilization.

At a deeper level, it seems to me that the disjuncture between liberty and developmentalism in whiggism accounts for a certain incoherence in the concept of nature and the natural, and the relation of savagery to it. Liberty is natural in that it is primitive in the exact sense of the word, that is, as the original condition of the human kind. It is in respect of liberty, then, that savages are thought of as being close to nature, of being *Naturvölker* in the whiggish way. On the other hand, knowledge, science (even religious knowledge) is subject to a developmental process, such that it grows ever larger in body and better refined, improvement in knowledge meaning a better correspondence to nature. In this respect it is the civilized, rational man who is the more natural, and the science and religion of the savage is seen to be unnatural, arbitrary and false. I believe the whiggish outlook is internally conflicted on the question of the relation of savagery to nature and that the principle cleavage falls here; but that is a large and complex story.

We have snapped a chalkline stretched between Locke and Morgan. The straight blue mark that connects them is far too thin and simple a figure by which to represent how whig ethnology develops over time and what it is that happens when whiggism goes on fieldwork. But the case of Morgan is enough, perhaps, to suggest that it isn't all, and only, an exercise in bending the refractory and baffling experience of the Other into received moulds. Something new and useful has come out of the meditation on the daily meal of Montezuma and family—as well as something old, familiar, whiggish, even Lockean.

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