

## ESSAY 22 – THE UNENLIGHTENMENT

The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee

“... You see, I am alive.

You see, I stand in good relation to the earth.

You see, I stand in good relation to the gods.

You see, I stand in good relation to all that is beautiful.

You see, I stand in good relation to you.

You see, I am alive, I am alive.”

- Kiowa Native American Poem

“Savages pride themselves in being hospitable to strangers.”

- Daniel Williams Harmon, *Early Pioneer*<sup>1</sup>

### Overview

- The Enlightenment was misanthropic about our natural condition.
- Early cultures provide baseline data regarding our natural condition.
- Scholastic dogma concludes that natural humans were “solitary.”
- False objectivity concludes that early cultures were “poor.”
- False deduction concludes that early cultures were “nasty.”
- Circular reasoning concludes that early cultures were “brutish.”
- Invalid and unreliable data concludes that the life of natural humans was “short.”
- Early cultures had greater longevity than civilized empires.
- UnEnlightenment economics substitutes colonialism for domestic production.
- UnEnlightenment politics substitutes contracts for generosity and respect.
- UnEnlightenment culture substitutes idolized beliefs for people and places.
- Misguided adolescence reflects the misguided UnEnlightenment.
- Our current culture forsakes the enlightenment of traditional rites of passages.

---

1 As quoted by Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* (1972, p. 217).

## *A Penny Well Spent*

Because I had an aptitude for math during the time of Sputnik I was pushed towards science. But science as an academic pursuit, and later a vocation, never shaped my cultural or religious beliefs. I was agnostic early on thanks to an eleventh grade English vocabulary word that initiated the most unenlightened period of my life. The word was “misanthrope,” defined on the vocabulary handout as “a cynical belief that all human behavior is self-motivated.” The more I reflected on this definition the more I agreed with its apparent truth. I convinced myself that even when we do good deeds, we do so for our own selfish motives of self-esteem. A bit of darkness invaded my soul that, given my aptitude for math, could have paved the way for me to become a *laissez faire* economist. That lasted until the incident with the penny.

After high school I took a year off away from school with the intent of growing up (some goals are never achieved). I lived with my oldest brother, one of the charter professors for Evergreen State College, and worked at a McDonald’s for \$1.60 an hour. One day I went to the Tacoma Mall to go Christmas shopping for my brother’s family. During a break from shopping I waited in line at an ice cream parlor behind a disheveled, elderly woman buying a 15 cent ice cream cone. When the woman put her money down the clerk stated, a bit coolly, that there was a penny tax. The woman hesitated and during that moment I reflexively reached into my pocket and slapped a penny down on the counter.

You may think this silly, but slapping that penny down was a key moment in my life. To my mind there was no real reason why I did that, which was precisely the point. A cultural ethnographer might hypothesize that some type of general reciprocity was at work, but I think not. I certainly did not expect that woman to repay me some time in the future, nor could my reflex be explained by a subconscious expectation that anyone else might pay a penny sales tax for me some day. A penny is simply too trivial an amount to justify any self-motivation as an explanation. I gave out of some instinct that only much later in life I could define as a sense of belonging to others.

After purchasing my own ice cream cone I practically was skipping along the corridors of the mall. I went up the down escalator and down the up escalator. Observers might have described me as giddy, perhaps even daft. But I had a brief insight into the real nature of things, and a burden of cynicism was lifted from my shoulders. I had become enlightened.

To become enlightened is, literally, to emerge from existing darkness. The period of western civilization named the Enlightenment implies that we emerged from previous eras of darkness. In contrast, to become unenlightened is plunging into darkness by turning off the existing light. The Enlightenment, despite its reputation as leading us out of darkness, had some misanthropic elements that plunged us further down a dark tunnel. These elements resulted from misconceptions

about early cultures and natural humans, which led to misdirection for the future. Our endeavor now is to shed some light where there has been darkness, a darkness augmented by the Enlightenment.

### *Early Cultures as Baseline Data*

From the viewpoint of economic production, the agricultural age of civilization ushered in production surpluses; the industrial age ushered in production efficiencies; and the current information age now ushers in energy efficiencies for the production of both goods and labor. When our colleague Hans, a modern day man, considers the scope of these three ages together he concludes how wonderfully advanced we have become. He readily accepts the conclusion drawn by the Enlightenment thinker, Thomas Hobbes, that in our natural condition: “the life of man was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>2</sup>

An argument could be made that Hobbes was the consummate misanthrope, but he was not alone among his Enlightenment peers in his dim assessment of “primitive” man. John Stuart Mill was known for his enlightened attitude towards women but he had a paternalistic attitude towards other races, exempting them from his rule that government should not interfere with the liberty to do harm to ourselves. Even the Enlightenment champion of early cultures, Rousseau, thought of them as “noble savages” whose main attribute was avoiding urbanization.

This Enlightenment dogma has been echoed by the most esteemed scholars of the present age. I was channel surfing the other day when a quote from Stephen Hawking flashed on the screen. In his opinion our only chance for planetary survival is to enable our reason to overcome our instinct. Hawking ironically bases his high esteem for reason on reason alone. He personally has not had the natural experiences to back up his reasoning about our natural instincts. He has not dabbled in cultural anthropology to observe what other early cultures experienced. He apparently has not even paid much attention to the science of ecology, which would characterize our natural instinct as that of an altruistic species.

Hawking merely echoes the dogma of scholars before him, in the fashion of *laissez faire* economists and Supreme Court justices. None of these scholars based their “reasoning” on their own natural experiences or even the trained observations of cultural anthropologists. Like Thomas Hobbes they ruminated from their armchairs. At best they observed the experiences of individuals suffering at the bottom of their respective cultural systems and concluded that must be natural.

Given this shortcoming of great scholars, we cannot blame our friend Hans for being misinformed. During the bicentennial celebration of Lewis and Clark, he no doubt heard much about the trading and lending of Native American wives like Sacagawea. Small chance, though, Hans knows that Iroquois women

---

2 From *Leviathan* (1651).

had more freedom and responsibility than any European counterpart of that era. This, in fact, was true for many Native American tribes, though taken all together their cultures are quite diverse.<sup>3</sup> There is virtually no chance that the modern Hans knows of the near equal status of women in band level foragers such as the Ju/'hoansi, influenced in his thinking instead by movies about early humans like *The Quest for Fire* and cartoons of cave men dragging women by their hair.

Early cultures provide empirical baseline data for comparing economic production, gender roles and other economic, political and cultural attributes. With this baseline understanding we can identify and qualify the changes cultural evolution has imposed, for both good and bad, on our natural condition. Unfortunately, we waste this baseline data when we make a tautological assumption that civilizations advance as a natural function of time. Many have concluded along with Hans that early cultures represents a “darkened” state of humanity, while “enlightened” beliefs and technologies have enabled civilizations to shine increasingly bright ever since. Misconceiving the baseline data corrupts not only our understanding of early cultures, but distorts our view of the progress of later cultures as well.

Let us examine the claim by Hobbes that the life of natural man was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” with a bit more scientific empiricism than exhibited by scholars from Hobbes to Hawking.

### *“Solitary” Early Cultures*

If modern culture permits one favorable opinion Hans may have about natural humans, it is likely the privacy we must have enjoyed once as “solitary” creatures. In reality, the least private cultures in human existence were probably the earliest bands of foragers. Speaking from personal experience, you cannot keep secrets from a band of people you are living closely with in a natural setting. Once two or more people are gathered together in close proximity only cultural contraptions such as walls and computers provide privacy. Aside from the impracticality, band members of early cultures did not wish to be private; this created the need for strong social mores.

Many foragers create a social contract with each other through a series of gift-giving, referred to by cultural anthropologists as general reciprocity. The material value of these gifts means little; the real purpose of the gift-giving is to cement social bonds. The “general reciprocity” involves giving a gift one year and not receiving anything back until much later. The uncertainty of the timing and value of the gifts are to reinforce the purpose of social bonding rather than economic exchange.

Humility is the key for a sense of belonging among others. Foragers understand the need to keep each other humble. If one of the Ju/'hoansi happens

---

3 The publication *The World of the American Indian* (1989), produced by the National Geographic Society, documents a wide variety of Native American tribes.

to be a great hunter, all the band members will insult the game he brings back. The elderly follow a custom of complaining about how the young do not care for them; even though, by the standards of any “advanced” culture, the foragers pay great respect to their elderly. The men do not lord over women because, frankly, the women have the more important “job” of foraging the higher caloric foods.

Early cultures like those of the Native Americans were keen on relationships—of all kinds, as the Kiowa poem at the start of this essay expressed succinctly. Of course, American pioneers may have viewed the Native American reverence for good relations a little differently, like the one who observed that “savages pride themselves in being hospitable to strangers.” Had Native American cultures been allowed to coexist with ours with their emphasis on seeking relationships we might have gained some insight into harmonizing diverse systems of beliefs and behaviors, the mark of an advanced civilization.

No one possibly could induce that natural man is solitary based on empirical evidence. Perhaps we could forgive Hobbes for not having access to such evidence, yet we still must conclude that in an age that championed empiricism Hobbes basically just spouted off dogma backed by no experience at all. Joined by other Enlightenment philosophers in this outlook on natural man, together they exhibited an authoritarian scholasticism that betrayed the main alleged characteristic of the Enlightenment. Modern day scholars, and even some esteemed scientists, adopt these uninformed and idolized beliefs as enlightened.

### *“Poor” Early Cultures*

OK, so early cultures had accorded greater status to women than occurred during the Enlightenment and were not solitary. Hans still would infer from Hobbes that they were “poor.” Good Lord, they walked around in loin cloths! However, early cultures perceive material possessions differently from westerners, as the following quotes compiled by Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics* (1972) reveals.

#### *About the Native South American:*

“Expensive things that are given them are treasured for a few hours, out of curiosity; after that they thoughtlessly let everything deteriorate in the mud and wet. The less they own, the more comfortable they can travel, and what is ruined they occasionally replace. Hence, they are completely indifferent to any material possession.”<sup>4</sup>

---

4 From Martin Gusinde’s *The Yamana* (1961, p. 87), cited by Sahlins.

*About the Native Kalahari African:*

“They themselves had practically no possessions: a loin strap, a skin blanket and a leather satchel. There was nothing that they could not assemble in one minute, wrap up in their blankets and carry on their shoulders for a journey of a thousand miles.”<sup>5</sup>

We can see from these quotes, particularly the one about the Native South American, that perception is everything. Being “completely indifferent to any material possession” is irresponsible and perhaps lazy to the “civilized” westerner; however, there is no indication that the Yamanas themselves are particularly bothered by this scarcity. The lightweight gear and long travels of the !Kung may seem the very essence of poverty and burden to the middle class Hans, but would not trouble such contented folks as Jesus, Gandhi or a good many long-distance backpackers of my personal acquaintance.

This highlights what has been an epistemological thorn to empiricism. Some empiricists of all eras confuse the meaning of empirical with objective. An objective criterion is independent of subjective cultural standards; the meaning is embedded in the object. Numbers and statistics are objective measures, yet they are employed to describe subjective phenomena. The meaning of “poor” cannot escape from the subjective context of different cultures. The best we can hope for in determining “poor” is an empirical standard, with meaning embedded in cultural experiences. To observe what is “poor” about natural man or early cultures, both the Enlightenment Hobbes and the modern day Hans would need to know the context of cultural experiences. Otherwise they are, once again, just spouting idolized beliefs.

*“Nasty” Early Cultures*

The evolutionary axiom “survival of the fittest” provides a nasty image of all organisms, humans included. This axiom has acquired a status of infallibility, particularly with *laissez faire* scholars from Herbert Spencer to Milton Friedman. To survive we must compete better, to compete better we must work harder. Any slackers in the natural world of survival would have been weeded out and discarded. The nasty burden of a primitive quest for survival is reinforced by a corporate culture that wants to convince us how much leisure we have in a modern *laissez faire* economy. Hans believes this without reservation, since he knows early humans did not have access to television, automobiles or other leisure-enhancing technologies.

The alleged gain in leisure from our cultural evolution has proven to

---

5 From Laurens van der Post’s *The Lost World of the Kalahari*, (1958, p. 276), cited by Sahlins.

be more fallacy than fact. Conserving energy drives the behavior of all natural organisms. Lions lie around for a good portion of the day in wise management of their energy budgets, while bears hibernate for a good portion of the year. For Hans to believe that “survival of the fittest” created a burdensome struggle to exist for early cultures, he must also believe that natural humans refute other laws of nature. He must believe that we are dumber and grossly more incompetent than lions. Humans include more caloric rich foods in their diet than lions and other carnivores, yet Hans uncritically accepts the implication that humans have not the wit to use this to their advantage for conserving energy. Thankfully, the baseline data from early cultures provide no support for such a self-debasing assumption of natural human ineptitude and inferiority to other species.

All studies of the production (foraging) time spent by early cultures put them around the 20 hour a week category, part-timers at best.<sup>6</sup> A study of the Ju/'hoansi in Botswana revealed that the men worked 21.7 hours a week at the foraging culture's version of a job, and the women worked 12.6 hours.<sup>7</sup> What makes this striking is that the women, as the main gatherers of mongongo nuts, are the more prolific producers of calories. This means that the foragers of the Ju/'hoansi could have even more idle time if they did not choose to supplement their diets with game. As with modern civilizations, the hunt just might be more of a leisurely diversion than real work to the Ju/'hoansi and, just as with modern corporate executive culture, the males protest how hard they are working while out having a good time with the boys.

The production surpluses of the agricultural age were not due to increased work efficiency, getting more food from the same amount of work. Comparisons of the work hours versus the calories produced reveal early cultivators to be no more efficient than foragers. The production surpluses of agriculture were a function of land efficiency, extracting more food from a smaller area, thus enabling humans to settle down and congregate. Early farmers actually worked longer hours than foragers, though they worked less than the modern day farmer.<sup>8</sup> A nasty existence of sixty hour work weeks or more for a family unit occurs only in “civilized” cultures.

The trouble with all “infallible” axioms is that none are based on infinite experience. Without the benefit of infinite experience to draw from all axioms are vulnerable to being proved fallible at some point. Sometimes an “infallible” axiom is refuted just by the limited experiences provided by getting away from one's armchair. But that would prove to be too much of a struggle for some scholars spouting their idolized beliefs.

---

6 In the chapter “The Original Affluent Society,” in *Stone Age Economics* (1972), Marshall Sahlins provides an overview of these studies.

7 From *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi* (2001), by Richard B. Lee.

8 Based on comparing data for cultivators in Sahlins with Lee's Ju/'hoansi.

## *“Brutish” Early Cultures*

No one wants to sign on the dotted line for a “brutish” life, whether short or long. Hans believes that survival of the fittest not only implies working harder, but under the natural conditions of “man’s inhumanity towards man.” This reveals a tautology about the way we think about early cultures. What is brutish? The natural, primitive condition. What are we to conclude about early cultures, not far removed from the primitive condition? They are brutish.

Defining what is brutish is arbitrary at the individual level of experience. Climbing a mountain may be brutal to one, exhilaration to another. In contrast, living a life of luxury may be heavenly for some, while others are mindful of the saying: “that which you would possess, possesses you.” To judge when conditions are “brutish” we need a criterion that applies to the entire culture without being tautological. We can borrow from ecologists for this task.

From the early discussion in Essay 2 regarding k-species and r-species please recall that these two fundamental types of population growth relate to the carrying capacity of the environment. K-species moderate their growth and use of resources to stay within this maximum level of sustainability. R-species multiply and use up resources quickly, like the bacteria in a Petri dish. This shoots them beyond the carrying capacity of their environment and they crash. Populations crash from some combination of famine, disease and/or aggression. An empirical description of “brutish” would be population crashes that occur in any of these ways.

Early human foragers fit the k-species stereotype; they managed their own population growth and resource use at sustainable levels, thus avoiding “brutish” conditions. The demands of early agriculture and industry encouraged greater population growth rates because: 1) more family members and labor hours were needed for economic production in these “advanced” civilizations and 2) early farmers and industrial workers died younger than early foragers. With greater birth rates and concentrations of populations came a shift towards r-species resource use and behaviors, and a shift towards “brutish” conditions for those being exploited by such behaviors.

Early cultures avoided “brutish” conditions in another typical manner of k-species, they dispersed into different areas. From a limited area of origin early humans dispersed over the entire globe, except for Antarctica. In each new location they adopted a different culture in accordance with their environment. The Jo/hansi of the desert, Yamana of the tropics and Inuit of the tundra adopted different foraging cultures to go after different food sources. Though aggression occurred between neighboring cultures and even within tribes, they avoided the “brutish” population crashes from aggression, typical of both r-species and nation states involved in world war.

Tautologies, like objectivity, have been another thorn to empiricism. In

our eagerness to attach something observable to abstract concepts, we occasionally define abstract concepts biased by what we expect to observe. Tautologies, such as the one affecting Hobbes and Hans (and Hawking), derive from the conventional wisdom of authoritarian dogma, rather than the collective wisdom born out of experience. Rather than a product of empiricism, tautologies are yet another vehicle for spouting idolized beliefs.

### *“Short” Early Cultures*

Perhaps the most pervasive bit of conventional wisdom about natural man and early cultures is that their lives were short. Keys to longevity must be unlearned in order to uncritically accept this conventional wisdom. There was no excuse for Hobbes in this matter. Health care in sixteenth century Europe was not much different from prehistoric levels. Indeed, the life span of humans had decreased during the time of Hobbes from earlier eras.<sup>9</sup> A great thinker like Hobbes should have at least suspected the impact of culturally induced stresses on health.

We can allow the modern day Hans considerable more latitude for his belief in the conventional wisdom spouted by Hobbes. Compared to our age of significantly reduced infant mortality and excellent health care, early cultures do have short lives. Hans even knows of empirical evidence that backs up this conventional wisdom. Like Temperance Brennan, we have come to trust in the evidence of bones.<sup>10</sup>

Much of the empirical evidence echoed about the short lives of early cultures stem from determining the age of Paleolithic bones. Paleolithic bones have been discovered for cultures engaged in early agriculture as well as foraging. The average age of bones for one early cultivator, the Dickson Mounds Indians, was determined to be 19 years.<sup>11</sup> Apparently the early farmer had but 19 years to grow up, have kids and raise them to be future farmers. Anthropologists confirm that the children of early farmers work earlier in life than the children of foragers, but a 19 year lifespan to perpetuate the cycle assaults basic common sense. You do not need Temperance Brennan to detect a serious problem with this interpretation from Paleolithic bones.

The technology for dating artifacts is marvelously reliable. We can date bones to the Paleolithic era with certainty. However, the technology is much less certain for aging prehistoric bones. A scholarly compilation of articles on longevity, authorized by the National Research Council, provided this criticism:

---

9 A few examples of how the Middle Ages were better off than the ensuing Renaissance and early Enlightenment are provided in the course on CD by the Teaching Company, *The Foundations of Western Civilization* (2002), taught by Professor Thomas F. X. Noble.

10 Temperance Brennan is the main character in *Bones*, a TV series about a forensic anthropologist

11 Reported in “The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race,” a PowerPoint document by Jared Diamond available for download from the Internet.

“These estimates have well-known weaknesses that arise from differences by age in the probability that a dead person will be represented by bones in the collection, difficulty in ascribing an age at death to the bones, distortions due to nonstationarity of the age distribution of the population giving rise to the specimens, etc.”<sup>12</sup>

Ethnographic studies of contemporary foraging cultures were given more credence by this scholarly publication, such as Lee’s study of the Ju/’hoansi. When Richard Lee made his first contact with the Ju/’hoansi the matriarch he first met was 70 years old. What are the odds?! These early foragers are supposed to have an average lifespan of 30 years yet Lee meets one right off the bat that is 70. Furthermore, Lee describes her as “spry.”

Perhaps just the mere incidental contact with Europeans in the nineteenth century increased the life spans of these foragers, even though their culture was not impacted until later in the twentieth century. This explanation does not work with the early Amazonian cultures which were undiscovered until the twentieth century. The opportunity to study these cultures immediately followed the contact and, lo and behold, these humans live into their 60s and even 80s. Studies have shown that once they reach adolescence, these aboriginals have a long life expectancy that might mistake them for actually being modern.<sup>13</sup>

The one thing that does make sense about the data from old bones is that early foragers apparently lived longer than cultivators from the same era. This might result in part from a more leisurely lifestyle, but is supported as well by findings that the early cultivators had more limited diets and suffered from diseases not found among hunters and gatherers. This comes as no real surprise. We naturally evolved over hundreds of thousands of years for our bodies to work best on the varied diet, band level relationships and leisurely lifestyle of a forager. The males of the Ju/’hoansi may be having a good time with the hunt, but the varied diet they help provide serves an important function as well.

This seeming contradiction in the usefulness of bones highlights one of the chief concerns for empiricism. How do we know when a method for obtaining observable data is both valid and reliable? The method is valid if the empirical evidence reflects the meaning we seek. The method is reliable if using the method in similar situations provides similar meaning. Difficulty in “ascribing an age at death” hurts the reliability of dating old bones. Problems with the probability that

---

12 From the chapter “The Evolution of the Human Life Course,” by Ronald Lee, in *Between Zeus and the Salmon: The Biodemography of Longevity* (1997), edited by Kenneth W. Wachter and Caleb E. Finch.

13 From a paper available from the Internet, “Longevity among hunter-gatherers: a cross-cultural examination,” (2006), by Michael Gurven and Hillard Kaplan. Much of this research is also in *Between Zeus and the Salmon*.

dead people of all ages are represented in a bones collection make the method invalid for determining average age. Yet the biases that might affect misrepresenting the ages of early foragers in the bones collection should also affect early cultivators. While the method is invalid for determining absolute ages, the method should be valid for determining relative differences in age.

Problems of validity and reliability exist for ethnographic studies as well. Once contact has been made by an advanced civilization the possibility exists for the evidence about early cultures to be distorted. Perhaps some support has been provided that biases the evidence. Yet ethnographic studies have been done shortly after first contact, minimizing the impact of this on the validity and reliability of the evidence. Simple and direct methods, when valid and reliable, are preferable to complicated ones. This harkens back to Essay 4, when the Federal Reserve Board used extremely complicated methods to prove to us all we are having more leisure these days, instead of using something much simpler like trends in day care. Attaching greater significance to the age of old bones rather than the age of live humans would satisfy only those just spouting idolized beliefs.

### *Running out of Time*

The conclusions that the modern day Hans makes about the longevity of early cultures are as problematic as his conclusions about the longevity of early humans. Westerners tend to think of the Roman Empire as the civilization with the greatest longevity, which neoconservatives hope to surpass with the Pax Americana. In reality, the Greek and Roman era combined are but adolescents to the Chinese Empire that predated both and lasted until at least the eighteenth century, with but a brief incursion by the Mongols. Only in the nineteenth century did technology and the balance of trade with other civilizations no longer tip in the Chinese Empire's favor. But even the Chinese are mere toddlers in swaddling clothes compared to the Ju/'hoansi and other aboriginal cultures. Up until European contact in the nineteenth century, the Ju/'hoansi used the same cultural style of bone-tipped arrows for their hunts that they used in 20,000 BC. Now that's longevity!

Early cultures modified their internal behaviors to maintain a balance with their environments. External disturbances could upset this balance. The external disturbance could be natural, such as an exploding volcano, or from a different culture, such as colonialism. An "r-species" culture that rapidly exploits and colonizes environments has an advantage over a "k-species" culture that lives in balance with their environment. The "r-species" culture uses up the resources of their original environment and then seeks to colonize and exploit the environments inhabited by "k-species" cultures. In this manner the "r-species" can shift the "brutish" nature of population crashes to the exploited "k-species," at least for awhile.

Cultural evolution has created both k-species and r-species variants of humans. In regards to external environmental conditions, the k-species variant lasts the longer of the two. Great empires have evolved, dominated their age and expired, while a few remaining foraging cultures continued uninterrupted throughout human history and prehistory. But even these few remaining cultures could disappear as r-species variants of the human population continue to exploit resources outside the boundaries of their own environments.

As might be defined by an ecologist, western civilization became an r-species variant of the human population. Western colonialism was a process of imperial nation states spilling over their uncontrolled use of resources to new environments. Growth patterns in colonies responded with higher birth rates and concentrated populations, a boon for the exploitive agricultural or industrial activity favored by the colonizers. Thus, “brutish” conditions result from both external and internal pressures ultimately caused by the colonization of the “r-species” variant of humans.

Historically, “backward” civilizations choose to emulate their “forward” neighbors. Thus during the post-classical period the Japanese chose to adopt those technology and beliefs from the Chinese Empire that they thought would make them more advanced. Also during this period western civilization chose to emulate the more advanced Ottoman and Chinese Empires in ways that contributed to our own advancement perhaps as much as did our own Enlightenment. Western civilization has closed the door on this path towards advancement. Developed countries now dictate the terms and pace of advancement for underdeveloped countries, with frequent “brutish” results.<sup>14</sup>

Africa has been the continent most colonized by imperial cultures, and consequently experience some of the most “brutish” conditions on the planet. We can broaden the term “colonialism” to include seemingly independent governments that yet are forced by some means to abide by the uncontrolled resource use of other countries. Much of the Latin American countries that were entrapped by the Washington Consensus of big loans for big obligations to multinational corporations fit this description of “colonialism.” Thus the “brutish” conditions found in both Africa and parts of South America are brought about by colonizing variants of the human species that pride themselves as being products of the Enlightenment.

There may be no more early cultures out there that have not had their first contact with “advanced” civilizations. Given the rapid colonization now possible, the time may come sooner rather than later when no early cultures are left as contemporaries. This sad prospect has a few depressing implications. First, we will witness our longest continuous cultures come to an end. This is a bit more ominous than something like Cal Ripken retiring. Second, in coming to an end they likely will shift from what Wasserstein would label an external economy, operating

---

<sup>14</sup> This quick overview of civilizations imitating others was abstracted from a course on CD by the Teaching Company, *A Brief History of the World* (2007), by Professor Peter N. Stearns.

independently of global economics, to a periphery economy that is exploited by the core developed countries of the world. As part of the economic relationship with the core countries, they will be on the low end of the wealth disparity continuum, where having very few material possessions will now indeed be an indicator of “poor.”

Finally, when we lose all early cultures as contemporaries, we will lose a source of valid and reliable data for the baseline of who we naturally are and what real impacts cultural evolution has had on our species. We will have less empirical evidence to combat the idolized belief that the life of natural man is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” Those who have the most to gain from this myth, namely colonizers, will continue their mission aided by greater gullibility. The time is now, then, to set the record straight about some of the authoritarian beliefs that sprang from the Enlightenment; beliefs that evolved western civilization into the greatest colonizing variant of the human species ever to exist.

### *UnEnlightenment Economics*

So far, we have criticized Thomas Hobbes only. Thomas Hobbes was not the only Enlightenment philosopher to scholastically reflect on the natural condition of humans from his comfy armchair, only to remain clueless about natural man. The Enlightenment was a broad movement, covering the full span of economic, political and cultural systems. Yet all the enlightened ideas that came out of these philosophers were built on a similar misconception of early cultures being “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” Great philosophers such as Adam Smith, John Locke and even John Stuart Mill turned off the light of understanding for our early cultures and natural condition, advocating beliefs without empirical evidence, constructing their ideas for civilization from a vantage point of relative darkness. We could just as well call this critical period of western civilization, when even sympathizers such as Jacque Rousseau viewed the noble foragers he championed as savage, The UnEnlightenment.

At the heart of The UnEnlightenment is a failure of the sense of belonging. The great thinkers of that age separated themselves from what they saw as our primitive natural condition. Thus an abolitionist such as David Hume can nevertheless write in his essay “Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations” (1758): “There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation.” The failure to connect with early cultures at this level prevented these unenlightened philosophers from understanding the deeper meanings of how our sense of belonging determines human systems.

The economic system formed by foragers was based on what Sahlin's termed, in *Stone Age Economics*, the Domestic Mode of Production (DMP). The

“domestic mode” is the communal unit formed by early cultures through a sense of belonging, called a band. As Lee describes for the Ju/’hoansi the kinship lines that form these bands can be extensive and flexible. People move from one band to another based on their sense of belonging. If unresolved tensions occur between the kin of a Ju/’hoansi band, one of the parties simply moves on to another band.

The “production” of foragers is for the internal use of the band, and many times just for the nuclear family units within the bands. Only a limited amount of goods might be produced for exchange outside of the unit, such as an exchange of marriage gifts. Within the band everything is shared. Meat mainly gathered by males and vegetables mainly gathered by females are shared, sometimes with elaborate rules to guarantee fairness. Healthy adults produce goods on behalf of their children and elderly. Thus the sense of belonging that develops among foragers not only determines their cultural system but also their economic system of resource distribution, their DMP. Something like the DMP happens to be the *modus operandi* of k-species throughout all of nature.

DMP economics falls significantly short of the carrying capacity of the environment. This holds true even for early agriculture. Slash and burn agriculture gets a bad reputation these days for good reason, because farmers are forced to extract huge surpluses of raw goods for the sake of developed countries. When part of a DMP economic system, studies have shown slash and burn agriculture to remain below the carrying capacity of poor tropical soils.<sup>15</sup> The patches are small enough and the rotation cycles long enough to be permanently sustained, which is why those slash and burn agricultures could be discovered in tact and thriving still in the twentieth century.

Enlightened philosophers such as Adam Smith, the father of economics, claimed that market economies are best driven by the self-interest of greed. A disclaimer should be made that Smith was, by no means, a greedy person. Had modern day *laissez faire* economists truly followed the ideas of Smith, rather than idolize those parts that prove most beneficial to corporations, the middle class would not be on a downward spiral of debt. Still, some blame must be attributed to Smith for contributing to our emulsion into darkness with his “enlightened” vision for economics that discounted either merit or a sense of belonging as a factor in markets.

Herbert Spencer took this economic “enlightenment” a step further with his reflections on the economic “survival of the fittest.” Spencer was the earliest proof that would-be economists do not know what the hell they are doing when they borrow from ecology. As discussed in the first essay on economics, natural competition in an environment of abundant resources leads to increased diversity, not the survival of either fewer superspecies or multinational corporations. Only cultural institutions such as government can provide the means for something like

---

<sup>15</sup> Table 2.1, pages 44-45, of *Stone Age Economics* provides a summary of such studies done by a variety of anthropologists.

a multinational corporation to concentrate capital and thrive to the competitive disadvantage of proprietorships.

Dog-eat-dog survival of the fittest also implies that resources barely meet subsistence levels. For early foragers, and even early agriculture, this simply was not true. The cultures dispersed and diversified, in accordance with an ecologist's understanding of competition, and they used resources at a rate that remained below the carrying capacity of the environment, in accordance with typical k-species behavior. The UnEnlightenment provided the cultural beliefs and behaviors that turned us more towards r-species economics, where the point of competition is not to subsist but to colonize and use as many resources as possible, including the resources of other cultures. Without The UnEnlightenment, modern day *laissez faire* economists and puppet libertarians would be derided and laughed at for seeking to degrade two of the most important components of any system, diversity and sustainability. Modern day cult economists like Milton Friedman stand on the shoulders of unenlightened giants in regards to denying the true normative altruism of our natural being.

### *UnEnlightenment Politics*

The simple sharing of resources within a band involves egalitarian politics. Rules of sharing are followed, but these are so well understood and accepted by the band that no formal system of law or contract is required. Consequently, there is not much basis for comparing our current political systems to the earliest forms of band level culture. The stationary tribes that evolved from foraging bands provide the baseline data for a distribution of resources not based directly on sharing. The DMP is replaced by a more political redistribution of resources involving a tribal chief.<sup>16</sup>

A portion of the resources earned by the merit of the tribe's labors is redistributed upwards to the chief, much like what occurs with corporations and shareholders. The analogy breaks down miserably at that point. Many tribal cultures have this quaint notion that respect is earned through generosity. Through the respect of the tribe comes the authority that the chief can wield. Thus the most authoritative man in a tribe, also controlling the most resources, is often the poorest. The chief redistributes the resources back to the tribe to complete, in essence, a politics founded on humility.

Though we may judge chiefs to be complete fools from the corporate or shareholder perspective, we should not think this totally strange from the point of view of culture or politics. One of the foundational beliefs of Christianity is that "the first shall be last." In the United States we still on occasion use the term

---

16 Tribal politics information was gleaned from *Stone Age Economics* (1972) by Marshall Sahlins and from *Peoples and Cultures of the World* (2004), a Course on CD by the Teaching Company, taught by Professor Edward Fischer.

“public servant” to describe the officials we elect to run our governments, though perhaps we have lost the original meaning of the term. Many might consider the principle of ruling through the authority granted by generosity as the epitome of wisdom. Pork barrel politics, though part of a corrupted system that enriches politicians, nevertheless is based on this principle of retaining authority through generosity. The analogy breaks down because the “pork barrel” is used to empower politicians at the ultimate expense of constituents.

The wisdom of generosity derives from our sense of belonging being the foundation of a political system. Generosity and respect result from the sense of belonging people in a tribe hold for each other. Through this respect comes authority, whether in a tribe or in local communities from western culture. There is even some corollary for the politics of a sense of belonging at the scale of a large civilization. The Chinese Empire was based on the cultural foundation of Confucianism, which insisted on a paternal obligation to the people. The early Chinese dynasties were obliged by a cultural code to look after and care for those they ruled.

In contrast to our sense of belonging, the UnEnlightenment established contracts and laws as the foundation of a political system. The terms of contracts, not the generosity of people, became the ultimate sources of authority and respect. While unavoidable at this point of our cultural evolution, we must be mindful that contracts and laws now facilitate exploitation. Considering the lofty esteem placed in contracts and laws, this assertion requires some justification.

The cause for the “enlightened” view of contract was obvious. Western civilization had gone through a period where the individual was subjugated to the capricious whims of monarchies, papal authorities and feudal lords. Even before the Middle Ages the abundant use of slavery by the Roman Empire, in contrast to the sparser use of slavery by the Chinese Empire, foreshadowed that we were a civilization destined to be culturally challenged with nurturing our sense of belonging. Contracts were a political means of instituting civility between the State and the individual where the attrition of our sense of belonging encouraged exploitation.

We can therefore sympathize with Hobbes a little bit in his view that our natural condition was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” From the Roman Empire onward what else could he conclude about western civilization? Hobbes was an early advocate of the contract as a means of saving us from ourselves. We needed the contract more to prevent the consequences of our base natures than to promote the cultural good.

John Locke was another early pioneer for contracts during The UnEnlightenment, but took a more optimistic view for our natural condition than Hobbes.<sup>17</sup> Hobbes condemned social protest and revolution, since the sovereign

---

17 *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) conveyed Locke’s beliefs on natural rights, property and contracts.

contract was saving us from ourselves, but Locke championed the notion that the individual actually had an obligation to ignore and rebel against contracts, laws or government if principles of “life, liberty and property” were being abused. Locke even acknowledged that Native Americans used something similar to contracts.

The protection of life, liberty and property constitute what Locke viewed to be natural law. There are flaws with all of these, the result of Locke himself never having empirically examined the natural condition. Liberty and property have no meaning save in a cultural context. Locke normatively stipulates that property is based on the merits of labor (we can forgive him for not foreseeing *laissez faire* economics or puppet libertarians actually seeking to compromise merit through the status of property). But by choosing property rather than labor as the determinant of economic worth, Locke effectively endorses the contract as the ultimate judge and authority. Unfortunately, a contract imposes no inherent judgments between the honest merits of labor and unmerited greed.

Liberty sounds like a nice political goal, but if the contracts or laws intended to secure liberty do not forbid distortion and secrecy, we have lost the real freedom of natural thought. A free market, unless you think like a “free market” libertarian, must be driven by open and honest information about the goods being exchanged, allowing the natural thoughts of consumers to determine their economics. A free government, unless you are a neoconservative, must be driven by openness and honesty, allowing the natural thoughts of citizens to determine their politics. There are no inherent political virtues of contracts and laws that require openness and honesty. They could just as well be driven by a political authoritarian principle of money being an expression of free speech, as alien as that principle is to any real understanding of liberty.

Protecting life is indeed a natural instinct, but that does not make prolonged life a natural right. Yet just as we have instincts to protect our lives we, as do other k-species in nature, have opposing instincts to risk our lives for proper causes, such as to protect our young or our community. Our natural sense of belonging determines our cultural altruism, including when to protect and when to risk life. Contracts and laws, to repeat once more, have no inherent ability to make such cultural judgments.

To sum up, contracts and laws have no inherent political wisdom. They have no natural inclination towards economic merit; they have no natural inclination towards political openness and honesty; they have no natural inclination towards cultural altruism. Contracts and laws are simply tools, nothing more or less. How they are to be used as tools ultimately depends on our sense of belonging, and whether we strive to idolize or harmonize our beliefs and behaviors. That contracts and laws are necessary to prevent the barbarism generic to r-species colonization now appears irrefutable, but they carry with them their own dangers.

The same resolute defenders of contracts will also recommend that

contracts be negotiated from a position of strength. The same advice holds true for laws. The demands for labor do not grant a position of strength over the resources of corporations to weather brief storms when negotiating contracts. The demands of a democracy cannot ensure a position of strength over the resources of wealth and power elites when passing laws. While the tools of contracts and laws are not the root of the greed and special interests driving our political system, they do not provide a cure. Contracts negotiated from a position of strength will redistribute the overall balance of resources to the side holding the advantage, generally in contradiction to merit, wisdom and harmony.

At the stage of international law and contracts, being in a position of strength is a license to exploit and/or colonize. Contracts and laws then become the tools by which we pursue an r-species approach to life. The justifications we provide for the politics of contracts still take us back to Locke and Hobbes and other great thinkers of the UnEnlightenment.

### *UnEnlightenment Culture*

There are no political boundaries to a band or tribe. In the case of foragers the “boundaries” move along with the band. Their “nation” consists of a group of people bonded by a sense of belonging and the geographic area they need for food and shelter during any particular season. They identify themselves primarily with the people and places of their living conditions, not with abstract beliefs and behaviors that align with political boundaries.

Nation forming and building are phenomena of western civilization. War has been the main impetus over the years for forming nations internally; colonization has been the main impetus for building nations elsewhere. An example of nation forming is the 100 Year War. William of Normandy conquered Britain and became king. Since William retained land in Normandy over the years the English royalty felt an entitlement to these original lands and other lands even farther south. A series of battles were launched, and mainly won, by England. Yet they were trying to occupy foreign lands that did not want to be occupied and the war was ultimately lost. The nations of England and France formed and coalesced through the course of this war. Incidentally, the ability of a superior invading foreign power to win most of the battles and still lose the ultimate war would become a familiar theme in western civilization.

War costs money; authorities seek to cover the costs of war through taxes. Collecting taxes necessitates boundaries that delineate those to be taxed, apart from their natural sense of place or belonging. War also requires manpower from within these same boundaries. Gathering the support needed for manpower took the form of nationalism, a mindset that championed abstract nation states over concrete communities. Many European countries formed during the UnEnlightenment in

conjunction with war and nationalism.

Nation building became an extension of colonization. To colonize is to tap the resources of other cultures to use in markets. The best tool for this is the corporation, which came into existence mainly for the purpose of market expansion. Corporations cannot exist without the type of government intervention that nations provide. The governments of core countries can suffice for creating and backing corporations, and only the intervention of core country governments fueled the initial periods of colonization.

A transition from colonies towards nation building provided benefits to corporations. More nations in the world mean more governments that multinational corporations can play against each other for the sake of bargaining strength. International development organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund enhance the bargaining strength of multinational corporations further through financial “aid” with strings attached to nation states.

Corporate sales and shareholders benefit from the government interventions of a developed country, while a box office (for tax purposes) and exploited labor can be sanctioned through developing countries providing a “bargain.” Now nation building accomplishes the neat trick of political democratization and economic colonization in the same process. Neoconservatives can trace the lineage of their manifesto back to the colonial seeds planted by the UnEnlightenment.

### *Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny*

There is a theory in developmental biology that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Translated into English, the development of an organism resembles the evolution of that species. The journey from embryonic to adult form resembles the journey from simple to complex organisms. The theory does not fit the empirical data entirely, but still has some merit.

We have explained how modern western civilization is a product of the UnEnlightenment. The problems we have cited, such as nationalism and colonialism, result from character flaws that infect adults more than children. Children are committed to people and places. As a group they lack the potential vanity of adults to wrap their self-esteem in abstract ideals; certainly they are more humble than the vain endeavors of interest groups like the American Legion. Children have faith. As a group they lack the potential cynicism of adults that commits them to materialism; certainly they are less cynical than interest groups like the Christian Coalition who are devoted to power and wealth. Children also have great courage. Children may be afraid of things such as the dark, but they will accept the unknown and the truth straight up with less apprehension than adults. They seek responsibility they are not yet ready to handle, rather than avoid responsibility that should be their duty to face. Children are a good deal less

apprehensive than interest groups such as PNAC.

All of this stems from the reality that children have a much greater sense of belonging than adults. Neither their physical nor their mental abilities are fully developed, they cannot compare with adults in regards to the merits of our labors or the freedom of our thoughts. Yet we know instinctively that the sense to belong starts out strong at the beginning of life. The developmental atrophy of this belonging from child to adult resembles the cultural atrophy of belonging from early cultures to modern western civilization. Perhaps something about our adolescent period of development “recapitulates” the cultural evolution of the UnEnlightenment, at least for those who become our economic, political and cultural leaders.

We have a tendency to brand any culture as primitive that engages in rituals bizarre to us. This may be imperial arrogance on our part typically, but occasionally you have to forego political correctness and call things as you see them. Neoconservatives should appreciate the moral clarity of this stance. There is one particular culture that engages in a series of bizarre and degrading rituals that clearly makes them primitive barbarians. Allegedly, they lie in burial artifacts and masturbate; they wrestle each other in mud; they urinate on each other; they scream at bones. Once they have established a social contract through these rituals they then hold each other in the highest esteem. They idolize their beliefs to an extreme, yet they cloak their behaviors in secrecy. We must describe their behaviors as “allegedly” because we must rely on the testimony of third party accounts not sworn to such grave secrecy.

The members of this culture think they are special; to that extent they are vain. They cynically degrade each other in ritual even as they assume superiority to people outside their culture. Finally, they are filled with apprehension for openness and honesty about their behaviors. This primitive culture does not exist from long ago or far away; unfortunately, they are right across the state from me. The Skull and Bones secret fraternity of Yale University has spawned captains of multinational corporations and world leaders. These vain, apprehensive and cynical primates were, in fact, instrumental in establishing the CIA.<sup>18</sup>

A period of transition that prepares children to become adults is known as a coming of age or rites of passage. In some cultures this period has a set structure and purpose, such as the walkabout for Australian aborigines or the vision quest for Inuits. The structure involves going into the wilderness during that period and leaving culture behind. The purpose is to reenter culture with a better sense of who you are and what your role in the culture should be. Alone in the wilderness, a sense of belonging is developed for others uninfluenced by social cliques. A sense of belonging to a higher order forms independently of fundamental beliefs. A sense of belonging to one’s self does not get confused by the complexities of

18 You can read about their alleged behaviors at <http://skullandcrossbones.org/articles/skulland-bones.htm> and <http://skullandcrossbones.org/articles/skullandbones-esquire.htm>.

social temptations.

In our country most adolescents “come of age” in school. Rather than nurture their sense of belonging through introspection, students typically become inundated with social pressures for which they have little perspective or little guidance to navigate. The Internet has exacerbated this inundation. They are greeted by a plethora of beliefs, virtually all of which are idolized by those who hold them. They must adapt to these social complexities without an anchor in first knowing who they are. They may get involved with a “good” or “bad” crowd, but in neither case do they establish a natural perspective for understanding the normative role of our sense of belonging in culture.

Thus the developmental impacts of schools are much like the evolutionary impacts of the UnEnlightenment. Schools offer terrific avenues for intellectual and cultural stimulation, but no better insight into our natural condition or sense of belonging than does Thomas Hobbes. Secret societies within a school, or within the broader culture, then become a perverted caricature of what our “coming of age” should involve. Members not only have lost any natural perspective, they insulate their own cultural beliefs and behaviors against the influence of others. Harmony or a genuine sense of belonging to the broader culture becomes virtually impossible to achieve. As the Skull and Bones members demonstrate, they insidiously network themselves into positions of authority based on their shared idolatries.

### *My Own Rites of Passage*

My own rites of passage consisted of backpacking thousands of miles, spread out over a number of years. Yet I can point to one specific moment in the wilderness, in 1977, when I gained the essential wisdom needed to become an adult. I was on the Pacific Crest Trail in the Sierra Nevada, heading south for the Mexican border. I stood alone at a trail junction, peering through a gap in the mountains to the expansive desert east.

I arrived at that trail junction having first completed the Appalachian Trail, a challenge set and met. Now the goal of completing the Pacific Crest Trail seemingly was assured. I had carried heavy packs, hiked long miles and endured many discomforts without being deterred. Our guidebook warned that people got lost for an average of 200-300 miles on the PCT (an unfinished trail in 1977), a number our Expedition at least equaled, yet we always managed to find our way in the end. The previous night I made camp soaked by wet snow, yet addressed that situation with absolute confidence that I would prevent hypothermia. Wilderness no longer posed a serious physical or mental challenge to me.

A cold drizzle sprayed my pack and parka as I stood at that trail junction, watching wisps of smoke rise from chimneys in a beckoning village. I confronted

myself as to why I should not take the side trail down out of the mountains to warmth and civilization. What was there left for me to prove? The goal was not finished, but I previously completed a similar journey and everything this goal represented—strength of body, independence of spirit and resourcefulness of mind—I already achieved. The Mexican border was no more a meaningful end for me than heading for the immediate comfort of a village.

There really are only three ends that matter for civilization: to enjoy and share the merits of our specialized labors without exploitation; to collect the wisdom of our diverse, independent and decentralized thoughts; and to achieve harmony despite diverse belongings. Everything else becomes only the props for the journey. Capitalism or communism, monarchies or federations, interest groups or neighborhoods, are good or bad only in the context of how they augment our natural rights to the free merits of our labor, free thought and free will.

We can be sidetracked into longing for “wisps of smoke.” We can abandon a quest for civilized advancement when we think a false patriotism, evangelism or neoconservatism might satisfy more urgent goals. We can fool ourselves into thinking that the end of history is near, changing our patient journey into an urgent dash for the finish. We can evolve culturally into something we naturally are not, and even declare such evolution to be the Enlightenment.

As I stood gazing longingly at the cozy village, a flood of thoughts and memories swept through me. A vision of an old woman needing a penny came to mind. I recalled a moment standing on top of an overlook along the Appalachian Trail when I was overwhelmed by the calm sunset after a storm, and I sensed that I belonged to something tremendously greater than myself. I knew that the cozy village below me now was just a mirage. There would be no end to my journey any more than we have ever witnessed an “end to history.” As long as I live, as long as we live, we are constant sojourners.

Though I stood alone I was far from being “solitary.” Most people would have concluded from the sum of the possessions on my back that I was “poor,” but richness surrounded me in ways that mattered most. Granted, I might have smelled “nasty, brutish,” but that merely was the cost of being in the best condition of my life. Would life be “short?” How was I to know? Only fools and cowards sacrifice the quality of life for the sake of speculative security. The point was not where or when the destination of a secure life was reached but the quality of my life’s journey along the way. That quality depended only on the company I kept, the senses of belonging I nurtured along the way.

I tightened my pack straps and turned away to catch up with Dave, Ken and Dan, the people I belonged to for this part of my journey. There would be no urgency to reach a destination. That was the moment I became an adult. As I headed south towards Mexico one other memory came back to me. When I had neared the end of my first Appalachian Trail thru-hike I encountered a former coal

miner also thru-hiking and also near the end of the trail. He recounted how he discovered he had black lung and determined that he would spend his last days pursuing his dream of hiking the AT. He never expected to live long enough to actually reach Katahdin. I asked him what he would do now that he was about to reach his destination after all.

“Just keep on goin’ I s’pose,” was his reply.

And so the wisdom of a West Virginia coal-miner was transferred to a college student from Connecticut, without having gone through a Skull and Bones initiation. Meanwhile, three thousand miles away from the trail junction where I stood amidst the majesty of the Sierra Nevada, at that same time some of our country’s current wealth and power elites were then in a secret society shouting demonically at old bones. Only the elite can get away with such primitive behavior without being castigated for their blatant barbarism; just one of many unfortunate consequences from The UnEnlightenment.