David Graeber
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The Indigenous Critique, the Myth of Progress and the Birth of the Left
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David Graeber

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Anthropologist David Graeber has been working for seven years, with archaeologist David Wengrow, on a work devoted to a history of inequality. A first excerpt from this work was published online in 2018. This excerpt showed that the usual narrative, according to which human inequality was the price to pay for developed societies and their comfort, is a lie.

Indeed, in an analysis of very long-term history, over approximately 50,000 years, David Graeber and David Wengrow[1] show that there existed both small societies of unequal hunter-gatherers and large, extremely egalitarian cities.

Even more astonishingly, there were societies that could be egalitarian in the summer and unequal in the winter, or vice versa. This extract had been widely commented on in intellectual circles and particularly in France by Emmanuel Todd[2] .

This second excerpt from the same work, still unpublished in French and English, deals with the influence of Native American societies on Enlightenment thinkers in the West. It appears that the founding texts of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and in particular Rousseau's text on the origin of inequality among men, were strongly influenced by books which related the criticism of the American Indians vis-à-vis -towards Western society.

Among these American Indians, the figure of Kandiaronk stands out as that of a sort of Native American Socrates, a brilliant orator who fascinated the French elite and who perverted Western youth as his critiques of Western society and of the Christian religion spread within the aforementioned society.

[1] David Wengrow est professeur d'archéologie comparative : https://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/people/david-wengrow-professor-comparative-archaeology.

[2] https://www.entrevues.org/aufildeslivraisons/les-nouvelles-origines-de-linegalite-la-revue-du-crieur-n-11/.

The text shows that the Myth of Progress then appears as a conservative reaction against the diffusion of these ideas, in order to justify Western inequalities since according to this ideology, the inequality of men would be the price to pay for technical progress and the comfort it brings.

We will comment on this excerpt soon and we invite interested people to offer their analyzes in order to try to open a friendly debate worthy of the dizzying height of this text.

Christophe Petit

In the last chapter, we described something of the legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau — whose story about the origins of social inequality continues to be told in endless variations to the present day. What we wish to explore here is how this story came about.

Historians of ideas have never really abandoned the Great Man theory of history. They often write as if all the important ideas of a given era could be traced to an extraordinary individual, whether Plato, or Confucius, Adam Smith, or Karl Marx, rather than seeing their writings as particularly brilliant interventions on topics already widely discussed in taverns or parties or public gardens, or any other place. […]

All this is entirely true for Rousseau. Historians of ideas sometimes write as if Rousseau had personally launched the debate on social inequality with his essay. In fact, Rousseau wrote it for an essay competition on that subject.

In March 1754, the *Dijon Academy of Arts and Sciences* had announced a national essay competition on the question 'What is the origin of inequality between men, and is it authorized by natural law?'

What we would like to do in this chapter is to ask ourselves the following question: why would a group of *Ancien Régime* aca-

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demics organizing a national essay competition have judged this to be an appropriate question in the first place?

The way the question is asked assumes, after all, that social inequality *has* an origin; that is, that it stands to reason that there was a time when human beings were equal, and that something then happened to change this situation, which is actually quite a surprising thing to think about for people living under the absolute monarchy of Louis XV. After all, it's not as if anyone in France at the time had any personal experience of living in a society of equals.

It was a culture in which almost every aspect of human interaction, from eating, to drinking, to working, to socializing, was marked by elaborate hierarchical orders along with rituals to ensure that everyone was aware of the respective ranks of those present.

The authors of the essays were men who had spent their lives having their every need attended to by servants. They lived on the patronage of dukes and archbishops and they rarely entered a building without knowing the precise order of the importance of each individual person.

Rousseau himself was an ambitious young philosopher, and was at the time engaged in an elaborate project of trying to exert his influence at court. […]

Despite all this, however, it seems that everyone agreed that this situation was not natural, and that things had not always been this way.

If we want to understand why *this* was the case, we need to look not only at France, but also at France's place in a much larger world. The fascination with the issue of social inequality is relatively new, and it has everything to do with the shock and confusion that followed Europe's sudden integration into a global economy in which it had long been a very minor player.

During the Middle Ages, most people in other parts of the world who knew anything about Northern Europe viewed it as an obscure

and uninviting backwater filled with religious fanatics who, apart from occasional attacks on their neighbors ('the Crusades') were largely irrelevant to world trade and world politics.

European intellectuals of the time were only rediscovering the classics and had little idea of what people elsewhere were thinking and arguing about. All this changed when Portuguese fleets began to round Africa and entered the Indian Ocean, and most importantly, with the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Suddenly, some of the most powerful European kingdoms found themselves in control of vast swaths of the globe, and European intellectuals found themselves in direct communication not only with the ancient civilizations of China and India, but exposed to a plethora of social, scientific and political ideas they never never previously even imagined. This flood of new ideas resulted in the intellectual movement now known as the Enlightenment.

Of course, this is also not the way historians of ideas typically tell the story. Not only are we taught to think of the history of ideas as largely the work of individual 'great thinkers' writing great books or thinking great thoughts, but we assume that these great thinkers do so almost exclusively in reference to each other.. Therefore, even in cases where Enlightenment thinkers themselves openly insisted that they obtained their ideas from foreign sources — such as, for example, the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. did when he urged his compatriots to adopt Chinese models of statesmanship — there is a strange tendency to insist that they were not really serious, or that when they said they embraced Chinese, Persian, or Native American ideas, these were not really Chinese, Persian, or Native American ideas but ideas that they themselves had created and simply attributed to foreigners.

This is a remarkably arrogant assumption, as if 'Western thought' (as it would later be called) was a body of ideas so powerful and monolithic that no one else could exert significant influence on it. It's also pretty blatantly false. Consider the case of

the work of serfs. Spartan citizens referred to themselves as the *Homoioioi* , which could be translated as 'the equals' or 'those who are all the same'; they all underwent the same rigorous military training, adopted the same haughty disdain for both effeminate luxury and individual idiosyncrasies, ate in community halls, and spent most of their lives practicing warfare.

This is therefore not a book about the origins of inequality. But it aims to answer many of the same questions in a different way. There is no doubt that something has gone terribly wrong in the world. A very small percentage of its population controls the destiny of almost everyone, and it behaves in increasingly disastrous ways. To understand how this situation came about, we must go back to what made possible the emergence of kings, priests, overseers, and judges. But we no longer have the luxury of being able to assume that we already know exactly what it was. Inspired by indigenous critics like Kandiaronk, we must approach historical, archaeological and ethnographic documents with fresh eyes.

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man soup. Accumulating evidence from archaeology, anthropology, and related fields suggests that, like the Native Americans or the 18th-century French , our distant ancestors had very specific ideas about what was important. in their societies, and that these varied considerably during the approximately thirty thousand years between the beginning of the ice age and the dawn of civilization and that to describe them in terms of uniform egalitarianism tells us almost nothing about them.

There is no doubt that there was generally some degree of equality by default: a presumption that humans are all equally powerless against the gods; or a strong feeling that no one's will should be permanently subordinated to that of another. It would undoubtedly have been necessary to ensure that hereditary princes, judges, supervisors or priests did not appear for such a long period.

But self-conscious ideologies of 'equality', that is, those which present equality as an explicit value, as opposed to an ideology of freedom, dignity or participation which applies equally to all, appear to have been relatively recent in history. Even when they appear, these ideologies rarely apply to everyone.

Ancient Athenian democracy, for example, was based on political equality among its citizens — even though they only made up between 10 and 20% of the total population — in the sense that all citizens had equal rights to participate in public decision-making.

We are taught to see this as a milestone in political evolution, as we view this older notion of equal civic participation as having been revived and expanded, some two thousand years later, at the time of the French and American revolutions.

It's a dubious proposition: the political systems label "democracies" in 19th-century Europe have almost nothing to do with ancient Athens, but that's not really the point.

Athenian intellectuals of the time, who were mostly of aristocratic background, tended to view the whole arrangement as a sordid affair and much preferred the government of Sparta, run by an even smaller percentage of the total population, which lived off

Leibniz mentioned above. During the 18th and 19th centuries, European governments gradually came to embrace the idea that each government should properly preside over a population of largely uniform language and culture, presided over by a bureaucratic official trained in the liberal arts. It may seem surprising that they did so, since nothing like this had existed in an earlier period of European history. Yet this was almost exactly the system that had existed for centuries in China. Should we really insist that the defense of Chinese models of statecraft by Leibniz and his allies and supporters has nothing to do with the fact that Europeans have, in fact, adopted something very similar to Chinese methods of statecraft? What is really unusual about Leibniz is that he was so honest about his intellectual influences; In most of Europe, church authorities still held a lot of power, and anyone who argued that non-Christian ways were superior could be accused of atheism, which was potentially a capital crime.[3]

It's pretty much the same thing with the issue of inequality. If we ask not 'what are the origins of social inequality', but 'what are the origins of the *question of the* origin of social inequality' — how would we have come to think that in 1754 , the Dijon Academy found this question appropriate — we are immediately confronted with a long history of debate among Europeans about the nature of remote societies: in this case, particularly the societies of the eastern forests of North America. Additionally, many of these conversations reference arguments that Europeans had with the Native Americans themselves, about the nature of liberty, equality or even rationality and revealed religion — in fact , many of the themes that would become central to the political thought of the Enlightenment. Many influential thinkers of the Enlightenment in-

[3] Un exemple notoire est celui de Christian Wolff, le philosophe allemand le plus éminent de la période entre Leibniz et Kant — il était aussi un sinophile et a donné des conférences sur la supériorité des modes de gouvernement chinois, avec pour effet ultime qu'un collègue jaloux l'a dénoncé aux autorités, un mandat a été délivré contre lui et il a été forcé de fuir pour sauver sa vie.

deed claimed that some of their ideas on the subject came directly from Native American sources – although, predictably, historians of ideas insist that this cannot really be the case. It is assumed that indigenous peoples lived in a completely different universe, that they even inhabited a different reality. Everything that Europeans say about them, according to logic, must therefore be simple projections of shadow plays, 'noble and wild' fantasies drawn from European tradition itself.[4] This is generally a critique of Western arrogance ('how can you suggest that the genocidal imperialists were actually listening to those whose societies they were eradicating?'), but could this criticism just as easily be considered a form of Western arrogance in itself? There is no doubt that European traders, missionaries, and settlers did, in fact, engage in prolonged conversations with the people they encountered in what they called the New World, and often lived among them for long periods of time, although they also participated in their destruction. We know that many of those living in Europe who came to embrace principles of freedom and equality that barely existed in their countries until a few generations prior credited the stories of these encounters as a profound influence on their thinking. To simply deny that it is possible that they were right is, in effect, to insist that indigenous peoples cannot have any real impact on history. It is a form of infantilization of non-Western people.

In recent years, a growing number of scholars, most of indigenous background, have questioned these assumptions.[5] Here we

[4] Pour quelques déclarations classiques de la prétendue tradition européenne du noble sauvage, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'Amérique du Nord : Chinard 1913, Healy 1958, Berkhofer 1978a. 1978b, Dickason 1984, McGregor 1988, Cro 1990, Pagden 1993, Sayre 1997, Franks 2002.

[5] Grinde 1977, Johansen 1982, 1998, Grinde & Johansen 1990, Mann 1992, Levy 1996, Tooker 1988, 1990 ; voir Graeber 2007. Cependant, la littérature se concentre surtout sur l'impact des idées autochtones sur les colons américains et s'est enlisée dans un débat sur l''influence' spécifique de la confédération politique des Haudenosaunee sur la structure fédérale de la constitution américaine. L'argument initial était cependant beaucoup plus large, soutenant que les colons

if men and women were equally equal according to some minimal external criteria: being equally safe from the threat of domestic violence, for example, or having equal access to resources, or having a voice in common affairs?

Since there is no clear, generally accepted answer to any of these questions, the use of the term 'egalitarian' has led to endless arguments. In fact, it is still not clear what the term 'egalitarian' means.

Ultimately, the term is not used because it has positive substance, but rather for the same reason that 16th-century Natural Law theorists speculated about equality in the state of nature: The term 'equality' is a default term, referring to that kind of protoplasmic mass of humanity that we imagine to be a remnant when all the trappings of civilization are stripped away.

'Egalitarian' people are those who have no hereditary princes, judges, overseers or priests, and are generally without a city or scripture. They are societies of equals only in the sense that all the most obvious signs of inequality are absent.

It follows that any historical work that purports to be about the origins of social inequality is really an inquiry into the origins of civilization; a work which in turn implies a vision of history which, like that of Turgot, conceives civilization as a system of social complexity which guarantees greater overall prosperity, but at the same time, guarantees that certain compromises will necessarily have to be made in the area of freedoms and rights. We're trying to tell a different story.

It is not that we consider insignificant or uninteresting the fact that princes, judges, overseers or hereditary priests — or for that matter writing and cities — emerge only at a certain moment in human history. Quite the contrary: to understand our current predicament as a species, it is absolutely crucial to understand how these things came to be.

However, we also insist that to do this we must reject the idea of treating our distant ancestors as some kind of primordial hu-

actually the same? And in the latter case, should this mean that an egalitarian ideal that characterizes this particular society is in fact largely realized, so that all members of society can be said to have equal access to land, or treat each other with equal dignity, or are equally free to make their opinions known in public assemblies?

Or could it be a measure imposed by the observer: monetary income, political power, caloric intake, size of the house, number and quality of personal possessions? Would equality mean the erasure of the individual or the celebration of the individual? (After all, a society where everyone was exactly the same, and where they were all so different that there was no criterion for saying one was superior to the other, would seem both 'egalitarian ' to an outside observer).

Can we talk about equality in a society where elders are treated like gods and make all important decisions, if all members of that society who survive after, say, fifty years become elders? What about gender relations? Many so-called 'egalitarian' societies are only truly egalitarian between adult men. Sometimes the relationships between men and women in these societies are anything but equal.

Other cases are more ambiguous. It may be that men and women in a given society not only do different jobs, but they have different theories about what is important, so that they both tend to think that the main concerns on the other (cooking, hunting, childcare, war, etc.) are insignificant or so profoundly different that it makes no sense to compare them at all.

Several of the societies encountered by the French in North America fit this description. They can be considered matriarchal from one point of view, patriarchal from another.[61] In such cases, can we speak of equality between the sexes? Or could we only do so

[61] En ce sens que les femmes contrôlaient la terre et ses produits, et les ressources les plus productives, mais que les hommes contrôlaient les fonctions politiques les plus importantes.

follow in their footsteps. Essentially, we're going to tell the story assuming that everyone involved in the conversation was adults and that they were listening to each other, at least occasionally. If we do that, even the stories suddenly take on a very different feel. In fact, Native Americans, faced with strange and unfamiliar strangers, gradually developed their own critiques of European institutions, which were remarkably consistent, and these critiques were taken very seriously in Europe. They were taken so seriously, in fact, that the story of the ambivalent progress of civilization that we summarized in the last chapter had to be invented, in large part, to neutralize the threat posed by the indigenous critique.

This is precisely why the Dijon Academy was asking the question, but here, of course, we are anticipating.

So, how did Europeans come to question the origins of social inequality?

The first thing to point out is that this problem is not one that would have made sense to anyone in the Middle Ages. Ranks and hierarchies were supposed to exist from the very beginning. Even in the Garden of Eden, as St. Thomas Aquinas observed, Adam clearly surpassed Eve. 'Social equality' — and therefore, the opposite, inequality — simply did not exist as a concept. A recent study of medieval literature by two Italian scholars[6] found no evidence that the Latin terms *aequalitas or inaequalitas,* or their English, French, Spanish, German or Italian equivalents, were used to describe social relations before the time of Columbus. We cannot therefore even say that medieval thinkers rejected the notion of social equality: the idea that it could exist never occurred to them.

européens dans les Amériques en sont venus à se considérer comme des ' Américains ' plutôt que comme des Anglais, des Français ou des Néerlandais, lorsqu'ils ont eux-mêmes commencé à adopter certains éléments des normes et sensibilités amérindiennes, du traitement indulgent des enfants aux idéaux d'autonomie gouvernementale républicaine.

[6] Alfani & Frigfeni 2013

The authors observe that the terms 'equality' and 'inequality' only began to become commonplace in the early 17th century, under the influence of natural law theory. Natural law theory, in turn, arose largely during debates over the moral and legal implications of European discovery of the New World.[7]

It is important to remember that Spanish adventurers like Cortes and Pizarro carried out their conquests largely without permission from higher authorities; subsequently, there were intense debates at home as to whether such blatant aggression against people who, after all, posed no threat to Europeans, could really be justified.[8] The main problem was that, unlike the non-Christians of the Old World, who could be assumed to have had the opportunity to learn the teachings of Jesus and therefore actively reject them, it was quite obvious that the inhabitants of the New World had never been exposed to the ideas of Christians. They cannot therefore be considered infidels. The conquistadors usually worked out this issue by reading a statement in Latin calling on the Indians to convert before attacking them; jurists at universities like Salamanca in Spain were not impressed by this argument. At the same time, attempts to view the inhabitants of the Americas as so completely alien that they were outside the boundaries of humanity, and therefore could be treated literally as animals, also did not have much success . Even cannibals, jurists noted, had governments, societies, and laws, and were able to construct arguments to defend the justice of their social arrangements; therefore, they were clearly humans, invested by God with powers of reason.

The question then was what rights human beings have simply by virtue of being human, that is, what rights could be said to have 'naturally', even if they existed in a 'natural' state of nature', innocent of the teachings of written philosophy and revealed religion

[7] Op cit : 21

[8] La meilleure source en anglais sur ces débats est Pagden 1986.

Savage. Of this he is guilty, even if he considers his subject happily stupid.

Nineteenth-century imperialists enthusiastically embraced the stereotype, simply adding a variety of seemingly scientific justifications — from Darwinian evolutionism to 'scientific' racism — to expand on this notion of innocent simplicity in order to push the remaining free peoples of the world (or increasingly, as European imperial expansion continued, the once-free peoples of the world) into a conceptual space where their judgment no longer seems threatening. This is the work we are trying to undo.

'Liberty, equality, fraternity' were the rallying cries of the French Revolution .[60] Today there are entire disciplines, subbranches of philosophy and political science and legal studies, which make equality their primary subject. Equality is almost universally recognized as a value, despite the almost complete lack of consensus on what the term actually refers to. Equal opportunities ? Equality of condition? Formal equality before the law?

Similarly, societies such as the Mi'kmaq, Algonquin or Wendat of the 17th century are regularly referred to as 'egalitarian societies' — or, alternatively, 'bands' or 'tribal' societies, which are generally assumed to mean the same thing.

It's never clear exactly what the term is supposed to refer to. Is it an ideology, the belief that everyone *should* be the same — obviously not in all ways, but in certain ways that are considered particularly important? Or should it be a situation where people *are*

[60] La ' fraternité ' peut sembler étrange ici, du moins dans la mesure où les influences amérindiennes s'exercent — même si l'on peut faire valoir que c'est une transposition de la responsabilité de l'aide et du soutien mutuels que les observateurs américains ont si souvent évoquée. Montesquieu, dans *L'esprit des lois,* met en évidence le sens de l'engagement fraternel chez les Osage, et son livre a eu une grande influence sur les théoriciens politiques des révolutions américaine et française ; comme nous le verrons, Montesquieu lui-même semble avoir rencontré une délégation d'Osage visitant Paris et ses observations peuvent se fonder sur une communication directe avec eux (Burns 2004 : 38, 362).

ine otherwise or to project themselves into the future in one way or another[59] . They therefore also completely lack philosophy. This is probably why no one could foresee the disasters that would ensue when they began staking properties and forming governments to protect them; by the time human beings were even capable of thinking that far ahead, the damage had already been done.

In the 1960s, French anarchist and anthropologist Pierre Clastres suggested exactly the opposite. What if the kind of people we like to imagine as simple and innocent because they are free from rulers, governments, bureaucracies and ruling classes, were free not because they lack imagination, but because they are actually *more* imaginative than us?

We struggle to imagine what a truly free society would look like; perhaps they do not have as much difficulty imagining what arbitrary power and domination would be like. Maybe they can not only imagine it, but also consciously organize their society so that such things never happen. As we will see in the next chapter, Clastres' argument has its limits. But by insisting that the subjects of anthropological studies are just as conscious and imaginative as the anthropologists themselves, he did more than anyone to undo the damage Rousseau had done before or since.

Rousseau was accused of numerous crimes. He is innocent of most of them. If there is truly a toxic element in his legacy, it is this: not his promulgation of the Myth of the Noble Savage, which he did not really do, but his promulgation of the Myth of the Stupid

[59] 'Son imagination ne peint pas d'images, son cœur ne lui fait pas d'exigences. Ses quelques désirs sont si facilement comblés, et il est si loin d'avoir les connaissances nécessaires pour le faire désirer davantage, qu'il ne peut avoir ni prévoyance ni curiosité… Son âme, que rien ne dérange, est entièrement enveloppée dans le sentiment de son existence présente, sans aucune idée de l'avenir, aussi proche soit-il, tandis que ses projets, aussi limités que ses vues, s'étendent à peine à la fin de la journée. Telle est, même à l'heure actuelle, l'ampleur de la clairvoyance du natif des Caraïbes : il vous vendra son lit de coton le matin, et viendra pleurer le soir pour l'acheter à nouveau, n'ayant pas prévu qu'il le voudrait à nouveau le lendemain soir.'

and without codified laws? The issue was the subject of heated debate. There is no need to dwell here on the exact formulas they found (suffice it to say that they allowed the Americans to have natural rights, but that they ended up justifying their conquest, provided that their subsequent treatment is not *too* violent or oppressive): the important thing in this context is that they have opened a conceptual door. It allowed writers like Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius and John Locke to move past the biblical stories that everyone was accustomed to using as a starting point and engage in similar thought experiments: how humans would have could they have been in a state of nature, when they only had their humanity?

In any case, these authors drew their examples from this state of nature from what they assumed to be the simplest societies in the Western Hemisphere and therefore concluded that, for better or worse (Hobbes, for example, certainly found it worse), the original state of humanity was one of freedom and equality.

It's important to stop here for a moment and consider why they did it because it was not at all an obvious or inevitable conclusion.

First, the fact that they focused on seemingly simple societies as examples of primordial times, societies like the Algonquins of the eastern forests of North America, or the Caribbean, or the Amazonians, rather than on urban civilizations like the Aztecs, the Mayans or the Incas, although it seems obvious to us, would not have seemed obvious at that time. Renaissance authors, faced with a population of forest dwellers without a king and using only stone tools, were unlikely to consider them primordial. Most Renaissance thinkers would have concluded that they were looking at the fallen remains of an ancient civilization, or at refugees who, in their wanderings, had forgotten the arts of metallurgy and civil governance. Such a conclusion would have made obvious common sense to people who assumed that all truly important knowledge had been revealed by God at the beginning of time, that cities already existed before the Flood, and that their own intellectual life was essentially considered a attempt to recover the

lost wisdom of the Greeks and Romans. History was not a story of progress. It was largely a series of disasters.

Introducing the concept of a state of nature didn't really change everything, at least immediately, but it did allow political philosophers to imagine people lacking the trappings of civilization not as degenerate savages, but as a kind of humanity in its raw state. This allowed them to ask a host of new and unprecedented questions about what it meant to be human. What social forms would still exist, even among people who had no recognizable form of law or government? Would marriage exist? What forms could it take? Would natural Man tend to be naturally gregarious, or would people tend to avoid each other? Did natural religion exist?

But why did they fixate on the idea of primordial freedom, or, above all, equality? This seems all the more strange since social equality had not been considered a possibility by medieval intellectuals.

First of all, a clarification is necessary. While medieval intellectuals had difficulty imagining equal social relations, medieval peasants seem to have had a much easier time doing so. There has always been a certain brutal and ready-made popular egalitarianism, which was particularly manifested during popular festivals such as Carnival, May Day or Christmas, which often revealed the idea of an 'upside down world', where all powers and authorities were overthrown or flouted. Often, celebrations were presented as a return to a primordial age of equality: the age of Chronos, or Saturn, or the Land of Plenty. Sometimes also, these ideals were invoked during popular revolts.

Certainly, it is never entirely clear to what extent such egalitarian ideals are truly autonomous, or a mere side effect of the hierarchical social arrangements that existed during ordinary times. Our idea that everyone is equal before the Law, for example, goes back originally to the idea that everyone is equal before the King, or the Emperor: since if a man is invested with absolute power , then obviously all others are equal in comparison. Early Christianity also in-

one says must therefore be treated as ineffably profound, is almost as boring. Both attitudes seem designed to prevent meaningful conversation.

Most of the people we're going to talk about in this book are long dead. It is no longer possible to have any conversation with them, meaningful or not. We are, however, determined to describe prehistory as if they were people who could have been spoken to while alive, who did not exist merely as specimens, sock puppets, or the playthings of some inexorable Law of History.. There are certainly trends in history. Some are very powerful trends — currents so strong that it is very difficult to oppose them (although there always seem to be some who succeed anyway.). But the only 'laws' are those we invent ourselves.

This too, of course, is one of the great insights of Enlightenment thought, and as we will see, it is itself, at least in part, derived from conversations between Europeans and North Americans.

When we set out to write this book, we imagined ourselves writing a contribution to the burgeoning literature on the question of the origins of social inequality — but this time, one based on the real facts.

As we researched, we realized how strange this question was. Even apart from the implications of primordial innocence, this way of framing the problem suggests a certain diagnosis of what is wrong in society and what can and cannot be done, which, as we have seen, often has very little to do with what makes people living in societies we have come to call 'egalitarian' different from people who are not.

Rousseau avoids the question, reducing his savages to simple thought experiments. He was about the only major figure of the French Enlightenment who *did not* write a dialogue or other imaginative work to try to look at European society from a foreign perspective.

In fact, he strips his 'savages' of any imaginative power of their own; their happiness comes entirely from their inability to imag-

For Chinard, whether or not European observers had accurately reported the views of their indigenous interlocutors was irrelevant. Maybe they had. What did it matter? Native Americans were, as Chinard puts it, 'a race different from ours' with whom no meaningful relationship was possible: one might as well, he implies, record the political opinions of a leprechaun.

What really mattered was the motives of the white people involved and these were clearly bad; they were all disgruntled troublemakers. At one point, Chinard even accuses an early observer of Greenland Inuit customs of mixing his descriptions with a mixture of socialism and 'illuminism' — that is, viewing savage customs through a lens that might as well have been borrowed from the Secret Order of the Illuminati![58]

> *Men make their own history, but not in the conditions of their choice.*
>
> Karl Marx

This is not the place to detail how right-wing criticism transformed into left-wing criticism. To a certain extent, we can probably put this down to the laziness of scholars educated in the history of French or English literature, faced with the prospect of having to seriously ask the question of what a Mi' kmaq of the 17th century could have really thought. To say that's unimportant would be racist. To say that it is unknowable because the sources are racist is a cop-out.

To a certain extent, too, it is based on entirely legitimate protests from those who, historically, have been romanticized. Many have pointed out that for those on the receiving end of it, being told that one belongs to an inferior race and therefore anything one may say can be ignored as one being an innocent child of nature or the embodiment of ancient wisdom and that everything

[58] Chinard 1913:214.

sisted that all believers were (in an ultimate sense) equal in relation to God, whom they called 'The Lord'. As this example illustrates, the primordial power in relation to which ordinary mortals are all, de facto, equal, need not itself be an actual flesh-and-blood human being; therefore, one of the essential points of creating a Carnival King or May Queen is that they exist in order to be dethroned.[9] As we will see, this kind of creation of a fictional authority is very important in the story.

As speculations about happy egalitarian orders from long ago also appear in classical literature, even educated Europeans were familiar with the concept. But all this is to say that a state of equality was not inconceivable for them. This in no way explains why they almost universally assumed that human beings innocent of civilization would exist in such a state.[10] Here we must return to the argument that was deployed to establish the inhabitants of the Americas as human compatriots in the first place: the fact that, however exotic or even perverse their customs may seem, they were capable of constructing logical reasoning for their defense.

What we are suggesting then is that American intellectuals-and here and in what follows we use the term 'American' as it was then, to refer to the indigenous inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere, and 'intellectual' as anyone accustomed to discussing abstract ideas-, actually played a role in this process. It is very strange that this is considered a particularly radical idea, but in the scientific literature it is a real heresy.

[9] L'un des rivaux de Rousseau dans le concours de rédaction, le marquis d'Argenson, qui lui aussi n'a pas remporté de prix, a précisément fait valoir cet argument : la monarchie a permis l'égalité la plus vraie, a-t-il soutenu, et la monarchie absolutiste surtout, puisque tous sont égaux devant le pouvoir absolu du roi (Tisserand 1936:117–136).

[10] Certes, il y avait des précédents classiques pour une telle idée, mais il y avait aussi des précédents classiques pour le contraire. Lovejoy et Boas (1935) compilent et commentent tous les textes pertinents.

No one denies that many European explorers, missionaries, traders, settlers, and other residents on American shores spent years learning native languages and honing their conversational skills with native speakers, just as Native Americans learned Spanish, English and French. Nor do we think that anyone who has ever learned a truly foreign language would deny that it requires a lot of conceptual work, trying to grasp unfamiliar concepts. We know that missionaries typically engaged in lengthy philosophical debates as part of their professional duties; many others, on both sides, argued either out of simple curiosity or because they had immediate practical reasons to understand the other's point of view. Finally, no one denies that travel literature and missionary accounts, which often contained summaries or even excerpts of these exchanges, were popular literary genres followed avidly by educated Europeans: any middle-class household in Amsterdam or Grenoble in the 18th century would probably have had on its shelves at least one copy of the Jesuit Relations of New France and one or two testimonies written by travelers to distant countries. Such books were popular largely because they contained surprising and unprecedented ideas.

Mainstream historians of ideas are aware of all this, but the overwhelming majority nonetheless conclude that even when European authors explicitly say that they are borrowing ideas, concepts, and arguments from indigenous thinkers, they should not be taken for granted. seriously. This is all a misunderstanding, a fabrication or, at best, a naive projection of pre-existing European ideas. American intellectuals, when they appear in European narratives, are assumed to be mere representatives of a pre-existing Western archetype of the 'noble savage', a puppet used to provide a plausible alibi for an author who might otherwise have difficulties in presenting what was considered subversive (deism, for example, reasonable materialism, or non-traditional views on marriage). Certainly, if we encounter an argument attributed to a savage in a European text that even slightly resembles what we find in Cicero,

may have appeared, their motives were not innocent. Ellingson's response to Chinard's passage above is worth quoting in full:

> *Wait a minute, we need to pause and ask ourselves, what is Chinard talking about here? A sort of anarchist movement perpetrated by Lahontan, the Jesuits and Rousseau? Is this a conspiracy theory to explain the French Revolution? Yes, it turns out that's almost the case; the Jesuits promoted 'dangerous ideas' by giving us the impression of the good qualities of 'savages', and 'this impression seems to have been contrary to the interests of the monarchical state and to religion'.*
>
> *He goes on to ask: 'To praise the goodness of the savages and the wisdom with which they direct the affairs of the nation in their councils, is it not to indirectly criticize our system of government?'*
>
> *He goes on to accuse them of a number of other subversive activities, such as 'reproducing the speech of savages' and 'faithfully reporting their naive, natural and reasonable objections', resulting in 'providing non-believers with all the weapons [ideological] that they could desire'.*
>
> *He concludes with a grim warning: 'The philosophers of the 18th century would come, their ideas would find well-prepared ground.' In fact, Chinard's fundamental characterization of Rousseau is ' a continuator of the Jesuit missionaries ', and the missionaries helped give rise to 'the revolutionary spirits [who] would transform our society and, ignited by the reading of their relations, bring us back to the situation of American savages'.*[57]

[57] Ellingson 2003:383.

mantic fantasies. But at first, these rejections came almost entirely from the political right.

Ellingson gives the example of Gilbert Chinard, whose 1913 volume *America and the Exotic Dream in French literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* was primarily responsible for establishing the *Myth of the Noble Savage* as a Western literary trope in American academia, with Chinard perhaps the least coy about his political agenda. He too recognized Lahontan as the key figure and explained in detail that Rousseau had borrowed specific arguments from him. In a broader sense, it detects an affinity of temperament:

It is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, more than any other author, who resembles the author of *Dialogues with a Savage.* With all his faults, his fundamentally despicable motives, he put into his style a passion, an enthusiasm which has no equivalent except in the *Discourse on Inequality.*

Like Rousseau, he is an anarchist; like him, he is devoid of moral sensitivity, and to a much greater degree; like him, he sees himself as prey to the persecutions of the human race united against him; like him, he is indignant at the sufferings of the unfortunate and, even more than him, he rejects the call to arms; and like him above all, he attributes to property all the evils that affect us. In this, it allows us to establish a direct link between the Jesuit missionaries and Rousseau.[56]

Because, according to Chinard, even the Jesuits, Lahontan's supposed enemies, were ultimately playing the same game. As exasperated by the undue freedom of the American natives as they

[56] Chinard 1913 : 186, traduction suivant Ellingson 2001 : 383. Un passage similaire : 'Rebelle contre toutes les contraintes, toutes les lois, toutes les hiérarchies, le baron Lahontan et son sauvage américain sont des anarchistes à proprement parler. *Les Dialogues avec un Sauvage* ne sont ni un traité politique ni une thèse savante, ils sont l'appel d'un journaliste révolutionnaire ; Lahontan ouvre la voie non seulement à Jean-Jacques Rousseau, mais aussi au *Pére Duchesne* et aux révolutionnaires socialistes modernes, et tout cela dix ans seulement avant la mort de Louis XIV' (1913:185, notre journal Le *Pére Duchesne* était le journal radical pendant la révolution française).

or Erasmus, we must assume that no savage could really have said it. — or even that the conversation in question never really happened at all.[11]

XXXXX

This habit of thought is at least very convenient for students of Western literature, themselves trained in Cicero and Erasmus, who might otherwise be forced to try to learn something about what indigenous peoples actually think about the world and, above all, what they do with Europeans. We will go in the opposite direction. We will examine the first accounts of missionaries and travelers from New France — today's Quebec -, because it is with these accounts that Rousseau himself was most familiar, to get an idea of what its indigenous inhabitants thought of French society and how they came to think differently about their own society as a result. We would say that Native Americans indeed developed a very critical vision of the institutions of their invaders, which focused first on their lack of freedom, then, later, on inequality, as they became more familiar with European social arrangements. One of the reasons that missionary and travel literature became so popular in Europe was precisely because it exposed its readers to this kind of criticism, in addition to giving them a sense of social possibility, the knowledge that the familiar ways were not the only ways, since societies existed that did things very differently. Finally, we will say that there may be a reason why so many Enlightenment thinkers insisted that their ideals of individual liberty and political

[11] Il ne semble jamais venir à l'esprit de personne que 1. il n'y a qu'un nombre limité d'arguments logiques que l'on *peut* faire, et des personnes intelligentes dans des circonstances similaires trouveront des approches rhétoriques similaires, et 2. Les écrivains européens formés aux classiques seraient probablement particulièrement impressionnés par des arguments qui leur rappellent ceux qu'ils connaissaient déjà de la rhétorique grecque ou romaine. De toute évidence, de tels récits ne fournissent pas une fenêtre directe sur les conversations originales, mais il semble tout aussi absurde d'insister sur le fait qu'ils n'ont aucun lien de parenté.

equality were inspired by Native American sources and examples. Maybe that's because they really were.

The 'Age of Reason' was an age of debate. The Enlightenment was rooted in conversation; it took place largely in cafes and salons. Many classic Enlightenment texts literally took the form of dialogues, most cultivated in a style that was easy, transparent, conversational, and clearly inspired by the salon. (It was the Germans, at the time, who tended to write in the obscure style for which French intellectuals have since become famous). The use of 'reason' was above all a style of argumentation. The ideals of the French Revolution, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, took the form they had taken over a long series of debates and conversations. All we are suggesting here is that these conversations extended further than we had assumed.

Huronia, Algonkia: communism in the service of freedom.

So: what did the inhabitants of New France do with the Europeans who began arriving on their shores in the 16th century?

At this time, the region known as New France was primarily inhabited by Montagnais-Neskapis, Algonquins and Iroquoians. Those closer to the coast were largely semi-nomadic foragers, although some also practiced agriculture; the Wendats ('Hurons'[12]

[12] Techniquement, les Hurons étaient une confédération de locuteurs iroquoiens qui existait à l'époque de l'arrivée des Français, qui fut ensuite dispersée sous les attaques des Haudenosaunee au sud et réformée en Wyandot ou Wendat, avec des réfugiés des confédérations Petun et Neutral. Leurs descendants contemporains préfèrent Wendat (prononcer 'WEN dot'), notant que 'Huron' était à l'origine une insulte, signifiant (selon la source) soit 'poil de porc', soit 'malodorant'. Les sources de l'époque utilisent régulièrement 'Huron' et bien que j'aie suivi l'usage de Barbara Mann en le remplaçant par Wendat dans des citations de locuteurs indigènes comme Kandiaronk, je l'ai maintenu dans des sources européennes.

jection of European fantasies onto people the authors could never truly understand. The racist denigration of the savage and the naïve celebration of savage innocence are two sides of the same imperialist coin.[55] Originally, however, this was an explicitly right-wing position.

Ter Ellingson, the anthropologist who has done the most comprehensive review of the literature, concluded that there never was a 'Myth of the Noble Savage' — in the sense of a stereotype of simple societies living in an era of happy primordial innocence — at all. The accounts of real travelers tend to provide us with a much more ambivalent picture, describing foreign societies as a complex, sometimes incomprehensible mixture of virtues and vices.

Instead, what needs to be examined might better be called the Myth of the Noble Savage Myth. Why did some Europeans begin to accuse other Europeans of having such a naive and romantic view, to the point where anyone who suggests that an aspect of indigenous life has something to teach us is immediately accused of romanticism. The answer is not pretty. The phrase 'noble savage' was actually popularized as a term of ridicule and abuse used by a clique of die-hard racists who took control of the British Ethnological Society in 1859, and called for the total extermination of inferior peoples.

The original proponents of the idea blamed Rousseau for the Myth of the Noble Savage, but soon afterward, students of literary history were scouring the archives for traces of this noble savage everywhere. Almost all of the texts discussed during this chapter have come under scrutiny and been dismissed as dangerous, ro-

[55] Certes, il y *a* une tendance, dans toute cette littérature, lorsqu'on les présente à des sociétés inconnues, à les traiter alternativement comme entièrement bonnes ou entièrement mauvaises. Colomb le faisait déjà dans les années 1490. Ce que je dis, c'est simplement que cela ne veut pas dire que rien de ce qu'ils ont dit n'a eu d'incidence sur les perspectives réelles des personnes qu'ils ont rencontrées.

conservatives' supreme *bête noire*. But special vitriol is always reserved for traitors.

Conservative thinkers generally consider Rousseau to have gone from a promising start to a complete U-turn and the creation of what we now think of as the left. In this, they're not entirely wrong. Rousseau was indeed a crucial figure in the formation of left-wing thought.

One reason why the intellectual debates of the 1740s or 1750s seem so strange to us today is that later left-right divisions had not yet crystallized. In fact, the terms 'left' and 'right' did not yet exist at the time of the American Revolution; they were a product of the decade immediately after it, and referred to the positions of the aristocratic and popular groups in the French National Assembly in 1789.

Obviously, Rousseau's effusions on the fundamental decency of human nature and the lost ages of freedom and equality were in no way responsible for the uprising by putting strange ideas in the heads of the *sans-culottes* (as we have noted, intellectuals in European society of the day seem to have was the only class of people who didn't already understand such ideas). But it could be argued that by bringing together theindigenous critique and the doctrine of progress originally developed to counter it, he, in effect, wrote the founding document of the left, *as* an intellectual project.

For the same reason, right-wing thought has always been wary not only of ideas of progress, but also of the entire tradition which sprung forth in response to the indigenous critique. We tend to assume that it is mainly left-wing politicians who talk about the 'Myth of the Noble Savage' and that any ancient European narrative that idealizes distant people, or even attributes convincing opinions to them, is in reality nothing more than a romantic pro-

trice classique tend à considérer qu'il a sapé les mœurs et les formes d'autorité traditionnelles qui avaient auparavant été capables de contenir les aspects moins bienveillants de la nature humaine.

), concentrated in the main river valleys further inland, cultivated corn, squash and beans around the fortified towns. It is interesting to note that early French observers attached little importance to these economic distinctions, especially since, in both cases, foraging or agriculture was primarily the work of women; men, they noted, were primarily occupied in hunting and, sometimes, in war, which meant that they could be seen in a sense as natural aristocrats.

The idea of the 'noble savage' dates back to such estimates — it was not originally about nobility of character, but simply that the Indians did their own hunting and fighting. , which, among them, were largely the business of dukes and counts. French assessments of the character of 'savages' tend to be very mixed. The native assessment of the French character was markedly less. Father Pierre Biard, for example, was a former theology professor assigned in 1608 to the evangelization of the Algonquophone Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, who had been living for some time near a French fort. Biard did not think highly of the Mi'kmaq, but said the feeling was mutual:

They consider themselves better than the French:

> *'Because, they say, you are always fighting and arguing among yourselves, we live in peace. You are envious and you are constantly slandering each other; you are thieves and deceivers; you are greedy, and you are neither generous nor good; As for us, if we have a piece of bread, we share it with our neighbor.' They say this and like things continually.*[13]

Even more scandalous, according to Biard, the Mi'kmaq constantly claimed that they were therefore richer than the French.

Twenty years later, Brother Gabriel Sagard, brother of Récollection, wrote similar things about the Wendats. Sagard was initially

[13] Biard 1611 : 173 -74 ; dans Ellingson 2001 : 51.

very critical of the Wendat life, which he described as a sin in itself (he was obsessed with the idea that the Wendat women were all intent on seducing him). By the end of his stay, however he had concluded that their social arrangements were in many respects superior to those of his country.

Here he clearly echoed the Wendat opinion:

> *They have no trial and take little trouble to acquire the goods of this life, for which we Christians torment ourselves so much, and for our excessive and insatiable greed to acquire them, we are justly and with reason reproached by their quiet life and quiet dispositions.*[14]

Like the Mi'kmaq of Biard, the Wendat were particularly offended by the lack of generosity of the French towards each other:

> *They offer hospitality and help each other so that the needs of all are met without there being destitute beggars in their towns and villages; and they considered it a very bad thing when they heard that there were in France a great number of these needy beggars, and thought it was through want of charity in us, and blamed us severely for it.*[15]

Wendat takes an equally critical look at the conversation habits of the French. Sagard was surprised and impressed by the eloquence and reasoning ability of his hosts, skills honed by near-daily discussions of common affairs; his hosts, on the other hand, when they were able to see a group of French people gathered together, often remarked on the way in which they constantly seemed to jostle each other and kill each other in conversation, using weak arguments, and above all (the subtext

[14] Sagard 1631[1939] : 192.

[15] 1632B : 88–89.

> *DOM had fundamentally ruined, and EQUALITY has disappeared.*[52]

The extract is said to be taken from the manifesto of the Secret Order of the Illuminati, a network of revolutionary executives organized within the Freemasons, by a Bavarian law professor named Adam Weisthaupt.

The organization existed; it appears that it was intended to educate an enlightened, even anti-national, international elite to work toward the restoration of freedom and equality.

Conservatives almost immediately denounced the order, and it was banned eight years later, but right-wing conspiracists insist it continued to exist, and that the Illuminati were the hidden hands that pulled the strings behind the French Revolution (or even the Russian Revolution).

It's silly, but one of the reasons the fantasy was possible is that the Illuminati were perhaps the first to propose that a revolutionary vanguard, trained in the correct interpretation of the doctrine, would be able to both to understand the general direction of history, and also to intervene to change it.[53]

It may seem ironic that Rousseau, who began his career adopting what we today consider an arch-conservative position – that progress leads to moral decadence[54] – would end up becoming the

[52] Barruel 1799:104. La citation provient d'un tract anti-Illuminati, prétendant être le 'Code des Illuminati' et toute la région est tellement enveloppée de rumeurs et d'accusations que nous ne pouvons même pas être entièrement sûrs que nos sources ne l'ont pas inventé, mais d'une certaine manière cela importe peu, puisque le point principal est que la droite considère les idées rousseauiennes comme inspirant une activité révolutionnaire de gauche.

[53] Il n'est pas tout à fait clair si l'' illuminisme ', comme on l'a appelé, était une doctrine révolutionnaire, puisque Weisthaupt lui-même l'a niée par la suite — après l'interdiction de la société et son expulsion de Bavière — comme étant purement réformistes, mais ses ennemis ont bien sûr insisté sur le caractère fallacieux de ces manifestations.

[54] La principale différence est que Rousseau considère que le progrès sape une nature humaine essentiellement bienveillante, alors que la pensée conserva-

property, then governments to enforce those laws, they imagined that they were creating the means to preserve their freedom. In fact, they 'ran headlong towards their chains'. It's a powerful image. But it is difficult to imagine what exactly the freedom Rousseau lost consisted of, if (as he insisted) any human relationship, even one of mutual aid, was a restriction on freedom. No wonder, perhaps, that he ended up inventing a purely imaginary age in which each human individual wandered alone among the trees.

Conservative critics, as mentioned, have blamed Rousseau for almost everything. Many held him personally responsible for the guillotine. The dream of restoring the ancient state of freedom and equality, they said, led to exactly the effects that Turgot had predicted: an Inca-style totalitarianism that could only be imposed by revolutionary terror. It is certainly true that radicals of the era of the American and French revolutions were influenced by Rousseau's ideas.

Here, for example, is an excerpt purportedly taken from a manifesto written in 1776, which almost perfectly reproduces Rousseau's fusion of evolutionism and his critique of private property as leading directly to the state:

> *As families multiplied, the means of subsistence began to run out; nomadic (or itinerant) life ceased, and PROPERTY began to exist; men chose homes; agriculture made them mix. Language became universal; living together, one man began to measure his strength with another, and the weaker were distinguished from the stronger. This undoubtedly created the idea of mutual defense, of an individual leading coalitions of different families, and therefore defending their persons and fields against the invasion of an enemy; but FREE-*

seemed to be), not showing themselves to be very intelligent. Those who attempted to seize the stage, denying others the means to present their arguments, acted in much the same way as those who seized the material means of subsistence and refused to share them; one gets the impression that the Americans viewed the French as living in a sort of Hobbesian war of all against all.[16]

Sagard's account of his time among the Wendat became the basis of a widely read book in Europe; Locke and Voltaire cited it as one of their primary sources for their description of American societies. The *Jesuit Relations*, which appeared between 1633 and 1673, and which was also widely read and debated in Europe, contains many similar admonitions. In the 71 volumes of Jesuit Relations, for example, the words 'equal ' or ' *equality* ' barely appear[17] — and in those rare cases, it is almost always in reference to 'equality of the sexes' (which the Jesuits found particularly scandalous). This seems to be the case if the Jesuits in question were feuding with the Wendat, who perhaps might not seem entirely egalitarian on an anthropological level, since they had official political functions and a stratum of prisoners of war that the Jesuits, at least, called 'slaves', or the Mi'kmaq or the Montagnais-Neskapi, who were organized into hunter-gatherer bands that later anthropologists would consider egalitarian. Instead, we hear Americans complaining about the competitiveness and selfishness of the French, and even more so, perhaps, about their hostility to freedom.

The fact that Native Americans lived in a generally free society, while Europeans did not, was never really up for debate — both

[16] Il est probablement digne de mentionner que, surtout à cette époque, les Américains connaissaient probablement les Européens surtout par l'intermédiaire de missionnaires, de trappeurs, de marchands et de soldats, c'est-à-dire de groupes presque entièrement composés d'hommes. Au début, il y avait très peu de femmes françaises dans les colonies, et moins d'enfants. Cela a probablement eu pour effet de rendre d'autant plus extrême la compétitivité et l'absence de soins mutuels entre eux.

[17] Une version consultable des documents existe maintenant en ligne.

sides agreed that this was the case. They disagreed on whether individual freedom was desirable. This is an area where early accounts of missionaries or travelers to the Americas often pose a real conceptual challenge. Most contemporary readers are accustomed to taking for granted that 'Western' observers, even those of the 17th century, are only an earlier version of ourselves, unlike the American natives who represent an essentially alien Other, perhaps unrecognizable. In fact, in many respects, the authors of these texts were nothing like us, at least when it comes to questions of personal freedom, equality of men and women, sexual mores or popular sovereignty — or even from deep psychological theory[18] — Native American attitudes are likely to be much closer to those of the reader.

Individual liberty is a particularly striking example because today it is almost impossible for anyone living in a liberal democracy to say that they are against liberty, at least in the abstract (in practice, of course, our ideas are generally much more nuanced). It is one of the lasting legacies of the Age of Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions. Freedom is intrinsically good. The Jesuits of the 17th century certainly did *not share* this hypothesis. They tended to view individual freedom as animalistic. In 1642, the Jesuit missionary Le Jeune spoke of the Montagnais-Neskapi:

> *They imagine that they must, by their birthright, enjoy the freedom of wild donkeys, without paying homage to anyone, except when they please. They have reproached me a hundred times that we are afraid of our captains, while they laugh and mock theirs . All the authority of their leader is in his tongue's end; for he is powerful to the extent that he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself*

[18] Wallace 1958 ; cf. aussi Graeber 2001, chapitre 5.

This is what was lost in the translation of the indigenous critique into terms that French philosophers could understand. It never occurred to Americans that there was a contradiction between individual freedom and communism — at least, communism in the sense in which we have used it here, as a certain presumption of sharing, that people who are not real enemies can be expected to help provide for another.

In fact, the freedom of the individual was supposed to rest on some basic level of communism, since, after all, people who starve or don't have adequate clothing or shelter in a snowstorm aren't really free to do much of anything except what's necessary to stay alive.

The European conception of individual liberty, on the other hand, was closely linked to conceptions of private property. From a legal perspective, it dates back to the ancient absolute power of the Roman head of household to do whatever he wanted with his personal and personal property, including his children and slaves.[50]

In other words, freedom had always come at least somewhat at the expense of others. Additionally, there was a strong feeling that households should be self-sufficient; therefore, true freedom meant autonomy in the radical sense, not just autonomy of will, but freedom from dependence on other human beings (except those under their direct power or control).[51]

Rousseau, who himself always insisted that he wanted to live his life in a way that did not make him dependent on the help of others (even though he had all his needs met by mistresses and servants), echoes this logic.

When our ancestors made the fateful decision to divide land into individual plots and created legal structures to protect their

[50] Voir Graeber 2011 : 203–207.

[51] Rousseau lui-même s'était enfui très tôt de chez lui, écrivant à son père horloger suisse qu'il aspirait à vivre 'sans l'aide des autres'.

It is also informed by the same crucial questions: why are Europeans so competitive? Why don't they share food? Why do they submit to the orders of others? Rousseau's long excursus on *pity* , the natural sympathy that, according to him, savages have for one another and which restrains the worst depredations of civilization in the second phase, only makes sense in the light of the constant exclamations from native observers in these books, that Europeans do not seem to care about others, that they are 'neither generous nor kind'.[49]

The reason for the essay's astonishing success, then, is that despite its sensationalist ic style, which was clearly designed to shock and confuse, it is really a kind of intelligent compromise between seemingly contradictory positions.

He succeeds in integrating elements of the indigenous critique, the biblical account of the Fall from Grace, and something very similar to the theory of evolutionary stages of material development that were had been proposed by Turgot and the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Rousseau agrees that Kandiaronk was essentially right; that civilized Europeans were, on the whole, atrocious creatures, and for all the reasons he described. He agrees that private property is the root of the problem; although he can't really imagine society being based on anything else.

[49] Autres exemples : 'La culture de la terre a nécessairement entraîné sa distribution ; et la propriété, une fois reconnue, a donné naissance aux premières règles de justice ; car, pour que chaque homme ait la sienne, il fallait que chacun puisse avoir quelque chose. En outre, comme les hommes commençaient à regarder vers l'avenir et que tous avaient quelque chose à perdre, chacun avait des raisons d'appréhender que des représailles suivraient toute blessure qu'il pourrait faire à un autre.' Comparez ce passage à l'argument de Kandiaronk, cité plus haut, selon lequel les Wendats évitaient intentionnellement les divisions de la richesse parce qu'ils n'avaient aucun désir de créer un système juridique coercitif. Montesquieu a fait la même remarque à propos de l'Osage, notant que ' la division des terres est ce qui augmente principalement le code civil. Parmi les nations où ils n'ont pas fait cette division, il y a très peu de lois civiles ' — une observation qui semble avoir été tirée en partie de la conversation de Montesquieu avec les membres d'une délégation d'Osage qui a visité Paris en 1725 (Burns 2004:362).

> *in speaking and haranguing, he will only be obeyed if it pleases the savages.*[19]

In the opinion of the Montagnais-Neskapi, on the other hand, the French were little better than slaves, living in constant fear of getting into trouble with their superiors. Such criticisms appear regularly in Jesuit accounts, not only from those who lived in nomadic bands, but also from urban dwellers like the Wendat. Moreover, the missionaries were willing to admit that it was not just rhetoric. Even Wendat statesmen could not force anyone to do what they did not want to do. As Father Lallemant noted in 1644:

> *I do not believe that there are people on earth freer than them, and less capable of allowing the subjection of their will to any power whatsoever, to the point that the Fathers here present have no control over their children, nor on their subjects, nor on the captains, nor on the laws of the land, except in so far as each is willing to submit to them. There is no punishment inflicted on the guilty, and no criminal who is not sure that his life and property are not in danger...*[20]

This account is worth quoting at length, because it gives an idea of the political challenge that some of the material found in the Jesuit Relations must have represented for the European public at the time, and why so many people found him so fascinating. After explaining how outrageous it was that even murderers got away scot-free, the good father admitted that, viewed simply as a means of keeping the peace, the Wendat justice system was not ineffective. In fact, it worked surprisingly well. Rather than punish the guilty,

[19] JR 6 pp. 109-110/241. L'expression 'capitaine' est utilisée indifféremment dans les sources françaises pour tout homme en position d'autorité, qu'il s'agisse d'un simple chef de bande ou de village, ou d'un fonctionnaire, nommé au grade dans la Confédération Wendat ou Haudenosaunee.

[20] JR 28:47.

the Wendat insisted that the offender's entire lineage or clan pay compensation. This is why it was everyone's responsibility to keep their fellow human beings under control:

> *It is not the guilty who are punished. It is the public who must make amends for the offenses of individuals; so that if a Huron has killed an Algonquin or another Huron, the whole country will come together; and they agree on the number of gifts to give to the tribe or to the relatives of the one who was killed, to suspend the revenge they could take. Captains exhort their subjects to provide what is necessary; no one is forced to do so, but those who want to bring publicly what they want to bring; it seems that they competed with each other based on their wealth, and that the desire for glory and concern for the public good impels them to do the same. Now, although this form of justice restricts all these peoples, and seems more effectively to suppress unrest than the personal punishment of criminals in France, it is nevertheless a very light procedure, which leaves individuals in such a spirit of freedom that they submit to no law and follow no other impulse than that of their own will.*[21]

There are a number of things worth noting in this passage. One is that it is clear that some people were indeed considered wealthy. Wendat society was not 'economically egalitarian' in this sense. However, there was a difference between what we considered economic resources, such as land, which were owned by families, worked by women and whose products were largely managed by women's collectives, and the kind of 'wealth' referred to here, such as wampum, which existed primarily for political purposes. Wealthy Wendat people hoarded precious items so they could give them away on dramatic occasions like this. Neither in the case of

[21] JR 28:48–49, cf. JR 10:211–221.

parable is only a means of trying to understand what allowed human beings to accept the notion of private property:

> *The first man who, having enclosed a plot of land, said to himself, 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes could one have saved humanity, by lifting up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellow men: 'Beware! Do not listen to this imposter; you are ruined if you one day forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to no one.'*
>
> *But it is very probable that things had already reached such a point that they could no longer continue as they were; for the idea of property depends on numerous previous ideas, which could only be acquired successively, and which could not have been formed at one time in the human mind.*

Rousseau therefore asks exactly the same question as so many perplexed Native Americans: How could Europeans transform wealth into power? How could they transform a simple unequal distribution of material goods — which existed, at least to some extent, in every society — into the ability to tell others what to do, to employ them as servants, laborers or grenadiers, or simply to feel that it is none of their business if they die in the street.

Although Rousseau does not directly cite Lahontan or the Jesuit authors, he knew them well[48], as any intellectual of the time would have been.

[48] Rousseau se décrit lui-même comme un lecteur avide de carnets de voyage et cite Lebeau, qui résume essentiellement Lahontan, ainsi que *l'Arlequin Sauvage (*Allan 1966 : 97–98 ; Muthu 2003 : 12–13, 25–28 ; Pagden 1983 : 33 ; Harvey 2012 : 73). Il est extrêmement improbable que Rousseau n'ait pas lu Lahontan dans l'original, bien que même s'il ne l'avait pas lu, cela signifierait probablement qu'il était venu avec les mêmes arguments de seconde main.

When in 1754, the same Academy announced a new competition on the origins of social inequality, they clearly had the impression that the young man had to be put in his place. Rousseau submitted an even more elaborate treatise, but not only did he not receive the prize — that prize went to a very conventional essay by a cleric named Abbé Talbert, which largely attributed our current unequal condition to original sin — but the judges announced that since Rousseau's submission went well beyond the stipulated word count, they had not even read it all the way through.[47]

The essay is certainly strange. It's not exactly what it's often made out to be. Rousseau does not, in fact, claim that human society begins in a state of idyllic innocence; he argues, rather confusingly, that early humans were essentially good, but nevertheless systematically avoided each other for fear of violence.

Accordingly, human beings in a state of nature were solitary creatures, allowing him to argue that 'society' itself, that is, any form of permanent association between individuals, was necessarily a restriction on human freedom. Even the language marked a compromise. The real innovation that Rousseau introduces is the emergence of property relations as a key moment in the fall from the state of grace.

Consequently, Rousseau's model — which, as he repeatedly emphasizes, is not intended to be taken literally, but is simply a thought experiment — involves three stages: a purely imaginary state of nature where individuals lived isolated from each other, a stage of savagery in the Stone Age, which followed the invention of language where it includes the majority of the inhabitants of North America, as well as the 'savages', and finally the civilization which followed the invention of agriculture and metallurgy. Each marks a moral decline. But, as he is careful to point out, the whole

[47] Il est intéressant de comparer les arguments des autres participants dans les termes développés dans ce chapitre. XXX

land and agricultural products, nor in the case of wampum and other similar valuables, was there any way to transform access to material resources into power — or at least, the power to make others work for you or to force them to do things they didn't want to do.

At best, the accumulation and skillful distribution of wealth might make a man more likely to achieve political office (becoming 'chief' or 'captain' — French sources tend to use these terms indiscriminately) — but as the Jesuits constantly emphasized, the mere fact of having such a role did not give these leaders the right to give orders. Or, to be completely accurate, an office holder can give all the orders he wants, but no one has any particular obligation to follow them.

For the Jesuits, of course, all this was scandalous. In fact, their attitude toward indigenous ideals of freedom is the exact opposite of the attitude that most French people, or Canadians, tend to have today. As we have observed, almost anyone who grew up in a liberal democracy sees freedom as a perfectly admirable ideal in principle, even if they feel that a society based on total individual freedom — say, a society that has gone so far as to eliminate the police, prisons or any other coercive apparatus — would instantly descend into violent chaos.

Father Lallemant was prepared to admit that in practice such a system worked quite well; he created 'much less disorder than there is in France'. But the Jesuits were opposed to freedom in principle. Lallemant continues:

> *It is, without a doubt, a disposition entirely contrary to the spirit of the Faith, which obliges us to submit not only our will, but also our mind, our judgments and all the feelings of man to a power unknown to our senses, to a Law which is not earthly, and which is entirely opposed to the laws and feelings of a corrupt nature. Add to this that the laws of the Country, which appear to*

them to be the most just, attack the purity of Christian life in a thousand ways… especially with regard to their marriages…[22]

The Jesuit Relations is full of this sort of thing: scandalized missionaries often reported, for example, that women had full control over their own bodies, and that unmarried women therefore had sexual freedom. Married women could divorce at will. It was a scandal. But for them, this sinful behavior was only the extension of a more general principle of freedom, rooted in natural dispositions, which they considered pernicious in themselves.

The 'wicked liberty of savages', it was insisted, was the greatest obstacle to their 'submission to the yoke of the law of God'[23] . It was even extremely difficult to find terms to translate concepts such as 'lord', 'commandment', 'obedience', 'obedience', into indigenous languages; it was virtually impossible to explain the underlying theological concepts.[24]

On the political level, therefore, the French and the Americans were not arguing about equality, but freedom. About the only reference to specifically political equality that appears in the 71 volumes of *The Jesuit Relations* occurs almost as an aside, in an account of an event in the year 1648, which took place in an settlement of Christianized Wendat near Quebec City. After a disturbance caused by the entry of a shipment of illegal alcohol into the

[22] JR 28:49–50. Voici un autre père jésuite, qui revient sur le thème de l'âne : 'Il n'y a rien d'aussi difficile que de contrôler les tribus d'Amérique. Tous ces barbares ont la loi des ânes sauvages, ils naissent, vivent et meurent dans la liberté, sans contrainte ; ils ne savent pas ce qu'on entend par bride ou mors. Avec eux, conquérir ses passions est considéré comme une grande plaisanterie, tandis que donner libre cours à ses sens est une noble philosophie. La Loi de notre Seigneur est très éloignée de cette dissolution ; elle nous donne des limites et prescrit des limites, en dehors desquelles nous ne pouvons aller sans offenser Dieu et la raison' (JR 12:191–92).

[23] JR 5:175.

[24] Blackburn 2004:93.

on the question '*Has the restoration of sciences and arts contributed to the moral improvement?*[46]

Rousseau won first prize, and national fame, with an essay in which he argued very passionately that the arts and sciences did not enhance moral improvement. Our basic moral intuitions, he asserted, are fundamentally decent and sound; civilization only corrupts us by encouraging us to favor form over content. Almost all of the examples in '*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*' are taken from the classics, but in his footnotes Rousseau alludes to other sources of inspiration:

I do not dare speak of those happy nations who do not even know the names of the vices we have such trouble suppressing, of those American savages whose simple and natural political order Montaigne does not hesitate to prefer, not merely to the laws of Plato, but even to anything more perfect which philosophy will ever be able to dream up for governing a people. He cites a number of striking examples for people capable of appreciating them. But what of that, he says, they do not wear breeches!

Rousseau's victory caused a scandal; it was controversial, to say the least, that an academy dedicated to the advancement of the arts and sciences would award top honors to an argument that the arts and sciences were entirely counterproductive.

He spent most of the next few years writing high-profile responses to criticism of the essay (and using his newfound fame to produce a comic opera, *The Village Soothsayer*, which became very popular at court).

[46] Il convient de noter que la question est formulée en termes traditionnels : les arts et les sciences ne sont pas censés progresser, mais plutôt être encore en voie de restauration pour retrouver leur gloire passée (probablement ancienne). Ce n'est qu'au cours de la décennie suivante que les notions de progrès ont été largement acceptées.

very heart of Enlightenment thought are, in fact, relative latecomers and, above all, the extent to which they were direct responses to the indigenous critique.

It was, in fact, an effort to salvage the sense of European superiority that Enlightenment thinkers had sought to overthrow, destabilize, and decentralize.

Certainly, over the next century, the reactionary ideas proposed by Turgot enjoyed remarkable success. This created a host of contradictions: for example, the peculiar fact that the European colonial empires, unlike almost any other empire in world history, were forced to pretend that they were not eternal arrangements, but temporary means to accelerate the march of civilization.

It is here that we can finally return to Rousseau. The exchange between Madame Givenchy and Turgot gives us an idea of what the intellectual debate was like in France in the early 1750s, at least in the *salonist* circles where Rousseau had established himself.

Were freedom and equality universal values, or were they — at least in pure form — incompatible with a regime based on private property? Has progress in the arts and sciences led to a better understanding of the world, and therefore also to moral progress? Or was the indigenous critique correct? Was France's wealth and power merely a perverse side effect of unnatural, even pathological, social arrangements? These were the questions which everyone seemed to be debating.

If we know anything about these debates today, it is largely because of their influence on Rousseau's essay. The '*Origins of Social Inequality Discourse*' has been taught, debated and dismantled in a thousand classrooms — which is actually a bit strange because in many ways it is an eccentricity by the standards of the time.

Early in his life, Rousseau was best known as an aspiring composer. His rise as a social thinker began in 1750, when he won first prize in a competition sponsored by the same Academy of Dijon,

community, the governor persuaded Wendat leaders to ban alcoholic beverages, and issued an edict to this effect. What was significant, he noted, was that this ban was backed up by the threat of punishment. Father Lallemant, once again, records history. For him, it was a significant event:

> *From the beginning of the world until the arrival of the French, the savages never knew what was so solemn about forbidding anything to their people, under any penalty, even minimal. They are free people, each of whom considers himself as important as the others, and they only submit to their leaders to the extent that it pleases them.*[25]

Equality here is a direct extension of freedom; in fact, it is the expression of it. It has almost nothing in common with the more familiar (Eurasian) notion of 'equality before the law', which is ultimately equality before the sovereign, that is, equality in submission. Americans, on the other hand, were equal in that they were equally free to obey or disobey orders as they saw fit. The democratic governance of the Wendat and Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee, which so impressed European readers, was an expression of the same principle: if no coercion was permitted, it was obvious that whatever social coherence existed must be created through reasoned debate, persuasive arguments and the establishment of social consensus.

Here we return to the question with which we began: the Enlightenment as the apotheosis of the principle of open and rational debate. I've already mentioned Sagard's grudging respect for the Wendat talent for logical argument. This is a theme found in most Jesuit stories. It is important to keep in mind here that the Jesuits were the intellectuals of the Catholic world. Trained in clas-

[25] JR v.33.p49

sical rhetoric and *disputatio techniques*[26], they had learned the languages of the Americans above all to convince them of the superiority of the Christian faith.

However, they were regularly surprised and impressed by the quality of the counter-arguments they had to face. How could such rhetorical sophistication befall those who had no knowledge of the works of Varro and Quintilian?

In considering the issue, Jesuits have almost always noted openness in the conduct of public affairs. Thus Lejeune wrote:

> *There are almost none who are incapable of conversing or reasoning very well, and on good terms, on subjects with which they are acquainted. The councils, which are held almost every day in the Villages, and on almost all subjects, improve their capacity for dialogue.*

This observation is echoed by Lallemant:

> *I can truly say that in matters of intelligence, they are in no way inferior to Europeans and those who live in France. I would never have believed that, without instruction, nature could have provided one with such quick-witted and vigorous eloquence, which I have admired in many Hurons; or clearer foresight in public affairs, or more discreet management in things to which they are accustomed.*[27]

Some went further and remarked, not without frustration, that the savages of the New World seemed more intelligent, on the whole, than the people they were accustomed to dealing with at home (e.g., '*They are almost all more intelligent in their affairs, their speeches, their courtesies, their relationships, their tricks and their*

[26] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disputatio.

[27] JR 28:61–62

or legitimacy of the current behavior of the inhabitants of rich and powerful societies.

Between 1703 and 1751, the indigenous critique of Western civilization had an enormous impact on European thought. What began as widespread expressions of outrage and disgust from Americans first exposed to European customs eventually evolved into a debate about the nature of authority, decency, social responsibility and, above all, human freedom.

When it became clear to French observers that most Native Americans considered individual autonomy and freedom of action to be consummate values, that they organized their lives in such a way as to minimize any possibility of a human being being subordinate to the will of another, and that as a result they viewed French society as a society of slaves, they reacted in various ways.

Some, like the Jesuits, condemned the very idea of freedom. Others—settlers, intellectuals, and members of the public reading at home—came to see a provocative and appealing social proposition. (Their conclusions on this subject had no particular connection with their feelings towards the indigenous populations themselves, whom they were often very happy to see exterminated — although, in fairness, there was public figures on both sides of the divide who strongly opposed aggression against foreign peoples).

In fact, the indigenous critique was seen as so powerful that anyone who opposed existing intellectual and social arrangements would tend to use it as a weapon of choice: a game, as we have seen, played by almost all the great philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment.

As time went on, an argument that had been about freedom morphed into one about equality. Appeals to the wisdom of the 'savages' became means of challenging the legitimacy of feudal authority — the medieval certainty that the judgments of the Church were necessarily superior to those of anyone on earth.

The case of Turgot reveals the extent to which the ideas of civilization, evolution, and progress that we have come to see as the

A few years later, Turgot expounded these ideas in a series of lectures on world history. He had already been advocating for several years in favor of the primacy of technological progress as a driver of overall social improvement, but in this conference he made it an explicit theory of the stages of economic development.

Social evolution, according to him , always begins with hunters, then moves to a stage of pastoralism, then agriculture and finally that of contemporary urban commercial civilization[45]. Those who still remain hunters, shepherds, or simple farmers are best understood as vestiges of our own earlier stages of social development.

In other words, theories of social evolution were first formulated as a direct response to the indigenous critique. Within a few years, Turgot's classification of all societies into four stages appeared in the lectures of his friend and intellectual ally Adam Smith, who was in the process of developing a general theory of human history along with his colleagues: men like Lord Kames, Adam Ferguson, and John Millar.

Their ideas soon began to have a profound effect on the way European thinkers, and the European public in general, imagined indigenous peoples. Observers who previously viewed livelihood patterns and the division of labor in North American societies as matters of secondary importance now began to assume that they were the only thing that really mattered. Everyone had to be sorted along the same grand evolutionary scale, based on how they acquired food. 'Egalitarian' societies were banished to the bottom of this scale, where, at best, they could provide insight into how distant evolutionary ancestors might have lived, but certainly could no longer be imagined as equal parties in a dialogue on the nature

[45] Meek 1976:70–71. Turgot écrivait à la veille de la révolution industrielle. Les évolutionnistes ultérieurs remplaceraient simplement 'commercial' par 'industriel'. Aucune société pastorale n'existait réellement dans le Nouveau Monde, mais d'une certaine manière, les premiers évolutionnistes ne semblaient jamais considérer cela comme un problème.

subtleties than the most prudent citizens and merchants in France.'[28]
)

The key point for the purposes of the present study is that the Jesuits recognized an intrinsic relationship between the refusal of arbitrary power, and the taste for reasoned argument, which could only come from open and inclusive political debate. Yet attributing this facility to "nature", as Lallemant does, treats rhetorical skill as if it were merely the inevitable result of non-coercive political arrangements. This ignores the fact that there are many ways to be persuasive .

The indigenous political leaders of Turtle Island, who in most cases had no way to compel anyone to do anything they had not agreed to do, were known for their rhetorical powers. Even American generals who waged genocidal campaigns against indigenous peoples often found themselves reduced to tears by the force of their eloquence. Yet persuasion need not take the form of logical argumentation; it can also appeal to feelings, stir up passions, deploy poetic metaphors, appeal to myths or proverbial wisdom, use irony and dissimulation, humor, insult, appeals to prophecy or revelation; and the degree to which emphasis is placed, above all other methods, has everything to do with the rhetorical tradition from which the speaker comes and the presumed dispositions of the audience.

It was especially speakers of Iroquoian languages like the Wendat, or the Five Nations to the south, who seem to have placed such importance on reasoned debate — even, as we will see, treating it as a form of enjoyable entertainment in itself.

If so, it can only be the result of a particular cultural history. Such things are notoriously difficult to piece together, although we'll do some speculation on that later. For now, suffice it to say that they did it, and the fact that they did it had major historical repercussions. Because it seems that it was precisely this form of

[28] JR 15:155, aussi en Francs 2002:4, cf. Blackburn 2004:68.

debate — rational, skeptical, empirical, conversational — that, soon after, became identified with the Enlightenment, and much like the Jesuits, the Enlightenment thinkers and the democratic revolutionaries saw it as intrinsically linked to the rejection of arbitrary authority — in particular, that of religious authorities like the Jesuits themselves.

Let's put together the pieces of the puzzle scattered so far. By the mid-17th century, European legal and political thinkers were beginning to play with the idea of an egalitarian state of nature: at least in the sense that societies without government, writing, religion or private property were egalitarian by default, since those living in these societies would have had no meaningful means to distinguish themselves from one another. Terms like 'equality' and 'inequality' were just beginning to enter usage in intellectual circles at the time when the first French missionaries began evangelizing the inhabitants of what is now Nova Scotia. and Quebec.[29]

The European public was increasingly curious to know what such primordial societies might have looked like. But they had no particular disposition to imagine men and women living in a state of nature as particularly 'noble', much less as rational skeptics and champions of individual freedom.[30] The latter resulted from dialogue and debate between European and indigenous intellectuals.

As we have seen, at first neither side had much to say about 'equality'. The argument was more about freedom and mutual aid, or, what might even better be called freedom and communism.

[29] Elles ont également été acceptées de manière inégale. La plupart des jésuites souscrivaient encore à l'ancienne doctrine de la Renaissance selon laquelle les 'sauvages' avaient autrefois été d'un niveau supérieur de grâce et de civilisation et avaient dégénéré (Blackburn 2002:69).

[30] Un récent examen exhaustif de la littérature effectué par Ter Ellingson (2001) révèle que les observateurs européens considèrent régulièrement ceux qu'ils prennent pour des sauvages comme des sauvages sans fondement ; même les récits les plus positifs ont tendance à être assez nuancés, reconnaissant à la fois les vertus et les vices des sociétés étrangères.

Zilia's criticism of France, like that of all Imaginary Strangers writing in the Kandiaronk tradition, focuses on his lack of individual freedom and violent inequalities .[44]

Turgot found this thought dangerous, writing:

> *Yes, we all like the idea of freedom and equality, that is, in principle. But the broader context must be considered. In reality, the freedom and equality of savages is not a sign of their superiority, but proof of their inferiority, since such equality is only possible in a society where each household is largely self-sufficient, and therefore where all are equally poor.*

His argument went something like this: As societies evolve, technological advances, natural differences in talents and abilities between individuals (which have always existed) become increasingly important, and ultimately they form the basis of a division of labor ever more complex. The poverty and dispossession of some, however lamentable, was a necessary condition for the prosperity of society as a whole.

The only alternative, according to Turgot, was massive intervention by the State which aimed to create a uniformity of social conditions — an imposed equality which could only have the effect of crushing any initiative, therefore leading to economic ruin and social catastrophe.

Turgot suggests to Madame Graffigny that she rewrite the novel so that Zilia realizes all of this at the end of the book. It's no surprise that she didn't follow his suggestion.

[44] 'Sans or, il est impossible d'acquérir une partie de cette terre que la nature a donnée en commun à tous les hommes. Sans posséder ce qu'ils appellent la propriété, il est impossible d'avoir de l'or, et par une incohérence qui est un outrage au bon sens naturel, et qui exaspère la raison, cette nation hautaine, suivant un code d'honneur vide et entièrement de sa propre invention, considère comme une honte de recevoir de quiconque autre que le souverain ce qui est nécessaire pour soutenir sa vie et sa position' (de Graffigny 1747[2009:58])

nist milestone in the sense that it may well be the first European novel about a woman that does not end with the marriage or death of its protagonist.

Graffigny's heroine, Zilia, critiques the vanities and absurdities of European society and patriarchy itself; in the end, she rejects the advances of a French aristocrat, builds herself a sanctuary for the Sun, and devotes her life to reading and contemplation.

In the 19th century, some credited the novel as the first work to introduce the notion of state socialism to the general public, since Zilia at one point wonders why the King of France, who was forever levying all kinds of heavy taxes, could not simply redistribute wealth in the same way as the Capa Inca.[43]

In 1751, Madame de Graffigny was preparing a second edition and sent letters to several friends requesting constructive criticism. One respondent was ARJ Turgot, a 23-year-old seminary student and budding economist, and we happen to have a copy of his response, which was long and very critical.

The text could not be more important, as it marks a key moment in Turgot's intellectual development: the moment when he began to transform his most enduring contribution to human thought, the idea of material economic progress, into a general theory of history.

The Inca Empire, obviously, can hardly be described as 'egalitarian', but Graffigny represents it as a benevolent despotism, in which all are ultimately equal before the king.

[43] Donc Etienne 1876 ; cf Kavanagh 1994. Cela soulève la question intéressante de savoir si les conceptions ultérieures de l'Inca en tant que premier 'Etat-providence' sont réellement des projections des catégories européennes sur l'Inca, ou si ces catégories européennes elles-mêmes sont finalement inspirées par l'exemple Inca. En 1752, au moment de la parution de la deuxième édition de Graffigny, Jean Henri Maubert de Gouvest, ancien soldat, espion et metteur en scène de théâtre, publie également un roman intitulé ' Lettres Iroquois ', la correspondance d'un voyageur iroquois imaginaire nommé Igli, qui connaît également un immense succès.

(Aside — We need to be clear about what we mean by the latter term. Since at least the early 19th century , there have been lively debates over whether there ever was anything that could legitimately be called 'primitive communism', and the indigenous societies of the forests of the Northeast have always been the focus of these debates, since Frederich Engels used the Iroquois as one of his main examples of primitive communism in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* . In arguments about early communism, however, 'communism' always refers to communal ownership, especially of productive resources.

As we have already observed, many American society can be considered somewhat ambiguous in this sense; women owned and worked fields individually, although they stored and disposed of produce collectively; men owned their own tools and weapons individually, although they usually shared game and the spoils of war.

However, there is another way to use the word 'communism': not as a property regime, but in the original sense of a web of social relations defined by reciprocity, in which the non-transactional exchange of goods and services predominated. Think: '*from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs*'.

There is also a minimal communism that applies in all circumstances, the feeling that if another person's needs are great enough (*let's say they are drowning*), and/or the cost of meeting them is modest enough (*let's say a woman is asking for directions, or a light for her cigarette*), then of course any decent person would oblige their social duty.

This basic communism could even be considered the very foundation of human sociability, since it is only bitter enemies who would not treat one another in this way. What varies from society to society is the extent to which it is believed that this basic communism should properly practiced. In many societies — including American societies of the time we are discussing — it would have been inconceivable to refuse a request for food. For the French of

the 17th century, this was clearly not the case; the range of basic communism seems to have been very limited; it certainly did not extend to food and lodging; the Americans were therefore scandalized by their behavior.

But as we saw earlier with the confrontation of two very different concept of equality, we are ultimately witnessing a clash between very different notions of individualism. The Europeans constantly competed to gain personal advantage. Americans guaranteed each other the means of independent living, or at least ensured that no man or woman was subordinate to another. To the extent that we can speak of communism, it existed not in opposition to individual freedom, but in support of it. The same could be said of the political system. It worked to ensure that no one's will would be subjugated to anyone else's.

It was only later, as Americans learned more about Europe and Europeans began to think about what it would mean to translate American ideals of individual liberty into their own societies, that the word ' equality' began to appear regularly in political discourse.

To understand the evolution of the indigenous critique and its impact on European thought, one must first understand the roles of two men: an impoverished French aristocrat, Baron Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce de la Hontan, and a exceptionally brilliant Wendat statesman, Kandiaronk.

In 1683, Lahontan (as he was nicknamed), then aged 17, enlisted in the army and was posted to Canada. Over the next decade, he participated in several exploratory campaigns and expeditions, eventually rising to the rank of deputy to the Governor General, the Count of Frontenac.

In the process, he became fluent in Algonquin and Wendat and, at least according to his own account, became friends with a number of indigenous political figures — who he later asserted, observing that he was somewhat of a skeptic in religious matters and a political enemy of the Jesuits, were willing to share with him their

In 1721, for example, Parisian spectators flocked en masse to Delisle de la Drevetière's comedy *L'Arlequin Sauvage* , the story of a Wendat brought to France by a young ship captain, which features a long series of indignant monologues where the hero, who like Kandiaronk, '*attributes the ills of [French] society to private property, to money and above all to the enormous inequalities which make the poor slaves of the rich*'[39] . The play was revived almost every year for the next two decades.[40]

Even more striking, a great figure of the French Enlightenment attempted a Lahontan-style critique of French society through the eyes of an imaginary foreigner. Montesquieu chose a Persian, d'Argens a Chinese, Diderot a Tahitian, Chateaubriand a Natchez, Voltaire's *L'Ingenu* was half Wendat and half French.[41]

All took up and developed themes and arguments borrowed directly from Kandiaronk, supplemented by verses from other 'savage critiques' in the travelers' accounts.[42]

Indeed, I think that we can legitimately assert that the real origins of the '*Western gaze*', the supposedly objective way of studying strange and exotic cultures which characterizes later European anthropology, is not to be found accounts of travelers, but rather in those of the skeptical natives, looking with an air of distrust at the strange foreigners who had arrived in their lands.

The Letters of a Peruvian Woman by the famous Salonist Madame de Graffigny (published in 1747), which viewed French society through the eyes of a fictional abducted Inca princess, was perhaps the most popular work of its kind. It is considered a femi-

[39] Allan 1966:95.

[40] Ouellet 1995 : 328. Après une pause, une autre série de pièces similaires avec des héros indiens a été produite dans les années 1760 : *La jeune Indienne* (1764) de Chamfort et *Le Huron* (1768) de Marmontel,

[41] Voir Harvey 2012 pour un bon résumé récent de l'impact des perspectives étrangères, réelles et imaginaires, sur la pensée sociale dans les Lumières françaises.

[42] L'expression est celle de Pagden (1983).

also happens between societies. People come to define themselves against their neighbors. When urbanites encounter nomadic warriors, something curious happens. The city dwellers become more urban and the barbarians become more barbaric. If we can say that 'national character' really exists, it is only because of these schismogenetic processes: The English try to be as little as possible like the French as possible, the French define themselves in opposition to the the Germans, and so on. To serve this end, members of one society commonly exaggerate their differences between themselves and their neighbors.

In a historic clash of cultures such as that which took place along the eastern seaboard of North America in the 17th century, we can expect to see two contradictory processes. On the one hand, people on both sides of the divide should be expected to learn from each other and adopt some of each other's ideas, habits, and technologies. For example, as Americans began to use European kettles and muskets, European settlers began to adopt indigenous agricultural techniques and more lenient approaches to raising their children. At the same time, they will also almost invariably do the opposite: they will choose certain points of contrast and exaggerate them, making a point to act as little as possible like their neighbors in some specific regard. Kandiaronk's focus on money is exemplary here: to this day, indigenous societies, from Bolivia to Taiwan, almost invariably frame their own traditions ' as opposed to white men 'living off money' (to borrow a phrase from Marshall Sahlins.[38]

All of these concerns would be rather insignificant if Lahontan's books had not been so successful. In fact, they had a huge impact on European opinions and sensitivities. Kandiaronk's views were translated into German, English, Dutch, and Italian, and continued in print, in several editions, for over a century. The book also inspired an endless stream of imitations.

[38] Sahlins 1999:402, 414

actual opinions on Christian teachings. Kandiaronk was one such friend.

A key strategist of the Wendat Confederacy, Kandiaronk (his name literally meant 'the muskrat', and the French often called him simply 'Le Rat') was at the time engaged in a complex geopolitical game, trying to outwit the English , the French and the Five Nations against each other, with the ultimate goal of creating a comprehensive indigenous alliance to prevent the settlers from advancing.[31]

The project seems to have required a lot of travel. Everyone who met him, friend or foe, agreed that he was a remarkable individual: a courageous warrior, a brilliant orator, and a particularly skillful political leader. He was also, until his death, a fierce opponent of Christianity.[32]

Lahontan's career ended badly. Although he successfully defended Nova Scotia against an English fleet, he fled from his governor and was forced to flee French territory.

Convicted in absentia of insubordination, he spent most of the next decade wandering across Europe trying to negotiate a return to his native France. His efforts were to no avail. By 1702 he was living in Amsterdam and was down on his luck. According to those who met him as a penniless wanderer and freelance spy, he managed to save his fortune by publishing a series of books about his adventures in Canada.

The third, entitled '*Curious Dialogues with a Savage of Good Sense Who Has Traveled*' (1703), consisted of a series of four conversations between Lahontan and Kandiaronk, in which the wise

[31] Ainsi, selon certaines sources de l'époque, et selon les traditions orales Wendat (Steckley 1981).

[32] Les histoires officielles affirment qu'il s'est converti à la toute fin de sa vie, et il est vrai qu'il a été enterré comme chrétien dans l'église Notre-Dame de Montréal, mais Mann soutient de façon convaincante que l'histoire de la conversion du lit de mort et de l'enterrement est probablement une simple ruse politique des missionnaires (Mann 2001:53–53).

Wendat takes an extremely critical look at European ideas and customs in matters of religion, politics, health and sex life.

These books were popular, and before long Lahontan had become minor celebrity. He even took up residence at the court of Hanover, which was also the seat of Leibniz, who befriended and supported him before he fell ill and died around 1715.

Most of the existing literature on Lahontan's work[33] simply assumes that the dialogues are invented, and the arguments attributed to 'Adario' (the name given to Kandiaronk in the Dialogues) simply the opinions of Lahontan himself. In a way, it's not surprising. Adario not only claims to have visited France, but he expresses opinions on everything from monastic politics to legal affairs. In the debate on religion, he often comes across as a deist, embracing exactly the kind of rational skepticism that was becoming popular in bolder intellectual circles in Europe, including Lahontan himself, at the time. It is also true that the style of the dialogues seems to be partly inspired by the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata; and it is certain that, given the prevalence of Church censorship at the time, probably the easiest way for a free thinker to get away with publishing an open attack on Christianity was to compose a dialogue purporting defending the faith from the attacks of an imaginary foreign skeptic and then causing the defender of the faith to lose all his arguments.

It is only very recently that indigenous researchers have [34] returned to the subject in light of what we know about Kandiaronk itself, and arrived at very different conclusions. The real Adario was, in fact, famous not only for his eloquence, but also for participating in debates with Europeans, as Lahontan's book indicated.

As Barbara Alice Mann points out:

> *Despite the almost unanimous refrain from Western scholars who insist that the dialogues are 'imaginary',*

[33] Chinard 1913, 1931, Allen 1966, Richter 1972, Betts 1984:129–136, Ouellet 1990, 1995, White 1991, Basile 1997, Sayre 1997, Muthu 2003:25–29, Pinette 2006

other American societies, had no laws, never fought, and had no wealth inequality.

At the same time, as we have seen, Kandiaronk's basic argument fits perfectly with what French missionaries and settlers had been hearing from other Turtle Islanders since their arrival in the New World. To assert that because the *Dialogues* are romantic, they cannot truly reflect what Kandiaronk actually said is to assume that people are incapable of casting themselves in a romantic light, despite the overwhelming evidence that this is precisely what any skilled debater would be likely to do in such a situation.

In the 1940s, anthropologist Gregory Bateson coined the term 'schismogenesis': the tendency of people to define themselves against others. Imagine an argument where two people start out with a minor political disagreement, but after an hour, have taken the positions of two completely opposite poles of a certain ideological divide — even positions so extreme they never never have originally supported — just to show how completely they disagree with each other.[37] We all know this kind of thing can happen. Anyone reading this will probably have seen it happen, at least once or twice.

Bateson suggests that such processes can become culturally institutionalized. How do boys and girls in Papua New Guinea come to behave so differently, when no one has ever explicitly told them how boys and girls are supposed to behave? They don't just learn gender roles by imitating their elders; It also happens because boys and girls each learn to find the other's behavior distasteful and to try to be as little like the opposite sex as possible. What begins as minor learned differences become exaggerated until girls come to think of themselves as everything boys are not, which they then increasingly become. And of course, boys do the same thing to girls.

Bateson was interested in psychological processes within societies, but there is every reason to believe that something similar

[37] Bateson 1935, 1958.

Lahontan: Try for once in your life to listen: Don't you see, my dear friend, that the nations of Europe could not survive without gold and silver — or without a similar precious symbol? Without it, nobles, priests, merchants and many others who do not have the strength to work the soil would simply die of hunger. Our kings would not be kings; what soldiers would we have? Who would work for kings, or anyone else? … This would plunge Europe into chaos and create the darkest confusion possible.

Kandiaronk: Do you really think you'll influence me by appealing to the needs of nobles, merchants, and priests? If you abandoned the use of money, yes, such distinctions between men would dissolve; a leveling equality would then take its place among you as it does now among the Wendats. And yes, during the first thirty years after the banishment of self-interest you will undoubtedly see some desolation, for those who are only qualified to eat, drink, sleep and indulge will languish and die. But their offspring would be adapted to our way of life. I have repeatedly outlined the qualities that we believe should define humanity — wisdom, reason, fairness, etc. — and demonstrated that the existence of distinct material interests hits all this on the head: a man motivated by greed cannot be a man of reason.

'Equality' is therefore invoked here as a self-conscious ideal, but only as a result of a the collisions of American and European ideas, and as a calculated provocation that turns European civilizing discourse back on itself.

One of the reasons historians have found it so easy to dismiss Kandiaronk as the ultimate 'Noble Savage', and therefore a mere projection of European fantasies, is that many of his claims are so obviously exaggerated. It is not really true that the Wendat, or

there are excellent reasons to accept them as authentic. First of all, those closest to the historical Kandiaronk were uniformly amazed by his oratorical skills… Everywhere he went, his contemporaries begged him to speak, to the delight of all that heard him. His spirit was legendary.

Charlevoix describes Kandiaronk as being so '*naturally eloquent' that 'perhaps no one has ever surpassed him in mental capacity*'. An exceptional speaker of the council, he was no less brilliant in private conversations, and [the advisors and negotiators] often took pleasure in provoking him to hear his repartees, always lively, full of wit, and generally unanswered. He was the only man in Canada to live up to the Count of Frontenac, who often invited him to his table to give this pleasure to his officers' (Mann 2001:55).

In other words, Montreal, in the 1690s, was often the scene of a sort of Salon des Lumières, where the governor and his officers (arguably including his deputy, Lahontan) welcomed Kandiaronk to debate exactly what kind of questions which appeared in the *Dialogues* , and where it was Kandiaronk who took the position of the rational skeptic.

Furthermore, everything suggests that Kandiaronk had gone to France; at least we know that the Wendat Confederacy sent an ambassador to the court of Louis XIV in 1691, and Kandiaronk's office at the time was president of the council, which would have made him the logical person to send.

While the intimate knowledge of European affairs and understanding of European psychology attributed to Adario may seem implausible, it must be kept in mind that Kandiaronk was a man who had engaged in political negotiations with Europeans for years. He knew how to ensnare them in rhetorical traps by anticipating their logic, interests, blind spots and reactions. Finally, Mann notes that many of the criticisms of Christianity,

and European customs more generally, attributed to Adario correspond almost exactly to criticisms that were documented by other speakers of Iroquoian languages at that time.[34]

Lahontan himself claimed to have based the *Dialogues* on notes taken during or after various conversations he had with Kandiaronk in the Wendat capital of Michilimackinac; notes which he later reorganized with the governor's help, and supplemented, no doubt, with memories of similar debates held at Frontenac's own dining table. There is no doubt that during this process the text was enriched and embellished, and probably touched up again when Lahontan produced his final edition in Amsterdam. But there is every reason to believe that the basic arguments were those of Kandiaronk.

Lahontan already anticipates some of these in his *Memoirs*, when he notes that the Americans who had actually gone to Europe — he was probably thinking primarily of Kandiaronk himself, as well as a number of Christian converts who had been put to work as kitchen slaves — returned contemptuous of European claims to cultural superiority:

> *As was the case in France, they never stopped teasing us about the social ills they observed in our cities, treating them as if they were caused by money. There is no point in trying to make them understand how useful property rights are for the welfare of society: they make a joke of everything you say about it. In short, they do not argue, they do not slander each other, they make fun of the arts and sciences, and laugh at the differences in rank that we observe among us. They call us slaves and treat us as miserable souls, whose lives are not worth living, alleging that we degrade ourselves by submitting to one man [the king] who possesses all the power and who is bound only by his own will.*

[34] Mann 2001:57–61

> *in the world. Fathers sell their children, husbands their wives, wives betray their husbands, brothers kill each other, friends are false, and all for money. In light of all this, tell me that we Wendats are not right to refuse to touch, or even look at, money?*

For 1703, this was captivating stuff.

Much of the subsequent exchange consists of the Frenchman trying to convince the Wendat of the benefits of European civilization, with Kandiaronk retorting that the Europeans would do much better by adopting the Wendat way of life.

> *Can you seriously imagine that I would be happy to live like the inhabitants of Paris, to take two hours every morning just to get dressed and put on makeup, to greet and bow to every pretentious guy I meet in the street and who was born with an inheritance? Do you really think I could carry a bag full of coins and not hand them out to hungry people, that I would carry a sword, but not pull it on the first gang of thugs I see in rounding up the destitute to force them into naval service?*

The Wendat philosopher then the suggests that if Lahontan adopted an American lifestyle, it might take him some time to adjust, but in the end he would be much happier.

(Here Kandiaronk's view appears to be borne out by empirical evidence: it was notorious during the first centuries of European colonization of North America that settlers captured and forcibly adopted into indigenous societies during a certain period of time rarely wanted to return home and often actively resisted doing so; Native Americans who were adopted into settler families almost always escaped at the first opportunity).

Kandiaronk is even ready to assert that Europe would be better off if its entire social system were dismantled:

You have noticed that we lack judges. Why? Because we never file complaints against each other! And why do we never sue? Because we have made the decision not to accept or use the money. And why are we refusing to use money in our communities? Because we are determined not to have laws, because, ever since the world was a world, our ancestors have been able to live happily without them.

This may seem disingenuous — the Wendat certainly had a legal code — but by 'laws' Kandiaronk is clearly referring to laws of a coercive or punitive nature. He then eviscerates the French legal system point by point, focusing particularly on judicial persecution, false testimony, torture, accusations of witchcraft and differential justice for the rich and the poor. But ultimately he comes back to his initial observation: the whole apparatus of trying to force people to behave well would be useless if France did not also maintain a contrary apparatus that encourages people to behave badly. This apparatus consisted of money, property rights, and the resulting pursuit of material self-interest.

Kandiaronk : I have spent six years thinking about the state of European society and I still cannot think of a single one of your ways that is not inhumane, and I sincerely believe that this can only be because you stick to your distinctions of 'mine' and 'yours'.

I affirm that what you call money is the devil of demons; the tyrant of the French, the source of all evils; the scourge of souls and the slaughter of the living. Imagining that you can live in the land of money and preserve your soul is like imagining that you can preserve your life at the bottom of a lake. Money is the father of luxury, of lasciviousness, of intrigues, of deception, of lies, of betrayal, of insincerity, of all the worst behavior

In other words, here we find all the familiar criticisms of European society that the first missionaries had to face — the bickering, the lack of mutual assistance, the blind submission to authority — but with a new element added : the institution of private property.

The text continues:

They think that it is wrong for one man to have more than another and for the rich to be more respected than the poor. In short, they say, the name savages, which we give them, would suit us better, since there is nothing in our actions which bears an appearance of wisdom.

Those who had the opportunity to closely observe French society came to realize a key difference from their own, one that would not have been obvious to those exposed almost exclusively to trappers, traders, soldiers and missionaries.

In their own societies, there was little way to convert wealth into power over others, and thus, differences in wealth had little effect on individual freedom. A man with an unusually large stash of wampum, or a woman who controls a record harvest of corn, would no doubt have been admired, and perhaps have used their influence to initiate new projects, but it would have been difficult to find a way to deploy one's wealth to make a neighbor do what he otherwise would not have been willing to do. In France, this was not the case at all. Power over possessions can translate directly into power over other human beings in a variety of ways.

But let's give the floor to Kandiaronk himself. The first of the *Dialogues* focuses on religious issues, in which Lahontan lets his protagonist calmly expose the logical contradictions and inconsistency of the Christian doctrines of original sin and redemption, paying particular attention to the concept of hell.

Kandiaronk continually highlights the fact that Christians are divided into endless sects, each convinced that they are entirely right and everyone else is hellbound, as well as the inherent unreliability of historical texts.

To give an idea of its flavor:

> *Kandiaronk : Come on, brother. Do not throw up your hands… It is natural for Christians to have faith in the Holy Scriptures, because since their childhood they have heard so much about them. Yet it is reasonable for those not born with such prejudices, like the Wendat, to examine things more closely.*
>
> *However, after thinking long and hard for a decade about what the Jesuits told us about the life and death of the son of the Great Spirit, any Wendat could give you twenty counter-arguments.*
>
> *For my part, I have always believed that if it were possible for God to have lowered His standards enough to descend to earth, He would have done so in full view, descending in triumph, with pomp and majesty, and more publicly… He would have gone from nation to nation performing powerful miracles, thus giving everyone the same laws. Then we would all have had exactly the same religion, uniformly spread and equally known in the four corners of the world, proving to our descendants, from then until ten thousand years in the future, the truth of that religion. Instead, there are five or six hundred religions, each distinct from the others, of which, according to you, the religion of the French alone is all good, holy or true.*[35]

This last point perhaps reflects Kandiaronk's most revealing point: the extraordinary hubris of Jesuit cosmology. Pointing out

[35] 1704 : 106–107. Les références citées se rapportent à l'édition anglaise de 1735, mais la traduction en l'occurrence est une combinaison de cela, celle de Mann (2001:67–68), et la mienne. Les traductions suivantes sont basées sur l'édition de 1735.

that their religion assumes that an omniscient and all-powerful being would freely choose to enclose himself in flesh and undergo terrible suffering in order to redeem a single imperfect species, the Wendat orator wondered why this Supreme Being was so stingy with his promise of redemption — for according to the Jesuits, precious few would would be saved[36].

A chapter on the subject of law follows, where Kandiaronk takes the position that European-style punitive law, like the religious doctrine of eternal damnation, is not necessitated by the corruption inherent in human nature, but rather by a form of social organization that encourages selfish and acquisitive behavior.

Lahontan objects. It is true, he says, that reason is the same for all humans, and everyone is capable of understanding that certain forms of behavior are destructive; but reason is not enough. The very existence of judges and sentences shows that not everyone is capable of following their diktats:

> *Lahontan: This is why the wicked must be punished and the good must be rewarded. Otherwise, murder, theft and defamation would spread everywhere and, in a word, we would become the most unfortunate people on earth.*
>
> *Kandiaronk: For my part, I find it difficult to see how you could be much more unhappy than you already are. What kind of human being, what kind of creature must Europeans be to be forced to do good and only refrain from evil for fear of punishment? …*

[36] 'En supposant qu'il est si puissant et si grand, quelle est la probabilité qu'un être si inconnaissable se soit fait homme, qu'il ait vécu dans la misère et soit mort dans l'infamie, juste pour réparer le péché d'une créature ignoble qui était aussi loin sous lui qu'une mouche est sous le soleil et les étoiles ? Où cela laisse-t-il son pouvoir infini ? A quoi cela lui servirait-il, et à quoi cela servirait-il ? Pour ma part, il me semble que croire en un tel abaissement, c'est douter de l'inimaginable balayage de sa toute-puissance, tout en faisant des présomptions extravagantes à notre sujet ' (Mann 2001:66).