

*Anthropological thought in the wake
of the French revolution :
La Société des observateurs de l'homme*

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I. Introduction

IN recent months a number of lively and stimulating papers have been published dealing with the meaning of history within the discipline of anthropology (Bermann 1978, Boon 1980, Cannon 1978, Cohn 1980, Higonnet 1980). In the literature, however, relatively little emphasis has been given to the variation in anthropological ideas within the tradition of anthropology. One very important aspect of such variation is to be found in the relationship between particular national cultural traditions and the development of anthropological ideas. Writers who have tended to see the history of the discipline in terms of biological paradigms, utilitarian behaviorism, and various conceptions of anthropology as 'objective' science, have failed to grasp adequately either the continuity or the range of variation within the anthropological tradition. Therefore, anthropologists and those thinking about the history of anthropology need to analyze anthropological ideas in historical context. Such an attempt to reconsider the past arouses opposition because it necessarily contradicts rationalist assumptions about anthropology as a science akin to the natural sciences, obedient to the laws of progress and independent of human preoccupations, a curious claim anyway for a science of man.

In order to consider the history of anthropology as an anthropological problem (Hallowell 1962), one must view national/cultural traditions within their historical context and recognize the importance of this context for the meaning of anthropological ideas (1). My argument in this paper rests on the assumption that the historical

(1) Balfour in his presidential address to the Royal Anthropological Institute (1904) put in a plea for a *national* ethnographic museum in Britain like those on the Continent. It would seem, therefore, that there was some consciousness of the importance

of nationalist conceptions of anthropological institutions. Relationships, for example, between museums and nationalist movements are of crucial importance in Central Europe (e.g., Kossuth in Hungary).

context of particular national cultural traditions affects profoundly the meaning of anthropological ideas and the development of those institutions (e.g. museums (2), professional societies) on which the growth of the discipline may be said to depend. It is both misleading and erroneous to maintain that anthropology has arisen in accordance with any clear scientific paradigms (3) which, as a series of goals, focused the efforts and sustained the careers of anthropologists in the same way at different times and in different cultures. Rather than seeing their predecessors solely as scientists dutifully committed to the onward march of accumulated objective knowledge, anthropologists would do well to recognize the social context in which anthropology has developed and to analyze not only the relations it has entertained with other disciplines, but also the manner in which political and social ideas prevailing at a given time and the career interests of anthropologists themselves have all contributed to notions of a science of Man (4).

In this paper I shall present evidence to substantiate the argument briefly stated above. By examining the historical, national, cultural context of what may justly be called the first anthropological society, I shall demonstrate how conceptions of anthropological problems at the end of the eighteenth century in France took root in a particular world view. Indeed, I hold that it is quite impossible to assess or understand the contributions of the Société des observateurs de l'homme to the development of anthropological ideas in France without knowledge of European intellectual history and of the specific ambitions and interactions of members of various disciplines (5) who

(2) When Buffon died in 1788 the Jardin du roi, soon to become the Muséum d'histoire naturelle, was bankrupt but rich in specimens and equipped with a particularly fine staff: Daubenton, Lamarck, Jussieu, Fourcroy, Thouin, Lacépède—all of whom were to become members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme. Thus the Museum is perhaps the most important institution for the organization of the Société des observateurs de l'homme and the one most directly related to their conception of a science of man.

(3) As Bernard Cohn (1980) cogently observes, paradigms in anthropology may in fact be as political as they are scientific. This point is highly important although, as we have seen in the case of the Société des observateurs de l'homme, scientific ideals

depend heavily on a political and social context. Moreover, scientific ideals are particularly influential in the case of the conceptualization of key anthropological problems and the self-consciousness of persons addressing them. On the notion of paradigm see Kuhn (1962).

(4) It is particularly surprising that neither culturologists like Leslie White, nor cultural relativists have been conscious of the cultural variability of their own ideas concerning cultural variability.

(5) There are, of course, difficulties with a notion of 'professionalization' in the history of the social sciences. What I wish to emphasize in this paper is the relevance of various professional interests of members of the Société for their conception of a science of man.

belonged to this first anthropological society (6). Furthermore writings of members of the Société profoundly influenced nineteenth-century French social thought. The works of Comte, Saint-Simon and Durkheim all seem, in certain ways at least, to have clear affinities with those of members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme.

II. The French Revolution and social theory

It is useful to summarize a few of the ways in which the French Revolution altered conceptions of both science and the scientific community in France. Following Picavet (1891), Moravia (1970), Gillispie (1959, 1969), Williams (1953, 1959) and others, I shall indicate a few aspects of this important subject.

1) Revolutionary ideals of human nature were seen to be deeply opposed to abstract physical science, which was associated with the conservatism of the Ancien Régime. The brain children of the Revolution, the Idéologues, referred to themselves as *applied* Encyclopedists. For not only was science conceived to be an essentially human concern dealing with human beings, but, because of its humanistic mold, it was believed to be capable of changing men. By contrast, the exact sciences (e.g. physics) existed independent of human will. The attack on the Academies and the reforms of the Écoles centrales were political expressions of a far older moral revolt against an elitist notion of science which gathered momentum throughout the eighteenth century.

2) The motto of the Société, 'Know thyself', implied an emphasis on *observation* and *comparison* as the basis of knowledge. The Revolution reinforced both the tradition of a natural history of man and the Stoic vein which ran through Enlightenment thought from Fénelon through Montesquieu, Turgot and Buffon. In his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* Montesquieu explicitly attributes the fall of Rome to superfluous wealth on the one hand and Epicurean philosophy on the other. From which Montesquieu concludes that public virtue is the only true guarantor of political liberties, a theme common in the Revolutionary period (Williams 1969: 294).

(6) Chronologically, the Société des observateurs de l'homme is the first society which not only alluded to the term 'anthropology' (which had already appeared in the writings of Kant in Germany, of Court de Gebelin (1781) in France, and Chavannes

in Switzerland), but which proposed goals of an anthropological concern. It cannot, however, be seen *stricto sensu* as a professional anthropological society, for its membership was too wide.

Knowing oneself was felt to be a process of understanding which embraced not only knowledge of science and the physical world but also that of the act of understanding itself. Thus, conceptions of language were seen to be particularly important in understanding man's place in nature. Indeed, the members of the Société sought to found a science of Man in which relations between sensations and ideas themselves were seen as a code which awaited its Champollion. Dubbed 'idéologie' by the Institut in the early post-Revolutionary period, this science of signs, this semiology of knowledge was pursued by the Idéologues, that group of persons most of whom later became founding members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme.

3) Another effect of the Revolution, related to the Stoic vein already referred to, was the change it brought about in public attitudes towards scientists and their educational functions. For such practicing scientists as d'Alembert, Lavoisier and Condorcet, scientific explanation itself functioned as a kind of 'cosmic education' (Gillispie 1959: 404). From Condillac to the Idéologues (from whose ranks virtually all members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme were drawn) this close alliance between education and scientific activity, after Thermidor, influenced scientific institutions and conceptions—in the creation of the Écoles centrales, the Institut de France, the École polytechnique, the Écoles normales, etc. Indeed, belief in an ideal intermingling educational, political and scientific goals is of fundamental importance for French social thought (e.g. Comte, Saint-Simon and Durkheim). As Stuart Hughes (1958: 280) observes: 'In Durkheim's mind, science reinforced democracy, and democracy science: he was a true child of the Enlightenment'.

4) With Stoicism and belief in the need to popularize science through education went the glorification of the natural history of industry. But these ideas did not always make good bedfellows. Lavoisier, for one, was suspicious of pushing analogies of scientists to artisans too far.

The scientist works for love of science and to increase his reputation. When he makes a discovery, he is eager to publish it, and his object is only to secure his intellectual property in his achievement. The artisan on the other hand, whether in his own research or in using the research of others, is always thinking of economic advantage. He publicizes only what he cannot keep secret and tells only what he cannot hide. Society benefits both from the disinterested investigation of the *savant* and the interested speculation of the artisan. Confound the two, however, and both will lose the spirit distinctive to them (Gillispie 1959: 399).

In this passage of Lavoisier, scientists are 'more' moral than artisans because they make public what they know, whereas artisans deal in

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trade secrets and pursue their own profit. It would appear that, *inter alia*, Lavoisier is advocating here that scientists hold their distance from artisans. This position may be better understood if one remembers that Frenchmen in the wake of the Revolution 'saw the culmination and the end of the very real hostility between scientists and artisans' (Gillispie 1959: 404) which the notion of a natural history of industry helped to palliate.

In sum, the Revolution and its aftermath bequeathed to members of the Société: 1. Hostility to elevating or abstracting science, and the concomitant attempt to link it to morality; the belief that the two are, in fact, fundamentally related and cannot be studied separately; 2. A Stoic, utilitarian idea of science and a corresponding idea of the role of scientists as moralists in social change; and 3. A firm belief in the value of scientific education as the basis of a new political and moral order.

III. La Société des observateurs de l'homme

3.1 A natural science of man

The Société des observateurs de l'homme (1799-1805) reflects with unusual clarity the conceptions of science, of language and of the scientific community in the period following the French Revolution. In the tradition of Buffon, who repudiated the supremacy of mathematical knowledge and Cartesian rationality in favor of observation and comparison (perfect cubes, octagons and hexagons do not exist in Nature, he wryly observed), members of the Société saw as their mission the establishment of a science of man. Although Rousseau certainly inspired them, the members allied themselves with Buffon; they frequently refer to a 'Histoire naturelle de l'homme', which may be distinguished from Rousseau's 'Histoire de l'homme naturel' (7).

De Gérando, one of the foremost members of the Société, stresses the importance of Buffon among those 'qui, plaçant l'homme au centre des tableaux qu'ils nous offroient, présentent l'étude de l'homme sous son véritable point de vue, c'est-à-dire comme une suite d'observations [...] ' (*Des Signes...*, III: 19). Buffon, like Diderot after him,

(7) Lest it be thought the Observateurs were sexist, it is useful to remind the reader that the Observateurs in fact devoted several works to women (e.g., *Histoire naturelle de la femme* (1803) de Moreau de la Sarthe).

explicitly made man the center of what is knowable and the only measure and source of his knowledge. Thus, he was highly skeptical of mathematical certainty, for he believed that mathematics and science are well and good but have their limits; if pushed too far, they confuse rather than clarify the essential concern of man: himself. Significantly, the motto of the Société des observateurs de l'homme is that of the Stoics: 'Know thyself' (Connais-toi toi-même).

'Know thyself' also connoted for de Gérando and others an obligation to think of the general good of 'humanity' and to avoid the cardinal sin: egoism (8). In the light of a conception of science as the royal road to the progress of mankind, one can perhaps better grasp the overtones of the idea of a moral science and of the morality of scientists, a social ideal of scientists which raised them in the eyes of their fellow men for reasons that had little to do with scientific competence. Such a social, scientific and political ideal appears again and again in the writings of the Idéologues and the members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme. Firmly rooted in the political ideals and social context of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary period, they implicitly and explicitly emphasize a humanistic approach to science: neither science nor scientists can be abstracted from human concerns, from 'la morale'. Moreover, the definition of these concerns was frequently utilitarian. Like the Idéologues, members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme saw science and morality as handmaidens of human welfare and progress.

Among the ranks of the Société one finds, for example, Abbé Sicard, L.F. Jauffret, Bougainville, Cabanis, Volney, Pinel, Sylvestre de Sacy, Jussieu, Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire and Lamarck, as well as the two Cuviers. There were approximately five doctors, fourteen naturalists, three lawyers and four voyagers, in addition to a spattering of other professions (9). The tone of the Société was

(8) Compare Adam SMITH in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759: 193-4). 'Conscience [...] is capable of combining the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive [...] a voice capable of astonishing the most presumptuous of our passions'. Thus conscience and morality are opposed to the destructive influences of egoism and the passions which must be harnessed for the survival of society.

(9) List of members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme:

Membres fondateurs [partial list]: Abbé

Sicard, directeur de l'Institution des sourds-muets; Savinien Leblond, télégraphe, littérateur et naturaliste; Lerminier, astronome; L.F. Jauffret; le duc Mathieu de Montmorency.

Membres: Patrin, minéralogiste; Baudin, capitaine de vaisseau et naturaliste; Pinel, célèbre médecin aliéniste; Bouvier, médecin, protégé de Buffon; Moreau de la Sarthe, médecin; Michaux, voyageur et botaniste; Dolomieu, géologue et minéralogiste; Deleuze, bibliothécaire du Muséum d'histoire naturelle; les philologues: Larcher, d'Ansse de Villosion, Coray.

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(10) See
(11) See

accordingly set by the profession the most heavily represented: naturalists (10).

Most of the members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme were (or had previously been) Idéologues. Significantly, the salon at which the Idéologues met socially, that of Mme Helvétius at Auteuil (11) (not to be confused with the better-known Salon of Arcueil) (12), was also the meeting place of the members of the Société and one known for its congeniality. 'In your company', wrote Benjamin Franklin of Mme Helvétius' salon, 'we are not only pleased with you but better pleased with one another and with ourselves' (quoted in Lopez 1966: 243).

Eminent foreigners such as Jefferson, Franklin, Schlegel, Jeremy Bentham and Alessandro Manzoni all spent time at the house of Mme Helvétius, widow of the sensualist philosopher Claude Helvétius, and author of the very successful novel *Les lettres d'une Péruvienne*. Her salon can fairly be called the last bastion of Enlightenment thought.

Let us take up briefly the writing and activities of several members

Millin, archéologue; Bougainville, navigateur célèbre; Cabanis, médecin and physiologiste; Thouret, adversaire de Mesmer; Volney; Lassus (Pierre), médecin; Papon, historiographe de Provence; Charles, physicien; Pfeffel, jurisconsulte et publiciste; Ramond, auteur de *Voyage au Mont-Perdu*; de Fleurieu, de l'Institut; Bourlet de Vauxcelles, littérateur; Laromiguière, philosophe; Sylvestre de Sacy, orientaliste; marquis de Pastoret; comte Faure, jurisconsulte, l'un des principaux auteurs du code Napoléon; Marcel, directeur de l'Imprimerie nationale; Bouchaud, professeur de droit au Collège de France; Pierre Sue, professeur de médecine; Palisot de Beauvois, botaniste; Levaillant, voyageur et naturaliste; Laurent de Jussieu, célèbre botaniste; Hallé, célèbre hygiéniste; Delannay, minéralogiste; Butet de la Sarthe, grammairien; baron Walckenaer; Lair, agronome et philanthrope; de Gérando, philanthrope; Jean-Baptiste Clair Jauffret, instituteur des sourds-muets; les deux Cuvier; Duméril, zoologiste; comte de Lacépède; Lamarck, zoologiste; Daudin, naturaliste; Lacroix, savant mathématicien; Alexandre Brogniart, minéralogiste; Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire (see Reboul).

(10) See note 2.

(11) See Guillois (1894) for a study of

the salon of Mme Helvétius.

(12) The confusion between the two societies, heightened by the similarity in the two names, hides profound differences. For Crosland (1967) The Société d'Arcueil represented French science under Napoléon. In fact, Napoléon was the patron of the Société d'Arcueil, whereas he certainly was not a patron of the Société des observateurs or the Salon d'Auteuil. Soon after his return with Bonaparte from Egypt in 1799 the chemist Berthollet bought a country house at Arcueil. In 1806, when Laplace bought the neighboring property, the stage was set for Napoleonic science. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Société des observateurs de l'homme failed only a few months before the Société d'Arcueil became prominent and seems likely that the latter took some of the wind out of the sails of the former. This interpretation is rendered more likely by the fact that Cabanis was Napoléon's personal physician in Egypt and most probably fell out with him in the years following his return to Paris. However, under Napoléon the scientific climate was hardly very congenial. As Lavoisier's judge is reputed to have said; 'The Republic has no need of scientists'.

of the Société to see more fully how their work can be considered in the light of conceptions of science and social reform in the period following the Revolution.

3.2 *Cabanis and Notre Dame d'Auteuil*

The first, Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis, was a doctor. The 'adopted' son of Mme Helvétius, to whom she left her estate, fortune and library, Cabanis married Condorcet's sister-in-law and was an intimate friend of Condorcet and of Benjamin Franklin. In fact it was quite possibly Cabanis who gave Condorcet the poison which was to cause his death during the 'Terreur'. Cabanis wrote on hospital reforms, was professor of 'hygiène' at the Écoles centrales of Paris (1794) and, as a member of the Institut, taught the class in the moral sciences. As the spiritual and legal heir of Mme Helvétius, he was a critical figure of the period. Perhaps best known for his *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802) in which he relied on Condillac's doctrine of knowledge derived from sense impressions, he emphasized also organic needs. Like the other Idéologues, he believed stoutly in the value of education, for of living beings 'l'homme est sans doute le plus soumis à l'influence des causes extérieures' (i.e. his sense impressions) [Cabanis (1802) IV: 9.]. In the same work (1802) he speaks of *anthropologie* (borrowing the term from German) as the methodological juxtaposition of the physical history and the moral history of man. Like most of his medical colleagues, he believed medicine (the physical organization of the human body) the basis of all moral sciences, a notion influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment tradition of moral and political philosophy which opposed British sensualist philosophy narrowly defined. Moreover, there was never any question in the minds of either Cabanis or other physicians of the period that the moral sciences were of direct interest and concern to them *as physicians*.

For Cabanis, the goal of knowledge is to decipher appearances and discern utility. Moralists and doctors both seek to find the secrets of the body's organization.

Le moraliste s'efforce de remonter jusqu'aux opérations les plus obscures qui constituent les fonctions de l'intelligence et les déterminations de la volonté. Il y cherche les règles qui doivent diriger la vie et qui conduisent au bonheur [again the utilitarian quest for happiness]. L'homme a des besoins; il a reçu des facultés pour les satisfaire; les uns et les autres dépendent immédiatement de son organisation (1802, III: 5) [italics mine].

What Cabanis means in this passage is, essentially, that man seeks happiness; illness, misfortune and all those painful experiences in life are therefore fair game for the studies of the moralist. Like the physician, he looks for the principles (règles) which govern life, those motivations and goals which determine behavior. Man has been given needs by biology; he must use his faculties to satisfy these needs; and both biological givens and functional faculties are to be seen as aspects of his organization. Any study of man must encompass both. Moreover, it must integrate these with conceptions of intelligence and volition.

Such cogwheeling of the various problems, theoretical perspectives and empirical research concerning man gave rise to a need for a synthetic overarching science of man. All members of the Société felt this need and, indeed, wrote about it. In fact, they took it as an article of faith. The better a picture which could be put together of *all* of the aspects of a definition of man, the more capable man would be of improving himself, and of assisting other less self-conscious brethren along the path of progress. Cabanis expressed an idea held by all Observateurs when he wrote:

Le moindre perfectionnement réel dans l'art le plus obscur rejaillit bientôt sur tous les autres; et les relations établies entre les différents objets de nos travaux, les font tous participer aux progrès de chacun [...] On voit, on sait, on démontre aujourd'hui qu'il n'est rien d'isolé dans les travaux de l'homme : ils s'entrelacent, pour ainsi dire, comme les peuples dans leurs relations commerciales; ils s'entraident comme les individus unis par les liens sociaux (Cabanis, *Coup d'œil* (1795), 1956: 253).

In this passage one can see the outlines of the Renaissance man. For a variety of reasons, this ideal was of concern to the Observateurs. If all branches of knowledge concerning man were needed to synthesize a global science of man, then relating different sorts of knowledge, different specializations, became important. Moreover, there were clear political and educational reasons for attempting to integrate the various branches of knowledge, as has been mentioned.

There was in Cabanis' life a man whom he greatly admired, an American statesman who proposed to Mme Helvétius at least once and who, moreover, spent a great deal of time with the young Cabanis when he was in his early twenties, soon after Mme Helvétius had taken him into her household. This was Benjamin Franklin, in important respects Cabanis' Renaissance man. Periodically Cabanis' style reflects the plain, prosaic language reminiscent of the 'plain style' in New England sermons which had influenced Franklin. Unlike Lavoisier (*supra* pp. 76), Cabanis tends to minimize the

differences between moralist and artisan. 'L'art de vivre et de la vertu [sont] appris de la même manière que celui de jouer d'un instrument et de faire des armes' (5: 233). And in his paper on Franklin, Cabanis remarks apropos of the man who in many ways was his mentor:

L'art de se vêtir, celui d'améliorer les aliments, celui de se loger, de distribuer les appartements d'une maison, de disposer les poêles et les cheminées d'une manière plus économique; l'art plus important de conserver la santé du corps, en un mot, tout ce qui tend à perfectionner la vie l'occupait tour à tour; et les moyens de rendre un meuble plus commode, ou un plot meilleur, ne lui paraissaient pas des recherches d'un philosophe (5: 244).

In fact, the various links between Cabanis and Franklin are quite significant for an understanding of the Société and of its prime mover, Mme Helvétius. Cabanis and Franklin had both been brought to Auteuil by Turgot. In the following passage Franklin, who affectionately called Mme Helvétius 'Notre Dame d'Auteuil', spoke for all those who visited this warm-hearted lady on her small estate near the Bois de Boulogne with its collections of animals and aviaries:

We were all so happy, were we not, when sitting together around a good table; when we discussed ethics, politics, philosophy; when Notre Dame d'Auteuil led you on to flirt, and the abbé Morellet, while fighting for the cream, set his arguments in magnificent sequence, so as to convince us of what we did not believe. In those days, we would gladly have renounced that other Paradise to keep the one we had, and live, just as we were, for all eternity (quoted in Lopez 1966: 255-6).

Regular visitors to the salon, in addition to those mentioned earlier, included Dupont de Nemours, La Rochefoucauld, Vicq d'Azyr and, at an earlier period, Diderot, d'Alembert, Voltaire, baron d'Holbach, Turgot, and Condorcet. From England and Italy came David Hume and Abbé Galiani. Quite significantly, the Idéologues had a profound influence on the Italian Risorgimento (see for example Lopez (1966), Moravia (1970)) as well as upon German nationalist thinkers. Schlegel came to the salon, and Claude Helvétius himself was in fact of German descent; behind him lay a long line of eminent physicians originally named Schweitzer, who were forced to migrate from Germany to Holland and thence to France. Moreover, many members of the Société were conversant in German and unquestionably knew the writings of Goethe, Kant and the literature of the period thoroughly (13).

(13) The links between Germany and the salon of Mme Helvétius have not been studied, to my knowledge. It would be extremely instructive to know more about what the Observateurs borrowed from Germany. 'C'est à Tübingen, et, ce

In one famous passage Cabanis gets rather carried away and writes that thought itself is organic; it is secreted by the brain as bile is secreted by the liver (see Gusdorf 1978: 338). Cabanis can attribute a 'function' to the brain: that of the attribution of signs to sense perceptions. The brain produces thought as the liver produces bile. From perceptions and the use of signs derives the faculty of judgement. Curiosity about the specific functions attributable to the brain was to find expression in the early part of the nineteenth century in the writings of Gall and the phrenologists, who set out to map the mind, plotting spatially its various 'functions' (see Lanteri-Laura 1970).

Thus Cabanis explicitly attempts to relate physical and moral realms of experience and knowledge. It is also significant that a medical doctor would be interested in physical and moral 'history' and that he should aim to bring the two closer together.

When Cabanis died in 1808, many realized that a period had ended, that the legacy of Mme Helvétius and the Idéologues had been deprived of the salon in which it had been kept alive so long. Alessandro Manzoni spoke for many when he wrote of Cabanis' death:

Je conçois que la perte de Cabanis, qui aurait été dans tous les temps une juste cause d'affliction pour ses amis, nous ait été doublement sensible dans un moment où les hommes de cette espèce semblent disparaître de la terre (quoted in Moravia 1970: 604).

3.3 Count Volney

The second figure is Count Volney, one of the most influential thinkers of the Société. Parts of his famous *Ruines ou méditations*

semble, d'après les indications de celle qui devait être sa femme, que de Gérando étudia la langue et la littérature allemandes. Elle le félicite, en février 1798, de ses progrès; elle place la littérature allemande au-dessus de la littérature française, et cite, à côté de Kant, Klopstock, Gesner, Haller, Schiller, Goethe, Herder, Voss, Schlosser, Richter. C'est donc l'Alsace qui, pendant toute cette période, a servi de transition entre la France et l'Allemagne' (Picavet 1891: 506). (See also Picavet, *La philosophie de Kant en France de 1773 à 1814*.) Also pertinent is the importance of Mme Helvétius, origins as a member of one of the four major families of Lorraine (Lopez, p. 244) and her position in facilitating contact between France and

Germany.

It is also noteworthy that one of the best-known works of de Gérando, *De la génération des connoissances humaines* (1802) won the prize of the Royal Academy at Berlin for the best treatment of the following subject:

'Démontrer d'une manière incontestable l'origine de toutes nos connoissances, soit en présentant des argumens non-employés encore, soit en présentant des argumens déjà employés, mais en les présentant d'une manière nouvelle et d'une force victorieuse de toute objection'. In part II chapter 3 of this work, de Gérando divides our ideas into two categories: acquired and archetypical.

sur les révolutions des empires (1791) were translated into English by Jefferson and the work was immensely popular in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Influenced by Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, and the works of Gibbon, Volney evinces a utilitarian spirit. As in the later formulations of Bentham and Mill, emphasis is placed on man's quest for pleasure and his avoidance of pain. Parenthetically, it may be remarked that one of the persons who enabled Jeremy Bentham to find his 'happiness principle', as he called it, was Helvétius!

Par la loi de la sensibilité, l'homme tend aussi invinciblement à se rendre heureux que le feu à monter, que la pierre à graviter, que l'eau à se niveler. Son obstacle est son ignorance, qui l'égare dans les moyens, qui le trompe sur les effets et les causes. A force d'expérience, il s'éclairera; à force d'erreurs, il se redressera; il deviendra sage et bon parce qu'il est de son intérêt de l'être [...] et tous les hommes connaîtront quels sont les principes du bonheur individuel et de la félicité publique (*Les Ruines...* 1791 (ed. 1822) p. 83) [italics mine].

The utilitarian ring to this passage (14) requires no comment. It is, however, interesting to note the use of analogies with laws of physics (i.e. gravity). Thus Volney's formulation, echoed by other Idéologues, 'la morale est une science physique' is perhaps more than a simile; it appears to have carried a high charge both intellectually and emotionally.

Volney's ambition to make science useful and popular finds expression in the passage in his *Ruines* which was to provide a spring-board for Louis-François Jauffret's *Mémoire sur l'établissement d'un musée anthropologique* (15). Read before the Société des observateurs de l'homme and published in 1803, the passage runs as follows:

Une salle de costumes dans l'une des galeries du Louvre serait un établissement du plus grand intérêt sous tous les rapports : il fournirait l'aliment le plus piquant à la curiosité du grand nombre, des modèles précieux aux artistes, et surtout des sujets de méditation utiles au médecin, au philosophe, au législateur. Que l'on se représente une collection de visages et de corps de tous pays et de toute nation [...] quel champ d'études et de recherches sur l'influence du climat, des mœurs, des aliments. Ce serait là véritablement la *Science de l'Homme* (quoted in Gaulmier 1951: 219) [my italics].

(14) In a recent paper, Camic (1979) reinterprets utilitarians and utilitarianism. 'An understanding of the social theory of the utilitarians entails an understanding of their social role. They saw themselves and were seen as moral (as opposed to natural) philosophers' (p. 524). And he adds; 'Thus the role of moral philosophy was transformed into that of general social critic as well as that of general social scientist' (p. 524).

It is also interesting to note that Camic

begins this paper with a plea for a *sociological* history of sociology. Consequently, his choice of the importance of utilitarians and their conceptions of their role as reformers is no accident. As I have pointed out in this paper, utilitarian theory is of fundamental importance for an *anthropological* history of anthropology.

(15) The best general studies of the development of ethnographic collections and of the Musée de l'Homme are those of Hamy (1900, 1906).

Volney here presents the overriding ambition of the Société des observateurs de l'homme : the founding and pursuit of a science of man, as useful for the progress of society as it is for the progress of science.

Volney's wide-ranging curiosity extended from attempts to apply questionnaires to attempts to retrieve narratives of voyages from the land of 'just-so' stories. His *Questionnaire envoyé aux gouverneurs des différents États aux USA par la légation de France* was a major source of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a document of fundamental importance for the development of anthropological thought in the United States. Jefferson was to recommend the technique of questionnaires in his instructions to Lewis and Clarke, as was de Gérando (yet another member of the Société des observateurs de l'homme) in his tract on how to observe natives (see Jamin and Copans, pp. 127ff.).

Professionally, Volney occupied the chair in history at the École normale. As an historian he was concerned with weighing evidence in a framework of geographical determinism reminiscent of Montesquieu. In his *Voyage en Égypte et Syrie*, he begins his analysis of each state by linking physical environment to political and moral conditions. Relationships which Volney establishes, both explicitly and implicitly, between 'état physique' (physical geography) and 'état politique' bear more than superficial resemblance to those to be found in the writings of Cabanis between physical and moral character.

Volney shared with Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy and others a highly significant tendency to confound ontogeny and phylogeny. 'Le gouvernement n'est que l'éducation des hommes faits, et l'éducation est le gouvernement des enfants', wrote de Tracy (quoted in Gusdorf 1978: 404). Moral and pedagogical instruction, as well as the art of statesmanship, must all look to the science of man for their cues.

Tracy goes even farther when he says that understanding the intellectual faculties of animals is indispensable. From which he concludes that Idéologie, the science of signs, the orchestrating science, includes zoology, a conclusion with which Lamarck, also a member, and author of *La Philosophie zoologique* (1809), would probably have agreed.

3.4 Moreau de la Sarthe : moral and physical anthropology

Yet another member of the Société, Moreau de La Sarthe, distinguished between *moral* and *physical* anthropology. The term, and

to some extent, the concept 'anthropology' are used in eighteenth-century writings. Two major figures to employ it are Immanuel Kant (*Anthropologie...* 1798) and Alexandre Chavannes, the very title of whose major work *Anthropologie, ou Science de l'Homme, pour servir d'Introduction à l'étude de la Philosophie et des Langues, et de guide dans le plan d'éducation universelle ci-devant proposé par Alexandre Chavannes (1788)* provides an indication of some of the ways in which the term was construed.

In a text published in 1801, Moreau de la Sarthe ascribes the following areas of research to each of the following two areas of anthropology:

Physical anthropology: 1) natural history of man and anatomy; 2) physiology or the science of human organisms and organization ('science de l'organisation humaine'); 3) 'hygiène' or physiology applied to 'l'administration de la vie, à l'art de conserver la santé'; 4) medicine properly speaking, or applied physiology (la physiologie appliquée au soulagement de l'homme malade).

Moral anthropology: 1) experimental anthropology (biology, history and voyages); 2) 'idéologie' or the analysis of intellectual faculties (in this context ideology bears clear resemblance to the cognitive psychology we know today); 3) 'la morale spéculative ou l'analyse des sentiments'; 4) 'la morale appliquée, ou l'économie publique, la législation, etc.' (quoted in Gusdorf 1978: 391).

Although this definition by Moreau de la Sarthe warrants extensive comment, in this context it is possible to make only three remarks. 'Applied' science is science put to use for the benefit of society, science applied to the good of mankind. 'La morale spéculative' (speculative morality) is speculative because it deals primarily with feelings, whereas 'la morale appliquée' (applied morality), with which 'la morale spéculative' is compared, deals with social engineering and with superorganic phenomena. Thus, in this case 'applied' designates knowledge made to work for mankind, science at the service of society. Particularly with respect to recent twentieth-century developments in the sociology and anthropology of medicine and the consequent growth of emphasis on preventative medicine, it is interesting to note the distinction under *physical anthropology* between applied physiology (caring for the sick) and applied 'hygiène' (caring for health). Thirdly, it is noteworthy that in the rubric 'experimental anthropology' (opposed to what is 'applied') we find biology, history and voyages. If there is a residual category, it is the 'experimental' rather than the 'applied'.

3.5 Jauffret

In the same year that Moreau de la Sarthe published his definition of anthropology, the secretary of the Société des observateurs, Louis François Jauffret, delivered a paper published in 1801 as *Introduction aux Mémoires de la Société des observateurs de l'homme* in which, after stating clearly that the goal of the Société was to be *useful*, he struck a familiar note by saying its members would observe man in his physical, intellectual and moral relationships. And he went on to call for a study of human differences, in space and in time ('jusque dans les ruines qui attestent son néant') (quoted in Copans and Jamin, p. 77).

Like de Gérando and most other members of the Société, Jauffret was interested in language, distinguished between language and thought, and stressed the social nature of human symbols. Language, Jauffret believed, is that which sets apart man from animals, and includes necessarily the propensity for symbolization, for the invention and comprehension of sign systems. For if the deaf and dumb learn to communicate by gesture they are no less human because they cannot speak. Following in the footsteps of de Brosse (1709-1777), whose *Traité de la formation des langues et des principes physiques de l'étymologie* (1765), as well as the works of Condillac, reinforced the tendency to wish to reform language, and drawing also on the extremely rich tradition of linguistic philosophy in eighteenth-century France, Jauffret upheld the existence of linguistic laws. But such laws, he realized, take root in the social systems which govern their context.

He speaks of a code in terms of which physical and social differences can be compared and thus understood; and emphasizes, for example, the relation between social and individual differences in facial expression, or physiognomy, an 'alphabet' which, like Egyptian hieroglyphics, awaited its Champollion. This semiotics of differences which (a) expresses the human and necessary links between physical and moral realms of human experience and (b) can be understood as a theory of theories, a code of codes—is of essential importance in the works of Jauffret and of other members of the Société des observateurs de l'homme (16).

(16) There are considerable difficulties facing those who would revive interest in the Société des observateurs de l'homme. For it has been revived at least once before the more current revival, due in large part

to a fine paper of George Stocking (1964). To explain why an 'important' society has been forgotten once is one thing; but to explain why it has been forgotten twice is clearly more difficult.

3.6 *Membership of the Société*

There is one aspect of the Société which remains to be discussed: its membership. Its guiding figures, Louis-François Jauffret (1770-1850), author of *Les charmes de l'enfance et les plaisirs de l'amour maternel* (1791), and Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1772-1842), perhaps best known for his *Considérations sur les Diverses Méthodes à suivre dans l'observation des peuples sauvages*, are relatively little known when compared to other members of the Société: Bougainville, Sylvestre de Sacy, Lacroix, Jussieu, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Lamarck, Lacépède, the Cuvier brothers, Philippe Pinel and the count Volney, to name but a few.

The professional diversity of membership was a reflexion and an expression of the self-image of the society. It sought to found a global science of man in which man is what he knows; he may understand himself by considering how he uses his knowledge. In fact, knowledge conceived in this humanistic fashion is the basis of science and the essence of what is human; it is this consciousness of knowledge which makes it useful and which glorifies man and places him clearly outside the animal kingdom (17).

3.7 *The accomplishments of the Société*

Briefly then, the accomplishments of the Société des observateurs de l'homme (which in most cases were extensions of previous attempts in similar directions) may be summarized as follows.

1) To have forged the concept of a Science of Man, an all-encompassing science capable of orchestrating all timbres of scientific utterance, a theory of theories, a holistic, humanist anthropology.

2) To have stressed systematically the value of sober, careful and thorough observation and comparison in the study of man and to have eschewed theories of origins and causes. In short, to have placed themselves squarely in the tradition of Buffon (and Diderot): that of the 'Natural History of Man' which schematically may be opposed to Rousseau's 'History of Natural Man'.

3) To have re-situated the 'sauvage' and to have made him a sociable, social being in large part through a theory of language and signs.

(17) This theme is present in the works of Buffon and was widespread in German thought at the time. The notion that man makes himself, his language and his culture,

and that to be human requires constant struggling was thus common to both German and French thinkers of the period (e.g. Goethe).

4) To have outfitted two ships, aptly named *Le Naturaliste* and *Le Géographe*. Under the watchful eye of Captain Baudin, these two vessels set out for austral waters. It is one of the ironies of history that the destination of the voyage was the Torres Strait, the very place where later the history of 'professional' anthropology (at least in Britain) was to begin. Unfortunately, Baudin never reached the Torres Strait. Forced to turn back on account of ill health, storms and dissent among crew members, Baudin died en route on September 16, 1803.

But—one might ask—with so many distinguished men, such mighty ambitions and such earnestness, such religious fervor, why did the Société only last six years? The most readily accessible answer is: because of Napoléon and the Empire. As Idéologues, members of the Société were under fire for their libertine convictions; the Académie nationale des sciences closed its doors. Unobtrusively, the Société des observateurs de l'homme faded away, most of its members migrating to the Société de philanthropie. As for the sizable ethnographic collections of the Australian Expedition, Baudin's ethnographer, Péron, did not know what to do with the 'pagaies et ses casse-têtes sculptés, de ses tapas, de ses hameçons de nacre et de ses boomerangs, de son canot tasmanien en écorce et de ses boucliers australiens' (quoted in Copans and Jamin, p. 27). Housed until 1814 at Malmaison, this, the first major South Pacific collection in France, was sold without catalogue in 1829 (see Hamy 1906).

In sum, the particular conflux of political and social circumstances which had allowed the Société des observateurs de l'homme to be created did not last long. Under Napoléon, science was defined more and more narrowly, the scientific institutions of the Revolution and the Directory were seen as subversive and the reformist beliefs of scientists—as well as the link they had forged between teaching and science—came under fire. In such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that those proposing a science of man to whom politics was but one part of a grand scheme would be frowned upon. Thus, the world's first 'anthropological' society—which had formulated anthropological problems, emphasized the need for fieldwork, empirical and linguistic studies and sought valiantly to further the interests of mankind—crumbled. No anthropology which proclaimed itself a reformer's science could have survived Napoléon*.

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