

Preface

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The modern enterprise of anthropology, with all of its important implications for cross-cultural perceptions, perspectives, and self-consciousness emerged from the eighteenth-century intellectual context of the Enlightenment. If the Renaissance discovered perspective in art, it was the Enlightenment that articulated and explored the problem of perspective in viewing history, culture, and society. If the Renaissance was the age of oceanic discovery—most dramatically the discovery of the New World of America—the critical reflections of the Enlightenment brought about an intellectual rediscovery of the New World and thus laid the foundations for modern anthropology. The contributions that constitute this book present the multiple anthropological facets of the Enlightenment, and suggest that the character of its intellectual engagements—acknowledging global diversity, interpreting human societies, and bridging cultural difference—must be understood as a whole to be fundamentally anthropological.

The Enlightenment not only defined the word and conceived of the subject “anthropology” but also, in one of its most potent coinages, gave the lexicons of many European languages the new word and concept “civilization.” First used by the physiocrat economists as they sought to convey the benefits that society would find in economic growth and progress, the word “civilization” came to sum up the European identity of enlightened men and women who comparatively and self-confidently assumed the superiority of their own way of life. To this day “civilization” provides the motto and matter of Western identity, constituting the self-assumed Occidental mantle of “Western civilization.”

In the eighteenth century, when “civilization” was first named, the word’s most potent effect was in authorizing a perspective on the allegedly less civilized, even the utterly uncivilized: societies to be civilized, or to become more civilized. By the light of civilization, it was possible to discern a whole ordering of societies, around the globe and across the centuries: societies backward, primitive, savage, or barbarous. Indeed, the very concept

of civilization presupposed a condition of uncivilized origins and more- or less-civilized stages on the path toward the ultimate Occidental goal. The philosophy of the Enlightenment was deeply preoccupied with discerning and describing the series of those stages, and the concept of civilization thus became indispensable for the articulation of any anthropological perspective.

That perspective, however, could also be turned against the ideal of civilization. Rousseau, for instance, could conclude, without ever visiting the Caribbean, that the Carib was perhaps happier than a Frenchman; while Diderot, without ever visiting Tahiti, would compose brilliant fiction to address the question of whether the sexual customs of the Tahitians might be ultimately as conducive to contentment as those of Christian Europeans. The anthropology of the Enlightenment—discovering the primitive worlds of exotic savages in remote lands—was also capable of harvesting the insights of anthropological perspective, and bringing them to bear with critical intensity on the customs and values of society in Europe. For the philosophes of the eighteenth century, the anthropological agenda pointed the paradoxical path, through the barbarous domains of primitive peoples, to the sophisticated self-doubts of modernity and Europe.

In this book, we seek to excavate the origins of anthropology in the eighteenth century, the first modern intellectual efforts to observe, understand, and analyze other cultures or—in the language of contemporary cultural theory—the Other. An enormous share of cultural theory, in fact, focuses on this very issue of “otherness.” The Other came to the forefront of modern intellectual debate with the pioneering works of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1979 and *The Conquest of America* by Tzvetan Todorov in 1982, which theorized on European cultural encounters with Asia and America, the East and the West, respectively. The prominence and prevalence of this academic discussion, in the decades since then, makes it now seem all the more important to take scholarly stock of just *how* Europe came to confront intellectually, describe systematically, and analyze critically other cultures beyond Europe. This book on the anthropology of the Enlightenment proposes precisely that: to identify the intellectual and cultural foundations of the European encounter with peoples perceived as alien, exotic, primitive, savage, or barbarous—fundamentally different in ways that demanded critical analysis from enlightened observers. That discourse sought to understand those peoples in their own social and cultural contexts, that is, anthropologically.

This book is—indeed, must be—an interdisciplinary enterprise, and the contributors come from the diverse fields of history, literature, philosophy, and anthropology. We the editors have brought together our own

two fields—the historical study of cultural relations and perceptions between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, and the cultural study of historical relations and perceptions between Spain and Spanish America—the better to pursue the anthropological perspective of the Enlightenment, looking eastward and looking westward. Our contributors have given the book a global range, reflecting the far-flung interests of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, when the comprehensive mapping and exploration of the Pacific Ocean in the age of Captain Cook made possible an appreciation of the global dimensions of geography and anthropology.

Larry Wolff's introduction explores the intellectual history of anthropology in the Enlightenment, considering Montesquieu and Swift, Voltaire and Rousseau, Fortis and Cook, Herder and Sade, and analyzing the complementary principles of enlightened anthropology: the philosophical spirit of cultural perspective and the ethnographic endeavor of scientific description. Marco Cipolloni's conclusion examines the relation between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, especially with regard to the New World of America: how the age of Renaissance discovery modulated culturally into the age of Enlightenment anthropology, and how Enlightenment anthropology bequeathed its legacy to the modern anthropology of the nineteenth century. He analyzes the anthropological significance of the discursive relation between the Old Wor(l)d and the New Wor(l)ds, in the crucial European encounter with the Americas.

The contributions to the volume are divided into three principal parts. The first part focuses on anthropology as a philosophical subject, used especially in writing philosophical history: Gibbon on the barbarians of the ancient world, the philosophes on China, Diderot on empire, Herder on India, William Robertson on the Aztecs and Incans, and Adam Smith on hunters and gatherers. In this mode, enlightened anthropology speculatively explored earlier and primitive stages of human development, and compared historical developments across different parts of the globe. The second part of the book focuses on direct ethnographic encounters between Europeans and the supposedly primitive peoples who became the objects of early anthropological observations: in the Pacific, in Greenland, in the Russian Empire, and in Haiti. The third part focuses on enlightened conceptions of human nature, considering how human nature came to be understood anthropologically in its various social and cultural contexts: the cultural meaning of dreams, the social context of law, the significance of environment for transplanted colonists, and the psychological implications of the eighteenth-century theory of "animal economy."

These divisions of the volume thus highlight our principal arguments for understanding the Enlightenment as the crucial intellectual matrix for the emergence of the modern anthropological perspective on human society.

The contributions suggest the rich variety of anthropological discourses and endeavors in the age of Enlightenment. Our book cannot offer a complete and comprehensive account of every anthropological aspect of the Enlightenment precisely because, as the book itself seeks to demonstrate, the Enlightenment was fundamentally anthropological in all of its aspects and preoccupations. The whole character of the Enlightenment was profoundly conditioned by the essential and pervasive importance of the anthropological impulse.