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FROM THE STATE OF NATURE TO THE EMPIRE OF REASON: CIVILIZATION IN BUFFON, MIRABEAU AND RAYNAL

Hugh L. Guilderson

Little work has been done on the history of the idea of civilization since Lucien Febvre first recommended it to scholars at a conference in 1927. Joachim Moras published "Origin and Development of the Idea of Civilization in France (1756 – 1830)" in 1930, a philological study that completed Febvre's search for civilization's origin by identifying the physiocrat Mirabeau as the first to use it as an historical rather than a legal term in 1756. Moras' philological research has been accepted by the major French dictionaries, but his description of civilization as the idea of progress ignored the complexity and the instability of the concept. Norbert Elias used Moras' work in The History of Manners. Elias set himself the task of explaining "as simply and clearly as possible the psychical process of civilization." It was Elias' thesis that during "the age of absolutism, under the watchword of civilité, behavior move[d] very perceptibly toward the standard that we denote today by a derivative of the word civilité as 'civilized' behavior." For Elias, civilization in Europe was part of the larger process of the central state's consolidation of power, a process that included making the language of the court the national language and the manners of the court the standard of acceptable behavior. The philosophes did not restrict their attention to the history of Europe, however. The idea of civilization was a product of the French Enlightenment, but it was not the expression of a simple faith in inevitable progress, as too many textbooks would have us believe. The philosophes read history. They knew that any progress, technical or moral, would be the result only of determined, persistent effort on the part of people like themselves to dispel the malign influences of tradition and superstition. By reading Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal together we learn that civilization had many elements and various meanings. The idea of civilization contained the philosophes' hopes for the future as well as their views of the past.

Febvre's challenge to historians, that we attempt to reconstruct the history of the word and idea in order to understand "the most profound of all the revolutions which the French spirit has achieved" and thereby understand what people mean when they speak of "the progress, conquests and benefits of civilization," has not been answered. This essay traces, in abbreviated form, the internal logic of Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal's ideas of nature, natural law, society, and history as they developed into the new conception of history as the process of civilization, the progress of humanity from the state of nature to the empire of reason.
Like civilization, benevolence, sociability, and humanity, the expression "empire of reason" was part of the vocabulary of the Enlightenment. It appeared in various forms in Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal. It is possible that Grimm used it first in a short essay in the *Correspondance Litteraire* in which he spoke of "the love of the good, the power of virtue, the empire of reason, the progress of the philosophic spirit." Grimm noted that progress was slow and achieved only with great difficulty, a sentiment shared by our three *philosophes*.

Buffon (1707–1788), Mirabeau (1715–1789), and Raynal (1713–1796) were three of the most widely read and discussed writers of the French Enlightenment. They used the methods of three disciplines, natural history, economics, and philosophical history, to develop their social theories. Despite their methodological differences, they were able to construct, out of their common concerns and their shared assumptions about science, human nature, and natural law, a new conception of history that was quickly adopted by *philosophes* on both sides of the English Channel.

* * *

The disciplines that emerged from the eighteenth century to form the social sciences had their origins in the application of Buffon's method to the analysis and reform of the *ancien régime*. Buffon's explanation of natural phenomena was scientific, as his contemporaries understood that term. Buffon described a history of the earth that relied solely on the physical evidence. The account of the earth's formation in Genesis, that is, the authoritative account, was shown to be inconsistent with the facts, and illogical.

The place of humanity in the order of nature was changed, also. Instead of removing humanity even further from the center, or reducing the species to the status of a machine or an animal, Buffon made humanity unique. Never having freed himself completely from the influence of Descartes, Buffon made intelligence, the ability to think, the essence of human nature. "To be and to think, are, with regard to us, the same thing," he said. Intelligence established humanity's uniqueness and superiority. Buffon, therefore, placed humanity at the top of the natural order. From that vantage point, the rest of the animals would be described as they existed in relation to humanity, and the most important part of their description would be "the services which they can render to us and all the uses which we can make of them." Everything in nature would be described and placed in a hierarchy by the historian. "Those which are the most necessary or useful to him will hold the first rank...."

Buffon described his method in the *Premier Discours of the Histoire Naturelle*, which was published in 1749. Natural History would be the complete and accurate description of the physiology of animals and their living habits — their *home-building methods, mating customs, family organization, and diet —*
"in a word, all that pertains to the history of each thing in particular," everything they did to survive. Mirabeau and Raynal would adapt this method to their economic and philosophical inquiries.

For Buffon, then, the method of science was the method of historical description. The purpose, or object of investigation, was "the knowledge of facts." All science could be divided into two classes. The first class encompasses the history of men in society, and the second, natural history. Buffon would provide the natural history. It would be up to the other philosophes to do the rest.

The method of natural history, the reliance on physical evidence, would resolve a problem that was common to science and philosophy, the definition of truth. Buffon suggested a new approach: "Instead of trying to form a definition of truth, let us try rather to make an enumeration of truths." Truth for Buffon was the observation of regularity in the operations of nature, the compilation and correlation of the physical facts. A true statement was one that described the regular operations of nature without any suppositions regarding first or final causes.

In addition to erroneous methods of classification, and inadequate definitions of truth, the other great obstacle to understanding natural history, in Buffon's view, was the persistent practice of trying to reconcile the book of Genesis with evidence that seemed to contradict the Biblical account of creation. The phenomenon that held the interest of naturalists and amateurs in the eighteenth century was the presence of sea-shell fossils far above sea level. In the first volume of the Histoire Naturelle, Buffon used the evidence of sea shells embedded in mountains to support his theory that the earth had been formed by the movements of the ocean, and to accomplish his larger purpose of separating science from theology. The evidence indicated that the earth did not reach its present state in six days:

The instantaneity of the creation destroys the notion of the Globe's being covered with the ocean, and of that being the reason why sea-shells are so much diffused throughout different parts of the earth; for, if that had been the case, it must of necessity be allowed, that shells, and other products of the ocean which are still found in the bowels of the earth, were created long prior to man, and to other land animals. Now, independent of Scripture-authority, is it not reasonable to think that the origin of all kinds of animals and vegetables is equally antient?"

Buffon argued that because of the height of the mountains, and the slow rate of the oceans' movements, the earth was much older than theologians had calculated it to be. Buffon contended the earth was older than the Bible implied, and that the system of nature was not finished. The earth continued to change:
The fire, the air, and the waters, produce continual changes, which, in a succession of ages, become considerable.... Thus, the surface of the earth, which we regard as the most permanent of all things, is subjected, like the rest of nature, to perpetual vicissitudes.\textsuperscript{12}

The perception that nature was a process, that it was constantly changing rather than a closed system, was central to Buffon's social theory, his idea of civilization. When he wrote the natural history of humanity in the third volume of the \textit{Histoire Naturelle}, Buffon argued that many of nature's "perpetual vicissitudes" were in fact the work of men, and that civilization began when people began to control nature for their own purposes.

Buffon arranged the \textit{Histoire Naturelle} according to the hierarchy that he established in the \textit{Premier Discours}. He began with the human species. Then he considered the animals, plants, and minerals in the descending order of their importance to the empire of reason, the domination of nature by humanity. History, according to Buffon, was the record of civilization, the progress of humanity from the savage state to the civilized. History began with the domestication of animals. "He compels the animal to obey him, by his being possessed of reason....\textsuperscript{13}" Gradually, the empire of reason was extended to the domestication of plants. Agriculture made sedentary societies possible. Life in a settled society required some measure of restraint. It was necessary for men to civilize themselves, to subject themselves to the empire of reason. Society made rational life possible:

\text{Man derives all his power from society, which matures his reason, exercises his genius, and unites his force. Before the formation of society, man was perhaps the most savage and the least formidable of all animals.}\textsuperscript{14}

In 1749, while writing the natural history of humanity, describing the various colors, sizes, mating habits, diets, and social organizations of the species, Buffon revealed his notion of civilized life. Law and good government were essential elements of the civilized state:

\text{The Persians, the Turks, and the Moors, have acquired a degree of civilization: But the Arabs have generally continued in a state of lawless dependency. Like the Tartars, they live without government, without law, and almost without society...}\textsuperscript{15}

\text{The severe desert climate, and the meager subsistence that the desert provided, had prevented the Arabs and Tartars from establishing agriculture and}
permanent settlements, a necessary stage in Buffon's notion of civilization.

The limitations that a harsh climate imposed on a group of people could be overcome only after a long passage of time and after an unremitting effort to establish the rule of law. The effects of good government could not be overestimated. What often was taken to be the work of nature was in fact the product of the empire of reason. By improving subsistence, and by submitting to the rule of law, even the human body could be changed, and changed for the better:

A polished people, who are accustomed to an easy, regular, and tranquil mode of life, and who, by the vigilance of a wise government, are removed from the dread of oppression and misery will, for these reasons alone, be more strong, vigorous, and handsome than savage and lawless nations....

A "tranquil mode of life" and a "wise government" did more than improve the stature and appearance of civilized people. The exploitation of nature did more than improve the diet of those who lived in society. It also had the effect of increasing the population:

Population depends more on society than nature. Men would not be comparatively so numerous as the savage animals, if they were not united, and derived not mutual aid and succour from society.... We may, therefore, presume, that the want of civilization in America is owing to the paucity of its inhabitants....

Buffon's work had touched on another important topic in the Enlightenment discourse, one that engaged Montesquieu, Hume, and others. The apparent decrease in the population of France, and the sparse population of the New World, were not just theoretical issues for Mirabeau and Raynal. In their view, population was the key to political strength and national wealth. Buffon said that a large population was the result of a well-ordered society, not the consequence of a moderate climate. Government, Buffon implied, was the means to overcome the influence of climate. Buffon's social theory, embedded in or presented as natural history, would influence the idea of civilization in several ways.

It was in his study of Americans that Buffon developed his idea of the civilized state:

...a people who live without restraint of fixed laws, or of a regular government, can only be considered a tumultuous assemblage of barbarous and independent individuals, who obey no
laws but those of passion and caprice, and who, having no common interest, are incapable of pursuing any determined standard of manners, which supposes general views that have obtained the sanction both of time and a majority of numbers. 18

Buffon's description contained multiple meanings: a state of refinement; self-restraint for the sake of the common interest; external restraint in the form of law; the supremacy of reason and reflection in comparison to the disorder of emotion and impulse; the continuity of social and political forms through several generations, which implied either the habit and sanctity of tradition or the wisdom of experience; and the consent of the governed. Buffon's description contained many of the elements that would be common to Mirabeau's and Raynal's ideas of civilization. It defined what Europeans were by describing what Americans were not, but it implied that everyone was capable of being civilized. Buffon's natural history of America implied that the empire of reason could be extended to include the savages.

Buffon's method of concentrating on the similarities in nature's productions led him to the conclusion that all humanity constituted one species. The division of humanity into five classifications according to color did not withstand scrutiny. When the survey covered the globe, as Buffon's did, differences that at first seemed to be clear and distinct were seen for what they are: mere nuances, shades along a spectrum. By concentrating on the similarities shared by Mongols, Eskimos, and the Indians of North and South America, while attributing the differences in skin color to the climate, Buffon determined that the people of South America had migrated from Asia. Buffon was satisfied that his theory of migration explained the similarities and the differences between Europeans, Asians and Americans:

Upon the whole, every circumstance concurs in proving, that mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other; that, on the contrary, there was originally but one species, who, after multiplying and spreading over the whole surface of the earth, have undergone various changes by the influence of the climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases and the mixture of dissimilar individuals.... 19

The lack of progress in the arts and sciences among the Americans was attributed to the relative newness of their societies. Buffon's assertion that the human species was one, that human beings were fundamentally the same, was crucial to the philosophes' hopes for a rational, just social order. Buffon provided what the philosophes accepted as the empirical, scientific basis of their programs for social reform. Tradition and superstition could only be overcome if all
people shared the same nature. Buffon both asserted the unity of humanity and defined the essence of humanity as intelligence.

* * *

Mirabeau's purposes in writing *L'Ami des Hommes* were to analyze the present state of the economy; to consider the mercantile theory of colonial trade and the arguments for increased commercialization; to find a solution to the decline in agriculture, and the apparent decline in France's population. Beyond those immediate concerns, Mirabeau had a larger project: to discover, scientifically, the basis of a long-lasting and virtuous empire.

Mirabeau was concerned that the neglect of agriculture, the pursuit of money, the display of wealth, the love of idleness and luxury were the symptoms of France's decline, that France would be permanently weakened, as Spain had been, by elevating commerce and the colonial trade at the expense of agriculture. The social order was being dissolved by corruption. Mirabeau believed that it would be impossible to assess the present condition of society or to make recommendations for reform unless human nature, and humanity's original condition, were understood.

In 1756, Mirabeau began *L'Ami des Hommes*, his first book, with a description of people that corresponded to Buffon's description of the earliest societies. Savage societies were more like large families than modern states. Like Buffon, Mirabeau believed that human society began with a common purpose: subsistence. Property at first was personal. Tools, boats, and cabins, but not the land, belonged to individuals. When humanity moved from the pastoral to the agricultural stage, land was divided.

Buffon and Mirabeau shared a similar method and a similar notion of human nature. Buffon's inductive method had the purpose of identifying a law of nature by noting the uniformity in the accumulated examples. Buffon drew philosophical inferences from what he perceived were the laws of nature. Buffon defined human nature as dual, composed of a material or physical principle, the body, and a spiritual principle, the soul.

The natural law for Mirabeau was the law which nature prescribed, the manner of living that was in accord with human nature. Mirabeau defined the two elements of humanity as sociability and cupidity, or greed. Some animals were solitary. The human animal was sociable. Like Buffon, Mirabeau recognized that humans could be classified with animals if it were not for their intelligence. His definition of human nature was determined by his discipline and his tendency to see the world in economic terms.

Mirabeau intended to develop a system that would restore society to a condition of conformity with natural law, a condition that prevailed before cupidity produced disorder. Mirabeau's science was economics. Economics was the
means to the end. The end, the overriding purpose in writing, was to establish what Mirabeau called a "true" civilization.

Although he recognized the necessity and usefulness of commerce, Mirabeau made it clear in the early chapters that the well-ordered economy and society would be agricultural, not commercial. Mirabeau saw the system of production as the prime determinant of all social relations. Mirabeau did not want to construct a new social order, nor did he want a new system of government. Mirabeau wanted to restore the existing order, to ensure its conformity with natural law, the law of "essential justice," which was liberty of person and property. From the history of Spain, and from his observations of England and the Dutch provinces, Mirabeau concluded that commercial economies turned people away from honor and generous actions, in a word, away from sociability. "In order to fix the degree of esteem due each profession," Mirabeau said, it was necessary to consider their functions.

Ministers of religion had the first rank in a well-ordered society because "religion was without doubt the first and most useful brake on humanity; it is the first jurisdiction of civilization." Mirabeau wanted to maintain the traditional order of French society by placing the clergy in the first rank. This was unusual for a philosophe. The utilitarian assessment of the value of religion was not unusual, however. Voltaire and Montesquieu were convinced that religion was useful, even if it was not believable. Diderot and his collaborators shared Mirabeau's opinion that religion was the primary civilizing influence. In the Encyclopédie, the article entitled "Society," which would be published in 1765, reaffirmed the value of religion:

religion is an absolute necessity, not only to procure for society a thousand gentle measures and one thousand amenities, but moreover to ensure the observation of duties, & to maintain civil government.

There was an important innovation, however, which became an important theme in Mirabeau's thought. The word civilization had been used in a new way. Mirabeau had changed the meaning of a judicial term, which had signified the process by which a criminal case was rendered a civil case, by using it to indicate the process of polishing, or civilizing, individual manners and behavior, a process in which people learned restraint. "Pebbles in rivers become round and polished by rubbing," Mirabeau said. "Men civilize themselves in society; I did not invent this axiom."

This use of the term civilization was problematic. Mirabeau had already shown himself to be doubtful about the advantages of city life. "The title of a country gentleman has become a term of ridicule among us," he said. Polish was not necessarily a good thing, although Mirabeau made it clear that restraint
was. There was, therefore, a certain ambivalence about civilization in the mind of the man who coined the term. There was also a certain ambiguity in its first definition. The original form of the word which I have translated as jurisdiction is "ressort." The word means spring, a source of strength or energy, and it means jurisdiction, an area of influence or control, domain, or, to use a synonym popular among the philosophes, empire. It is not clear, then, whether Mirabeau meant that civilization was a state of polish or restraint attained by individuals, a stage in a particular society's development in which some are polished and most must be restrained, or a process that gradually extends its influence and control, its jurisdiction or empire, over all members of a society or even all societies.

There were some aspects of civilization about which Mirabeau was not ambivalent. Government was more important in the moral sphere than it was in the physical. Most of the physical goods — health, youth, beauty, strength — were gifts of nature. The moral goods which bound society together — honor, glory, generosity, justice, fidelity, peace, charity, love — depended on government. The purpose of government was to establish an equilibrium between the various economic and political interests: to take measures that would prevent injustice, and the ill effects of inequality of fortunes.

The just social order and economic order would be agricultural. The first duty of government would be to encourage agriculture, the means of subsistence and the guarantor of a large population. That end would be achieved by allowing free trade in grain and amending the tax code. Other reforms that would reduce cupidity and the desire for luxury would be the abolition of tax farming and the sale of public offices, and the abolition of protective tariffs. Mercantilist colonial policies, closed borders, monopolies, and protectionist policies were all contrary to sociability. They provoked wars among nations. The abolition of those policies would advance civilization:

I have said it and cannot repeat it too often, civilize your neighbors, little by little, if it is possible, the entire world, and you will have nothing to fear.25

Mirabeau had revised the meaning of civilization. Civilization was more than restraint induced by religious precept, polished manners, or the enjoyment of the fine arts. It affected entire peoples. Colonial trade was the "apple of discord" among nations. It worked against that natural fraternity which ought to prevail.26 The attempt to strangle the economy of one's neighbors was contrary both to natural law and the interests of civilization. "The wealth of a nation depends not only on its civilization, but on that of its neighbors."27 Civilization for Mirabeau, then, was not merely a particular stage of refinement achieved by a particular society. A new element had been added. Civilization was an historical process that involved, or ought to involve, several societies. Free trade would be
one of the means by which that historical process would advance.


Whatever civilization might be, it is clear that for Mirabeau, being enlightened, thinking, and writing, were part of it. Civilization was not the same as high culture because Mirabeau referred to the arts "resulting from civilization." Yet the arts were related to it because printing had doubled "the ease and the influence of the art of writing, the principle medium of civilization...." 28 No society would be well-ordered or well-governed "without being instructed in the self-evident laws of the social order and of essential justice, which constitute true civilization...." 29 The solution to the problem of cupidity and corruption would be the restoration of the legal order in France. Knowledge of the science of economics would be the primary means of achieving that restoration. The restoration would be achieved through a program of public instruction in the science of economics.

Once every man, woman, and child could read, write, and do arithmetic, they would be taught economics. The future of civilization would depend on education. True civilization depended on the exercise of reason. One could become a true citizen, a full member of society, only "by the exercise and use of his intelligence and his enlightened reason." 30 Mirabeau had, at least to his own satisfaction, constructed an empire that would endure. But Mirabeau had addressed himself only to the condition of civilization in France. Raynal furthered the development of the idea of civilization by considering the issue of European expansion.

* * *

In 1775, Raynal began his inquiry with the European discovery of the New World and the successful navigation of the Cape of Good Hope. It was not Raynal's purpose to provide a detailed economic analysis of the European colonial system, but to answer a question that he posed immediately after the opening paragraph of the *Histoire des Deux Indes*:

Everything has changed and must change again. But it is a question, whether the revolutions that are passed, or those which must hereafter take place, have been, or can be of any utility to the human race? Will they ever add to the tranquillity, the happiness, and the pleasure of mankind? Can they improve our present state, or do they only change it? 31
The question Raynal posed was fundamental. Because industry and commerce constituted the new basis of wealth in Europe and determined the relations between states, the judgment on the utility and value of international trade, colonial conquest, and the maintenance of colonial empires would necessarily involve a judgment on the value of European civilization, however Raynal defined it. The fact that Raynal could question the utility and value of colonial trade and conquest indicated a certain ambivalence about European civilization. That ambivalence, and Raynal's value judgment, were inherent in his idea of civilization and contributed to the instability of the idea.

The thesis of the *Histoire des Deux Indes* seems to be the assertion that world trade determined international politics but, while Raynal recounted the history of European trade and colonization, he did not prove or even seek to prove that thesis. Instead, Raynal sought to answer the philosophical questions occasioned by the last three hundred years of commercial history, questions that went beyond the issue of utility: what was the purpose of government, of society; what constituted a just social order.

Raynal relied on natural history, economics, and shared ideas about human nature and natural rights to answer his question. He began by adopting the point of view of the economic historian. In doing so, he plunged into the central topic of this essay, the *philosophes*’ understanding of history, the idea of civilization. "The commercial states," Raynal said, "have civilized all others." 32

Raynal and Mirabeau shared the same ideas of liberty and property; however, by founding civilization on different economic systems, one agricultural, the other commercial, they rendered the idea of civilization unstable at its inception. By "unstable" I mean that its meanings were multi–faceted and often contradictory. Buffon was convinced that science, and the application of scientific knowledge, was the means to ensure the continuation of the process of civilization. Mirabeau thought that print was the primary means of civilization's transmission and that public education was the means to ensure its continuity. For Raynal, civilization sprang from "that spirit of invention and industry, which is the parent of arts and opulence." 33 It was related, then, both to progress and corruption. It is no wonder that in his preliminary research, Lucien Febvre referred to civilization as a group of ideas.

Raynal was aware that civilization was problematic. It was related not just to opulence but to oppression, too. Raynal's survey of European expansion began in India, whose caste system, he said, "supposes a very advanced state of civilization and enlightenment." 34 Raynal associated civilization with Enlightenment, but the caste system was contradictory to his idea of civilization. The caste system "violates the order of nature," Raynal said. It was "a barbarous inequality," a system of privilege. 35 He implied that any social order based on privilege violated "the order of nature" and declared that it was the duty of philosophers to free people by making their rights known to them, to "Teach
mankind that liberty is the institution of God...[and] authority that of man.

In the manner of Buffon, who studied human variety by making a circuit of the globe, Raynal followed the routes of the European explorers. Based on the experiences of the Portuguese in Southeast Asia, Raynal concluded that people who lived as the Malays did, "who derive from nature such inflexible bravery, may be exterminated, but cannot be subdued by force." He followed that observation with an assertion which was the logical consequence of his premise that the "commercial states have civilized all others." People such as the Malays, Raynal said, "are only to be civilized by humane treatment, by the allurements of riches or liberty, by the influence of virtue and moderation, and by a mild government." Like Mirabeau and Buffon, the benefits of government in Raynal's view were chiefly moral. The assertion represented the beginning and the foundation of Raynal's colonial policy and it signaled the addition of a new element in the idea of civilization.

Raynal wanted to avoid a repetition of the horrors perpetrated by the Spanish in the New World. He wanted the French empire to endure. He assumed that civilization would extend from Europe because Europe was the center of world commerce. He also assumed that the process of civilization for the Malays and other people who lived in, or close to, the state of nature would be different from what civilization had been for Europeans. Europeans had civilized themselves. The inhabitants of Asia, Africa, and America would be civilized by Europeans in the interest of establishing free trade, international peace, and a rational social and political order, the empire of reason.

Raynal, like Mirabeau, advocated the abolition of tax farming, publicly subsidized monopolies, and mercantilist trade policies. He argued that economic growth, liberty, and national prosperity depended on free trade. All depended on an enlightened colonial policy, one that did not depend on conquest, that would not depopulate the colonies, and therefore would not require the use of slaves' labor. An enlightened colonial policy would involve the civilization of the people still living in the state of nature. A model had been provided by the Jesuits in Paraguay. "The Jesuits have had the prudence to civilize the savages in some measure before they attempted to convert them." The Jesuits' methods had been more productive than the military's method of conquest and enslavement:

If any one should doubt these happy effects of kindness and humanity over savage nations, let him only compare the progress the Jesuits have made, in a very short time, in South America, with what the forces and navy of Spain have not been able to effect in the space of two centuries.

Buffon was the source for Raynal's civilizing mission. In 1749, in the volume dedicated to the discussion of human variety, Buffon had commented on
the success of the missionaries:

...the missions have made more men in those barbarous nations, than the victorious armies that have subjugated them. Paraguay has not been conquered in that manner: gentleness, charity, and the exercise of virtue, constantly practiced by the missionaries, have touched the savages and conquered their defiance and their ferocity.... Nothing does more honor to religion than to have civilized those nations and established the foundations of an empire without any arms but those of virtue.41

Buffon's Natural History, as one of the new human or social sciences, provided the knowledge that made possible the establishment of a peaceful and productive colonial empire. Buffon's Natural History also established Europe as the standard for human behavior, a point of view shared by many of the philosophes. The idea that one was not truly human until one was civilized, implicit in Buffon, was made explicit by Raynal. Raynal adopted the elements of civilization as they had been defined by Buffon and Mirabeau, but he added to the idea's instability by proposing the civilizing mission, the extension of civilization as a European accomplishment.

In Raynal's view, the Europeans' contact with the peoples of the world had taught them tolerance. Their own customs were no longer seen as sacrosanct. Europeans were more interested in trade. Commerce had civilized them. The most zealous priests had left Europe to convert the savages, thereby contributing to the peace of Europe. The discovery of the New World and the establishment of colonies, therefore, had been beneficial. "If we do not avail ourselves of the present time to re-establish the empire of reason," Raynal said, "it must necessarily be given up to new superstition."42

Like Mirabeau, Raynal thought that it was the philosophes' responsibility to guide the course of civilization. Philosophers were legislators in Raynal's view, even if they had not been officially appointed:

Every writer of genius is born a magistrate of his country; and he ought to enlighten it as much as it is in his power. His abilities give him a right to do it....His tribunal is the whole nation; his judge is the public....43

The future of civilization, the empire of reason, depended on the philosophes.
Although Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal had different views of the empire of reason, and different ideas of civilization, they shared the fundamental Enlightenment attitude that all knowledge should be useful somehow, that it should improve the human condition. The Enlightenment, at least for Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal, was a project. Mirabeau adapted natural history to the service of economics by focusing on subsistence rather than trade, by starting from the premise that all humans shared the same intelligence, the same capacity for reason, that would allow them to discover the laws of nature, to make politics a science, and to construct a lasting civilization. Raynal relied on Buffon's demonstration of the unity of humanity to make civilization a global enterprise. That enterprise would succeed because, as Buffon had shown, the history of humanity was the gradual extension of the control of nature and society, made possible by the uniquely human attribute of intelligence. Civilization, the progress of the empire of reason, would continue despite all obstacles because, as Buffon had said at the beginning, "to be and to think are, with regard to us, the same thing."

The development of the idea of civilization reflects the fact that the Enlightenment was a coherent philosophical conversation, or a set of related conversations, conducted in books and salons and focused on a clearly defined set of concerns. In his preface to The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Ernst Cassirer identified those concerns as "nature, history, society, religion and art." The central topics of the Enlightenment discourse converged in the formation of the idea of civilization.

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END NOTES

Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. (New York: Pantheon, 1982), xii, xiv. The usual and necessary limits of length for journal articles do not allow a discussion of recent work by Roger Chartier and Daniel Gordon on the related topics of civility and sociability. Buffon, Mirabeau, and Raynal shared the view held by many of their contemporaries that humans were naturally sociable, as evidenced by the fact that all live in societies. For them, the various forms of sociability and civility discussed by Chartier and Gordon were consequences of civilization.


Ibid., 111.

Ibid., 112.


Ibid, 110.


*Smellie*, 1:125.

Ibid., 1:511.

Ibid., 2:362.

*Smellie*, 3:305.
Ibid., 3:108. The word civilization appears frequently in the first English translation of Buffon, made by William Smellie, the first editor of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Buffon used polis, polisé, civilisé, civiliser, se civiliser. I have not found any instance of his having used civilisation, despite its popularity after Mirabeau's first use of it in 1756, presumably because he objected to the use of neologisms. Buffon made his distaste for neologisms clear in his address to the Académie Française upon his induction on August 25, 1753. Smellie's use of the word civilization is a rare variation from his practice of translating Buffon literally. The variation is significant, however. It indicates the widespread use in England of a word that had entered the language quite recently. Smellie's translation appeared in 1781. Smellie used "civilization" as it entered the language, despite Doctor Johnson's objections, with the letter "z" to distinguish it from the old legal term. The first English dictionary to use the term civilization, in the sense that Mirabeau intended it, was John Ashe's New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language, published in London in 1775, only three years after Samuel Johnson rejected Boswell's request that he include it in the second edition of his dictionary. See James Boswell, Esq. The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (London: George Bull & Sons, 1884), 2: 9.

Ibid., 3:110.

Ibid., 3:170.

Ibid., 3:171.

Ibid., 3:206.


Ibid.


Ibid., 1:152.

Ibid., 1:72.

Ibid., 3:45.

Ibid., 3:258.

Éphémérides 1767, 9:134 and 139.

Ibid., 1768, 8:41.

Ibid., 1768, 10:21.

Abbé Guillaume–Thomas Raynal, A Philosophical and Political History of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies, 3rd edition. 5 volumes (London: Wm. Strahan, 1777), 1:2, hereafter referred to as Raynal, 1777.

Ibid., 1:3.

Ibid.

Abbé Raynal, Histoire Philosophique et Politique du Commerce et etablissements des Europeens dans les Deux Indes (Geneva: Libraires Associés, 1775), 1:33, hereafter referred to as Raynal, 1775. I am aware of Diderot's collaboration with Raynal. The passages quoted in this article are the work of Raynal, not Diderot.

Ibid., 1:59.

Ibid., 1:60.

Raynal, 1777, 1:98.

Ibid.

Ibid., 3:36.

Ibid., 3:146.


Raynal, 1777, 5:404.
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3) Ibid., 5:449.

4) Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1951),