Religion (1996) **26**, 297–309

Nothing Human is Alien to Me

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I

On 29 August 1771, Benjamin Franklin, then resident in England for more than seven years, published in a London newspaper an article entitled, *A Plan for Benefiting Distant Unprovided Countries*. He had just heard of the condition of the Maoris of New Zealand who lacked any of the 'conveniences of life', presumably an intelligence gathered from some report of Captain Cook's first voyage (1766–71), the published account did not appear until 1773. Franklin proposed a subscription to enable an expedition to be mounted to bring domestic animals and manufactured goods to them, noting shrewdly that this would be not only an act of charity but an investment in support of future trade, a combination that would appeal to the commercial and philanthropic interests of his British Whig supporters. The proposal failed; a donation of five pounds is the only recorded response. Nevertheless, there is much of interest here. The proposal is cosigned by Alexander Dalrymple, a former official of the East India Company, who was named by Franklin to be the leader of the expedition. Dalrymple was the author of an *Account of the Discoveries made in the South Pacifick Ocean Previous to 1764* (1767) in which he argued for the existence of a vast Southern Continent 'to counterpoise the land to the North and to maintain the equilibrium necessary for the Earth's motion'. He calculated that all of the hitherto unchartered areas of the Pacific from the equator to 50 degrees south must be a large land mass 'of greater extent than the whole civilized part of Asia, from Turkey eastward to the extremity of China', capable of supporting a population of 50 million. Dalrymple had expected to lead the Royal Society's expedition to Tahiti to observe the transit of Venus in June, 1769, as an occasion to search for this Continent, but Captain James Cook had been chosen in his stead. Now, as Cook was preparing to undertake his Second Voyage (1772–75), in part with the explicit purpose of seeking this Southern Continent, for which the First Voyage had provided no evidence, the Franklin proposal has all the air of a consolation prize for Dalrymple. Frustrated in even this slim hope, Dalrymple would have to content himself with publishing the narratives of others in his influential two-volume anthology, *Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean* (1770–71), which continued to maintain the necessary existence of the Southern Continent ('The Great South Land'—the name ultimately given to Australia).

What caught my eye in the *Proposal* was not these complicated politics of exploration nor the geometric cosmology, but rather a small detail in the course of Franklin's argument for charity. He wrote that these people, although:

> distant . . . are in truth related to us and whose interests do in some degree concern every one who can say *homo sum &c* . . . (Smyth, 5: 343).

Homo sum &c, 'I am a human, etc.' is a remarkably abbreviated tag even by eighteenth century standards where, as Dr Johnson remarked, 'classical quotation is the *parole*

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('speech') of literary men all over the world', (Hill, Boswell's Life, 4: 102), and yet, Franklin could be certain that his audience would instantly be able to 'get' the allusion and complete the line, even though, as becomes typical of its later use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is no reference to its originator. In a process which the French philosopher of science, Bruno Latour, terms 'negative modality' it has become a general maxim, shorn of specificity as to both its author and its context—the greatest sort of success any phrase can have. For the full quotation, 'I am a human being; nothing human is foreign [or, alien] to me' (*Homo sum: Humani nihil a me alienum puto*) served as a motto of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, the latter a more accurate descriptive term than the more recent (and tendentious) characterization of Enlightenment 'universalism'.

If we restore authorial context, the initial results for a cosmopolitan understanding appear quite promising. The line is from an opening scene of a play by Terence, an author of problematic status in Christian Medieval and Renaissance criticism, but a secure figure in the Enlightenment canon, as David Hume observes: 'Aristotle, and Plato, and Epicurus . . . may successively yield to each other: but Terence and Virgil maintain a universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men' ('Taste'). This is, in part, because Terence is a complex, multicultural figure: by origin a Carthaginian, 'of dark complexion', whose native language was probably Punic, he was taken to Rome as a slave where he became, along with Plautus, one of the two pre-eminent writers of comedy in the Latin language, works consisting of adaptations of the Greek comedies of Menander—a borrowing which fitted well with phil-Hellenic preoccupations of the so-called Scipionic circle to which Terence belonged.

If, however, we consult the play, a quite different contextual understanding emerges. The opening scene of *The Self-Tormentor* (*Heautontimorumenos*), composed *c.* 163B.C., consists of a dialogue between a wealthy landowner and his neighbor, Chremes. The neighbor inquires as to why the landowner is working like a slave in the fields. The landowner retorts by asking how his neighbor has sufficient time to meddle in the affairs of others. Chremes's response is our line (77) which, in context, needs to be translated not as a general imperative, but as a defense of gossip or mixing in others' business. Something like:

> 'I am human and nothing human is foreign to my interests' (P. Bovie *et al.*)

or better, with respect to both context and syntax:

> 'I am a normal human; nobody's business is no concern of mine'. (F. O. Copley)

If the line in Terence is an adaptation of one from Menander, by no means an uncontroversial proposal in Terentian scholarship (see the debate between F. Dornseiff and M. Pohlenz in *Hermes*, 78, 1943), then Terence has, in fact, stripped it of both its generality and moral implications, as Menander fragment 475 reads: 'No one is foreign to me if he is upright' (Korte, *Menander Reliquiae*).

As the Terentian line was deployed in later writers, it was taken to be a moral imperative of concern for others, a sort of Roman version of the 'Golden Rule', so much so that Augustine reports that the line would be enthusiastically applauded by theatre audiences whenever the play was performed (Riley, 154). This understanding emerged first in classical Roman Stoic and Stoic-influenced writers, was continued in later European Humanist traditions, and remains in place for Enlightenment figures such as Benjamin Franklin. Thus Cicero (*c.* 45B.C.) argues:

> it is not easy to be concerned with other peoples problems, yet in Terence's play, as we know, Chremes thinks that 'nothing that concerns any human is foreign to him' (*De Officiis* I.9 [30]).

While Seneca, a century later, cites the line when urging that ones 'hands be ready for all that need help' (*Epistle* 95.53).

At a very different juncture of European history, Giambattista Vico, the great Italian philosopher of culture history, and professor of rhetoric, employs the line as part of a moral argument that had as its ultimate aim a defense of the Humanist tradition against the rise of Cartesian scientific ideals. In his sixth *Inaugural Address*, delivered to the University of Naples at the beginning of the 1707 academic year, Vico insists that one should never be:

> regretful for having spoken without propriety or decorum. [Such a one] is without doubt a true human whom the Terentian character describes neatly: 'I am human and nothing human is foreign to me'. Chremes, not for hope of gain, not out of necessity, not out of indebtedness, but simply in a neighborly spirit asks . . . [the landowner] who plays the part of a fool, tormenting and punishing himself, the reasons why he does this . . . (Pinton-Shippee, 129–30).

The second tradition of citation is specifically associated with the French Enlightenment and applies the maxim to disciplinary ideals. Its most influential use was in that famous, anonymous essay, *c.* 1730, *The Philosopher*, now convincingly attributed to the grammarian Dumarsais, and reedited and published by Diderot, twice by Voltaire, as well as by Helvetius and Naigeon, giving rise to a complex textual tradition well studied by Herbert Dieckmann in 1948. Here the quotation serves to identify the *philosophe* as an individual of practice as well as theory, much as in the subtitle of Hume's essay, 'The Stoic: or the Man of Action and Virtue'. The philosopher, Dumarsais argues in a passage that remains constant through all the versions:

> does not think that he lives in exile in this world . . . He is an honest man who wishes to please others and render himself useful . . . He knows how to divide his time between solitude and social intercourse [and is] full of humanity. He is like the Chremes of Terence who feels that he is human and that humanity itself impels him to take an interest in the good or bad fortune of his neighbors. *Homo sum: a me nihil alienum puto.*

The narrower disciplinary use is with respect to the historian and occurs in Voltaire's *New Reflections on History* (1744). Here the issue is a criticism of historians for focusing on the 'grand' events without including the small details of ordinary life, of economic or social history.

> None of these historians has taken for his motto *Homo sum: a me nihil alienum puto*. Yet it seems to me that one must skillfully incorporate this useful kind of knowledge into the tissue of events. (*Oeuvres historiques* 46–48).

It is not until, in the same year, Henry Home, Lord Kames, printed the Latin line as the epigraph of his two-volume *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774) that the motto became emblematic of the disciplinary ideal of the emerging science of anthropology.

The irony of its occurrence in Kames will have to wait until the conclusion of this presentation to be appreciated.

From one perspective, tracing moments in the reception-history of the Terentian tag may seem like some game of trivial pursuit. Why is the sentence, and the sentiment it encodes, worthy of note in the first place? The various understandings we have reviewed seem to range from truism to tautology. This becomes apparent if we subject them to paraphrase.

1. It's human nature to gossip.
2. One ought to respond to fellow human beings.
3. One ought to be interested in the least detail concerning fellow human beings.
4. No one that is human is not human.
5. No one that is human is not like me.

Beyond the original context in Terence (paraphrase 1), each sentence only becomes problematic and, therefore, interesting, if the terms 'human' and 'fellow human' are themselves problematic; if other human beings are not merely different, but in some fundamental way 'alien' though nonetheless 'human'.

It will be the burden of the remainder of this presentation to attempt to isolate the occasion at which this sense of the problematic first emerged and to isolate its first strong theoretical formulation. It is at this moment that the human sciences become intellectually urgent. The occasion is the discovery of the Americas; the theoretical formulation is that of race; it is the early theory of the races as separate species of the genus *Homo* that gives rise to the agendum of the emerging human sciences. To bring us to this point we must take the 'long way round', a detour that is necessarily historical, an element in the complex histories of the western imaginations of difference.

II

It is a commonplace, and, therefore, both somewhat true and somewhat misleading, to speak of western intellectual history as an interrelationship between Athens and Jerusalem. Within the sphere of anthropological thought, at least through the sixteenth century, it is undoubtedly true. The biblical account of human origins and subsequent relations, especially the genealogical map of Genesis 10, was overlaid upon the rich Greek ethnographic tradition, especially as categorized and transmitted by classical and Christian encyclopaedists. It was a system that exhibited remarkable flexibility, ever accommodating to new elements. For example, as late as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries new segments, that is to say, new grandchildren, were added to both Noachic genealogies and migrations in order to explain the population of all of known Europe, as well as Africa and Asia.

It was a system that, by its very elasticity, *prevented surprise* whenever similarities or differences were encountered in the peoples mapped upon it. For the genealogies that underlay the system, as well as the biblical narration of anthropogony, guaranteed the *essential* unity of humankind. All were children of Adam and Eve, even though their lineages must be traced through Noah's three sons: Shem, Japhet and Ham. Differences were, therefore, *accidental*. Drawing upon Greek and Roman theories, these were explained by the effects of climate, especially for somatic characteristics, and of migration/diffusion for cultural divergencies. Similarities and differences were perceived as having 'documentary properties' (to use M. T. Hodgen's useful formulation). They

allowed the mapping of spatial as well as temporal relationships. Adopting the archaic apologetic language of the relations with Christianity to classical culture, a notion of anthropologically significant *survivals* was developed in which the scholar sought 'seeds', 'sparks', 'traces', 'footprints', 'remains' or 'shadows' of the original, essential unity of humankind amidst its palpable diversity, and through which one could discern placement and reconstruct historical relations.

Take, for example, the 'Mission to the Mongols' (or Tartars) of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the occasion for the first, new western ethnography since Roman times. It would be impossible to overemphasize the difficulties and tensions which set the context for the 'Mission'. The great Mongolian 'horde' under Batu, nephew of the Khan, had divided into two fronts. Batu conquered Hungary even as his chief general penetrated into Poland and delivered a stunning defeat to the forces of Duke Henry II of Silesia (9 April 1241). Pope Gregory IX proclaimed a crusade against these invaders, but the antagonism between the papacy and Frederick II precluded any effective military action. Contemporary propangandists, such as Matthew of Paris, fulminated against this 'detestable nation of Satan . . . who poured forth like devils from the Tartarus, so they are rightly called Tartari or Tartarians . . . They are inhuman and beastly, rather like monsters than humans', while other pseudo-Sibylline oracles were updated to place the Mongols/Tartars within the framework of a Christian apocalyptic scenario that associated them with the Scythians (one of the borderlines of humanity on the old Herodotean ethnographic map) and, through them, with the release of the feared tribes of Gog and Magog, walled in by Alexander the Great in the Jewish and Christian versions of the *Alexander Romance*. In support of this, a new version of the pseudepigraphical *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle Concerning the Wonders of India* was produced, proclaiming the presences of apocalyptic 'trials' and associating them with the Mongols. Other initial reports of the Mongol incursion displayed similar biblical placements: the first notice (J. de Vitry, 1221) identified Ghengis Khan with King David; while the Hungarian Dominican, Julian, as well as the Alexander–Aristotle *Letter*, declared the Mongols to be 'sons of Ishmael'. An interpolation into a set of fourteenth French manuscripts of *Mandeville's Travels* confusing *Khan* and *(C)ham*, connected the Mongols to the Noachic Hamitic lineage. The Mongols were hitherto unknown to the west, but their presence constituted no surprise, they could be classified as another 'remnant' of biblical ethnography or, less commonly, as monsters. Even if monstrous, they had a place on the biblical map: as descendants of Cain, or of the Fallen Angels, or, generalizing the theory accounting for individual monstrous births, they could be understood as people deformed by sin, usually of a sexual nature. The third option of Augustine's three, with respect to Greco-Roman reports of monstrous peoples, was most frequently taken: either the reports were untrue; or, if true, such peoples were not human; or, 'if they are human, they are descended from Adam'.

The invasion was halted, neither by military action nor by prodigy, but by the death, in December 1241, of the Great Khan, Ogodai. Pope Gregory died in the same year, and was succeeded by Innocent IV. While relentless in his wars against excommunication Frederick, Innocent, after proclaiming an ineffectual crusade, chose the course of diplomacy in dealing with the Mongols.

Although there are indications of a prior effort, in March 1245, Innocent commissioned the Franciscan friar, John of Pian del Carpini, as an emissary to the court of the Khan, charged with persuading the Mongols to halt their invasions 'for fear of divine wrath', and, if possible, with converting them to Christianity. John set forth on his northward journey from Lyons on 16 April 1245, accompanied first by a Bohemian

monk, Stephen, and then by the Polish Friar Benedict, whose narrative of their travels also survives. In February 1246, they reached the camp of Batu on the Volga. From 22 July through 13 November, they were with Kuyuk Khan near Kharakorum, returning to Italy in the Autumn of 1247.

John's ethnography, the *Ystoria Mongalorum*, exists in several recensions, an indication of its wide readership, and was further disseminated through its inclusion, in epitomized form, in medieval encyclopaedias. It is a remarkable work, systematically taking up the classical ethnographic *topoi* (persistent from Herodotus to Poseidonius): geography, appearance, costume, housing, marriage, religious beliefs and rituals, and miscellaneous customs (*Ystoria*, chapters 1–4). The fifth through seventh chapters, perhaps, reveal the true purpose of the journey; they are almost entirely preoccupied with military espionage, introduced by an account of Mongolian history. The final chapter (8) is John's itinerary.

The most striking feature of John's report, thoroughly predictable, however, from our previous discussion, is its utter lack of surprise. While we are told at the outset that 'in appearance the Tartars are quite different from all other men', in the very same sentence John goes on to observe that, on the tops of their heads, 'they have a tonsure like [our] clerics' (*Ystoria*, 2). In the fourth chapter, John even-handedly presents a catalogue of the Mongols' virtues and vices, nine of the former, eight of the latter, each of a perfectly ordinary nature. With respect to religion, while, from one perspective, their traditions are to be understood as 'idolatory' (3), in the full biblical anthropological model, the result of degeneration, from another perspective, John reports, 'they believe in one God and they believe that he is the maker of all things visible' (ibid.), in the full model, the presence of a 'trace' which guarantees their Adamic/Noachic pedigree.

While the literature of the 'Tartar Relations' multiplied during the thirteenth century, the lengthiest, and, from our perspective, the most interesting is that of the Franciscan, William of Rubruck, reporting on a journey undertaken in 1253–55, eight years after John. His report is in a different format, an itinerary rather than an ethnography, and his function was more that of a missionary than that of an envoy. Although his narrative was not widely circulated until the sixteenth century, when it was published by Richard Hakluyt, William did meet with Marco Polo upon his return, and William's *Itinerarium ad partes orientales* served as the basis for Roger Bacon's important treatment of the Mongols in the *Opus Maius*.

As with John's *Ystoria*, William's *Itinerarium* exhibits a mixture of motifs of strangeness relativized by the traveller's recognition of analogies. He twice declares that, upon entering the lands of the Mongols, 'it seemed to me as if I were stepping into some other world' (*Itinerarium*, 1 and 9). Nevertheless, their horsemeat sausages are 'better than' ours (6); their drink, brewed from rice, millet, wheat and honey is 'clear like [our] wine' (2). Perhaps because of his missionary purpose, William spends far more time on their religious practices. Indeed, his is a far more complex picture of the Mongols' religion, recognizing (often with surprising accuracy) native components as well as the presence among them of Muslims, Buddhists, Nestorians and other forms of Eastern Christians. Even here, the parallels, that is to say, the 'traces', persist: the Buddhist priests 'shave their heads all over' and 'observe chastity' as do ours; they wear 'mitres'; they carry beads on which they recite prayers 'just as we carry our rosaries' (25). The Mongols use a chest 'in place of an altar' which sometimes has on it 'a statue with wings like St. Michael and others which look like statues of bishops holding their fingers as if in blessing' (24). 'They also have large bells like us' (24). The Uigur priests 'have a cloak on their left shoulders . . . as the [Christian] deacon wears a chasuble in Lent' (25).

Where there *is* palpable surprise in William's account is *not* with respect to the Buddhists or Mongols, with whom he recounts civil religious discussions, but rather with the Nestorians and other sorts of Eastern Christians. They do not have a cross with the figure of Jesus upon it, this must be 'owing to a doctrinal error' (24) and gives the impression that they are 'ashamed' of the crucifixion (15). They refuse to drink fermented beverages, 'they do not consider themselves Christians after they have drunk it', (10, 11), by contrast, William is happy to imbibe. They wash their genitals, like the Muslims, before entering church. They eat meat on Fridays. Again, like the Muslims, they fast on Saturdays. Their priests are ordained while still infants, and are married when they come of age (26). This surprise reminds us of an important feature of the discourse of alterity, that similarity can pose as great a set of intellectual problems as difference. That, at times, it is the differences of those who claim to be like us or to be us—the 'near', that prompts a more distancing language than those perceived as 'far' for whom we are delighted to decipher hidden relationships. The Mongols were the different who, nevertheless, could be constructed as the same. The Nestorians presented themselves as the same, but turned out to be, in important respects, significantly different.

The 'Tartar Relations', taken as a whole, demonstrate the power of the amalgamation of the Greco-Roman ethnographic tradition and the biblical. Even in times of extreme distress and conflict, the flexibility of the system proved able to assimilate new elements while holding the map intact. Differences remained in the realm of accident; similarities in that of essence.

I know of no serious challenge to this interpretative system until the post-Columbian debates over the nature of the Americas. It is here, for the first time, that surprise, that a strong language of alterity emerges. America is an *other* world, a *new* world. I shall not take time here to review the slow and difficult history of this perception, but pause only to note that, as such, the American continent was a world wholly unknown to either the Greco-Roman or the biblical authors. In that sense, both sets of writings were irrevocably impeached. True, the Noachic model was re-examined and altered, including the suggestion, most likely based on an observation of the effects of interweaving the 'J' and 'P' flood narratives which, among other doublets, results in Noah, his family and the animals entering the Ark twice (Gen 7.7–9 [J]/Gen 7.13–15 [P]), that there were two Arks, one that repopulated the familiar three-lobed world island of Africa, Europe and Asia; a second that sailed, with a cargo of different species, to the new world.

Other authorities sought to expand the migratory model. In Gregorio Garcia's enormous encyclopaedic work, *The Origin of the Indians of the New World and the West Indies* (1st edition, 1607), theories that the Americas were populated by: Jews, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Africans, Ethiopians, French, Cambrians, Finns, Frisians or Scythians are reviewed. As an appendix to this naval, Noachic, transatlantic catalogue, another possibility is raised, returning to the original Columbian misidentification of the Native Americans as 'Indians', but, in fact, now, a correct understanding: the Americas were populated by an overland migration of Chinese or, more likely, of Tartars. Once this theory was isolated and disseminated, most famously by Edward Brerewood's, *Enquiries touching the diversity of Languages, and Religions through the chiefe parts of the World* (1614) and by John Ogilby's *America, Being the Latest, and most Accurate Description of the New World* (1671), the old genealogical enterprise was resumed with new debates as to the Noachic genealogy of the Tartars, with descent from Japhet now being the most frequently argued connection.

Despite such intellectual efforts, the haunting and shattering conclusion could not be long avoided; the elasticity of the old system proved insufficiently flexible. The

Americas were a novelty that resisted absorption. The Americans lack 'traces', they were genealogically untraceable. The 'new world' was not merely 'new' merely different; it was 'other' *per essentiam*—a radical conclusion first (and more readily) made with respect to its flora and fauna which appeared to entail less consequence for the biblical view. Thus Acosta (*c.* 1580), in a passage much discussed in seventeenth century works on the implications of America for biblicist anthropology:

> What I say of the *guanacos* and *pacos* I will say of a thousand varieties of birds and fowls [in the Americas] that have never been known [previously] by either name or appearance, nor is there any memory of them in the Latins or Greeks, nor in any nations of our [European] world over here . . . It is well to ask whether these animals differ in kind and essence from all others, or if this difference be accidental . . . But, to speak bluntly, any one who in this way would focus only on the accidental differences, seeking thereby to explain [away] the propagation of the animals of the Indies and to reduce them [to variants] of the European will be undertaking a task that he will not be able to fulfill. For, if we are to judge the species of animals [in the Americas] by their [essential] properties, they are so different that to seek to reduce them to species known in Europe will mean having to call an egg a chestnut.

This radical botanical and zoological conclusion foreshadowed the even more revolutionary anthropological revision. The novelty of the Americas introduced surprise.

III

It is in the context of this disarray with respect to the centuries old amalgam that a previously refused resource within the theories associated with Greco-Roman ethnography was recovered and resituated at the center of the anthropological enterprise. The biblical narrative, and, therefore, western ethnologic theory was, up to this point, relentlessly *monogenetic*. There was a single ancestral pair from which all humankind descended; there was a single locus, most usually thought of as somewhere in the Armenian mountains, from which all the diversities of humankind ultimately diffused. But, such an account could not be sustained if, as the novelty of the Americas suggested, difference was an affair of essence rather than accident.

Deep within the Greco-Roman theories of migration and diffusion, mixture and borrowing as the explanation for cultural similarities and differences was a second, oppositional structure which emphasized immobility and originality: that of *autochthony*, the spontaneous generation of a people from their native earth. While most frequently an Athenian political *topos* (autochthony equals autonomy), the notion, more widely applied, as in emergence mythologies, suggested not only that some peoples were sprung from the very soil they inhabit, but implied, as well, a plurality of places of origination. Rejected by the monogenetic presuppositions of the biblically oriented Christian anthropology, autochthony was a theory of *polygenesis*.

Its explanatory power can be seen in the very vehemence with which autochthony is criticized in sixteenth and seventeenth century literature defending the biblical model. For example, Jean Bodin, in his influential *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History* (1565), devotes the final, ninth book, to ridiculing the 'arrogant pretensions' of those peoples who call themselves 'sprung from the parent land, that is autochthonous and earthborn':

> What more stupid, shall I say, or more impious can be imagined than this? The ancients, of course, in a certain sense deserve indulgence, but modern people [who propose autochthony as an explanation] are guilty either of great error or sin, both because they openly contradict statements made by Moses about primitive times in Holy Scriptures . . . and because they [thus] separate those races altogether from association and friendship with others by assuming for them no source other than the ancestral soil. By divine will many things led Moses to write about origins, and I think especially this reason, that all whom his story might reach should understand clearly that they are of the same blood and allied by the same bond of race [i.e. common descent]. I know of no conviction more powerful than that of consanguinity for developing and maintaining the good will and friendship of humankind . . . The word indigenous [or autochthonous] must be abandoned and the origins of all peoples must be sought in the Chaldaeans since, in their country, or certainly near to it, came to rest that ship [of Noah] which served as nursery of the human race. From there men scattered hither and thither and propagated their kind in the way in which Moses and the teachers of the Jews have most truthfully and accurately described.

While Sir Thomas Browne, the English physician, antiquarian and religious writer, devoted a section to autochthony in his book popularly known as *Browne's Vulgar Errors* (1646) reviewing the claims, in relation to Genesis 2.7, and concluding: 'There was, therefore, never any autochthon, or man emerging from the earth, except for Adam' [*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*: 274].

Even at the present time, when we have returned to a Darwinian rather than a biblical notion of monogenesis (mythically represented in the figure of 'Lucy'), the concept of autochthony persists in some of our common ethnic designations: occasionally, as in the British philosopher, Ian Hacking, in the *London Review of Books*, 7 September 1995, 'autochthonous societies' will be employed as a euphemism for 'primitives'; more commonly, *aborigine* (classically understood as the Latin equivalent of the Greek *autochthony*), a people who has been in this or that place from their beginning; *indigenous*, *creole* and *native*, a people first born (or created) in the place they now inhabit—terminology which, ironically, in colonial discourse, was shifted from expressing *their* firstness to ours, becoming a designation of the inhabitants found in a place when *we* first 'discovered' it.

While some scholars find anticipations of polygenetic theory in the Renaissance Hermetists, especially Paracelsus and Bruno, the scattered references are far from clear. By the seventeenth century, these hints will be fully developed. One of the earliest, unambiguous, polygenetic accounts of the Americas is by an anonymous author, L.P., Master of Arts, in *Two Essays, Sent in a Letter from Oxford to a Nobleman in London* (1695).

> The West Indies and the vast regions lately discovered towards the South abound with such a variety of inhabitants and new animals not known or even seen in Asia, Africa or Europe that the origin of them doth not appear so clear . . . especially seeing that there are no records or monuments of their migrations out of Asia or any other known parts of the world either before or after the Flood; and their differences from all the rest of the Globe, in manners, languages, habits, religions, diets, arts and customs as well as in their quadrupeds, birds, serpents and insects, render their derivation very obscure and their origin uncertain, especially in the common [biblical] way and according to the vulgar opinion of planting all the earth from one little spot. [In their] great zeal to maintain a Jewish tradition . . . every corner is searched to find out a word, a rite, or a custom in order to derive from thence many millions of different peoples . . . [But] all nations agree in some words and some customs, therefore a resemblance in a few of them is no proof . . . I can see no way at present to solve this new face of nature by old arguments fetched from Eastern rubbish or rabbinical weeds . . . Let them all [i.e. the new world humans, flora and fauna] be *aborigines*.

Although L.P.'s essay was not widely circulated, it contains, *in nuce*, the logical paradigm of the polygenetic argument: (1) given the utter novelty of the Americas, (2) the biblical account must be rejected (here the rejection contains an anti-Semitic element), (3) as must be the quest for 'traces'. (4) The solution is that the life forms of the Americas are autochthonous. 'Let them all be *aborigines*'.

The logic will be fully elaborated in one of the most controversial and widely known works of the seventeenth century, Isaac la Peyrère's books, collectively known as *Preadamites* (1655, English translation, *Men Before Adam*, 1656).

In a sense, Peyrère represents that longstanding fear of Catholicism, the lay Bible reader. He tells us that he has spent twenty years pondering Romans 5.12–14, the classic Augustinian/Reformation prooftext for 'original sin' (a monogenetic notion, itself based on a Latin misreading of Paul's Greek text). On the basis of the phrases, 'sin was not imputed when the Law was not', and 'even over those whose sin was not like the transgression of Adam', he concluded that 'sin was in the world before Adam', although it 'was not imputed until Adam'. Therefore, there were many sorts of humans before Adam. Adam was not the ancestor of humankind.

With this established, he turns to an exegesis of the opening chapters of Genesis. Genesis 1.26–27 shows that God created, by the power of the word, vast numbers of humans (that is to say, gentiles) just as the deity created all of the different sorts of animals and plants. Genesis 2 records the special, subsequent creation of Adam, the first Jew, out of clay. The Cain and Abel story indicates the presence of other peoples. If the brothers were farmers and shepherds, who made the knife that killed Abel? Where did Cain's wife come from? Who are the 'others' that would seek to kill him? Who inhabited the cities that 'covered' the world?

More generally, he asserts, the Jewish–Biblical chronology is strictly limited. It comprises no more than some 5000 years. But he knows of older histories: the Chaldaeans record 470 000 years of history, the Mexicans and Peruvians write of thousands of suns, Chinese history extends back 880 000 years. Drawing upon the biblical criticism of his friend, Richard Simon, Peyrère next argues that Moses wrote an epitome of earlier records at a comparatively late date. In Genesis 1–11, he compressed a series of long works into several 'little chapters', being far more interested in his own time than in prehistory. Thus Moses was being no more than hyperbolic when he declares Adam to be the first human; the Flood was a limited phenomenon, confined to parts of Palestine, which was easily repopulated by Noah's three sons. Hence, all parallels between the biblical account and that of other cultures are merely superficial.

The polygenetic accounts of Peyrère and L.P. in principle freed anthropology from its biblical framework. The Bible was reduced to a parochial document, the history of the Jews of a relatively early period, no longer to be understood as the universal history of humankind. Human diversity now became an urgent intellectual problem. While these conclusions would be debated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they contributed to the formation of the first, new, western theory for explaining human similarities and differences: the theory of race, the possibility that the genus *homo* might be divided into separate species of different lineages, a possibility first realized by Francois Bernier in an article in the *Journal des Savants*, 24 April 1684. It was neither Orientals nor Blacks, who had long been mapped on the old Greco-Roman/Biblical taxonomy, that gave rise to the intellectual problematics of race, rather it was the unanticipated presence of Native Americans, a surprise of profound implication, rendered even more certain once it was clear, post-Magellan, that America was not part of Asia.

IV

To expand fully on the development of polygenetic theories of race and their long history of contestation with monogenetic ones would require at least another lecture recalling the judgement of George Stocking, Jr.: 'it seems fair to say that polygenism—or more broadly, the problem of race, was the central concern of pre-Darwinian anthropology'. Adding only that it by no means disappeared post-Darwin, having major supporters and schools of thought, at times overriding Darwinian theory in France, Germany and the United States. Such a lecture, among other matters, would have to trace the development of two complex terms and ideas: the new coinage 'race' (a word of uncertain derivation) and an old Latin philosophical term, 'species', much reinterpreted in relation to race in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. It is a history that initially combined a breeder's sense of significant minimal intraspecific diversity with later European aristocratic ideologies concerning the purity of bloodlines. The word 'race' was first employed in sixteenth century Italian and Spanish animal husbandry to refer to relatively small differences within the same sort of domestic animal—that is to say, what Linnaean taxonomy would come to call 'varieties', extended to humans, in the same Romance languages, in the sense of 'caste' or 'class' as in a 'race of beggars', or 'bishops'. By the eighteenth century, English lexica define 'race' solely in terms of familial descent, as in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh, 1771): 'Race, in genealogy, a lineage or extraction continued from father to son' [III.525]. However, its earliest known human genealogical occurrence is in a Spanish document from 1611, in the context of a concern for purity referring to the 'race' of converted Jews. Our present view of race as a 'variety'(not a 'species') returns to a language characteristic of husbandry—with 'species' defined, since Buffon in 1749, primarily (and poorly) in terms of the capacity to interbreed fruitfully.

I should like to glimpse these new theories through the eyes of an eighteenth century savant, who stands midway between the polygenesis of La Peyrère and L.P. and the emergent science of races, Henry Homes, Lord Kames, whose *Sketches of the History of Man*, first published in 1774, ran through three editions during his lifetime, as well as two posthumous ones. As I have already noted, his book is the first work I know of to link the Terentian tag, 'nothing human is alien to me', which serves as its epigraph, to the disciplinary ideal of anthropology.

Kames was one of that remarkable group of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers who stand at the beginning of important theories in the Social Sciences (as well as, ironically, providing most of the philosophical tools for later Christian Fundamentalisms). Kames was a friend or patron of figures as diverse as Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire, David Hume and Adam Smith, a writer on legal history, aesthetics and the utility of manure, he turned his attention to anthropology at a time when the new definition of species as the capacity for sexual interbreeding was first proposed by Buffon, when the biological classification of humans and anthropoids was being worked out by Linnaeus, and when, in Edinburgh, there was serious debate as to whether the native Americans 'ought not to be accounted a race of orang-outangs' [James Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Man in Rude and Cultivated Ages* London (1780): 162]—that is to say as members of a second human species, *Homo nocturnis* with two varieties, according to Linnaeus's tenth edition (1758), in contradistinction to *Homo sapiens* with six varieties.

Kames begins his work by a slashing and sarcastic attack on both Linnaean taxonomy and Buffon's definition of 'species'. The former he declares to be arbitrary (in technical

language, an artificial rather than a natural classification), for example, it is capricious to classify a man with a bat as a mammal because they possess nipples while denying that a whale is like a fish though both possess fins. It's all a matter of what characteristics one chooses as significant. The latter, the definition of 'species', which is more pressing to his argument, is simply foolish. Imagine being uncertain as to whether a rabbit is a hedghog until, by chance, we can determine whether they can have successful sexual intercourse and procreation. By analogy, the same for human beings. Just as there are different species of plants and animals in different climates and environments, so too human beings. There are different species of human beings, suited for their different locales, by divine design and (multiple) creation. This is especially clear in the case of native Americans:

> America has not been peopled from any part of the old world. The external appearance of the inhabitants, makes this conjecture a certainty, as they are widely different in appearance from any other known people (3:141).
>
> If we can rely on the conjectures of an eminent writer [Buffon], America emerged from the sea later than any other part of the known world: and supposing the human race to have been planted in America by the hand of God later than the days of Moses, Adam and Eve might have been the first parents of mankind, i.e. of all who at that time existed, without being the first parents of the Americans (3:146–48, esp. 146, cf. 1:75–77).

In making his argument, Kames goes on to note that the logic of separate human species would lead to the view that God created successive pairs of humans, differing each from the other, and placed each in the proper locality where they would propagate and develop languages and cultures appropriate to their surroundings. While this is clearly Kames's view, he consciously makes a move towards biblical orthodoxy. Such a logic is contrary to the Mosaic record that God created only one pair, and they were by no means at a savage level of civilization. Therefore there must have been degeneracy as a result of a global catastrophe. The dispersion after Babel is 'the only known fact that can reconcile sacred and profane history' (1:60–61). It takes a very small step to link Kames's Babel-theory with that non-biblical thesis first advanced by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, in his three problematically monogenetic essays on race (1775, 1777, 1785) that climate was an insufficient explanation for racial difference (yielding only, as we might now say, 'acquired characteristics). Rather—expanding the scale of biblical time—there were global, irreversible natural catastrophes which altered the primordial human stock into diverse human types which have since remained immutable. To quote a French monogenetic version of this argument from 1801, which is, in fact, part of a new creation myth dependent on new geological models:

> The great varieties within the human species are not a recent product of natural causes to whose influence man is submitted, like the secondary variations based on nuances of skin and nature of hair. When the human species was divided into basic groups, and the different races began to exist, the influence of climate was greater than it is today. They were formed, these races, in an era very close to the last of the horrible catastrophes which convulsed the earth's surface (B. Lacépède, *Discours* 1801:23–24).

The debates within the human sciences between monogenesis and polygenesis continued through the mid-twentieth century, often signaled by the difference between two terms (although deployed inconsistently in different circles and languages), 'anthropology', the 'science of [singular and uniform] man' and 'ethnology', a term

created by the modified polygenist William Frederick Edwards in the 1830s to designate 'the science of [plural and distinct] races'. Nor, as already noted, did Darwin make a decisive difference. Thus Alfred Russel Wallace, who independently discovered the theory of the origin of species through natural selection, could write in one of the earliest statements (1864) on the implications of Darwin for cultural evolution, that, although humankind had once been a single 'homogeneous race', natural selection, operating on this primal human stock, 'scarcely raised above the brute', produced the physical differences which distinguished the present races, differences which were so deeply ingrained that one might 'fairly assert that there were many originally distinct races of men' (JAS, London, 1864: clxiv–clxx). Within the sphere of cultural (as different from physical) anthropology, the monogenist/polygenist debate was sublimated into the dominant argument of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century, diffusion (monogenesis) versus independent invention (polygenesis).

Simply put, monogenesis celebrated similarity; polygenesis, diversity–the latter leading, for the first time, to the development of a complex vocabulary for describing and explaining difference, limited only by the unfortunate eighteenth century decision to correlate biological and cultural characteristics. From the point of view of difference, with respect to biology, the intellectual choice was whether to understand the human races as 'varieties' (i.e. as accidents) or as 'species' (i.e. essences) as well as the question as to whether the latter be seen as 'real' or 'nominal', 'natural' or 'artificial'. If difference was understood to be accidental, a monogenetic account could be fashioned where difference was accounted for by natural causes (as would ultimately come to full expression in the Darwinian theory). If understood as essential, then a polygenetic account which held the races to be irreducible was required. From the point of view of similarity, with respect to culture, a monogenetic account would need to refurbish the old language of diffusion and derivation; a polygenetic account would have to emphasize parallel, independent development. From these choices, combined with questions of hierarchy, a necessary component in any taxonomic enterprise, one could generate the central anthropological debates which dominated eighteenth and nineteenth century anthropological discourse, and still, to a large degree, rule popular perceptions, processes and notions of cultural comparison.

The novelty of the Americas gave the West its first compelling language of difference as more than an accidental, dependent variable. We have yet to set forth a set of equally compelling cultural and comparative theories fully adequate to this language. This remains, today, the unfulfilled challenge to the human sciences.

This paper was presented as the Holstein Family Community Lecture 1996 at the University of California, Riverside. The oral style has been retained and a minimum of references added.

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