‘THE BETTER SORT’: IDEAS OF RACE AND OF NOBILITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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« The Better Sort » : Race et noblesse dans la pensée et la littérature des Îles britanniques au XVIIIe siècle

RESUME


Mots-clefs : noblesse, race, généalogie, hiérarchie, Grande-Bretagne, Irlande, XVIIIe siècle
‘The Better Sort’: Ideas of Race and of Nobility in Eighteenth-Century Great Britain and Ireland

ABSTRACT

For centuries, British nobility promoted an elite hierarchy based on genealogical precedence within the greater Western tradition of universal order. In 1735, however, Carolus Linnaeus’s *Homo sapiens* signalled the beginning of an entirely new discourse of human hierarchy based on physical ‘variety’. This study aims to identify how noble tradition influenced conceptions of race in Great Britain and Ireland during the long eighteenth century. Tracing the persistence of a ‘pureblood’ model of human superiority in the West, it traverses a vast range of historical material in order to highlight the continuity of genealogical hierarchies across multiple disciplines and over hundreds of years. The first section reviews the history of hereditary privilege as a backdrop to noble culture in eighteenth-century Britain: examining works such as Francis Nichols’s *British Compendium, or, Rudiments of Honour* (1727-7) and Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1734), it considers how nobility as a genealogical identity was accommodated in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ understanding of human hierarchy. The second section considers these same traditions in terms of the eighteenth-century ‘race’ construct: it considers the notion of ‘breeding’ in works such as the anonymous *The Lady’s Drawing Room* (1744) and the rhetoric of human variety in naturalist texts such as Oliver Goldsmith’s *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774). The third and last section considers the influences of Enlightenment and the French Revolution on ideas of noble race in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and the role of ‘natural’ nobility in abolitionist texts such as Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Slavery; or, the Times* (1792). In short, this study demonstrates that the tradition of noble ‘race’ was, and is, a fundamental component of the human ‘race’ construct, asserting blood purity, anatomical superiority, and inimitable excellence as defining principles of human hierarchy.

Keywords: nobility, race, genealogy, hierarchy, Great Britain and Ireland, eighteenth century
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Introduction

True nobility, according to Anthony Mario Ludovici – a twentieth-century English eugenicist, Nietzschean philosopher and later supporter of Adolf Hitler – represented racial excellence. “The true ruler, the true superior man,” he claimed in his *Defence of Aristocracy: A Textbook for Tories* (1915),

is always a beautiful man … Because regular features, strong features, harmonious features and grace of body are bred only by a regular life lasting over generations, strength of character exercised for generations, harmonious action enduring for generations, and that mastery in action which is the result of long practice for generations (11-12).

Over his lifetime, Ludovici produced over fifty pamphlets, novels, and treatises expounding his bizarre and “idiosyncratic blend of Förster-Nietzscheanism, Lamarckianism, social Darwinism, anti-semitism, anti-feminism, monarchism and aristocratic conservatism”, all of which have long since fallen into obscurity, and today mostly lie forgotten amidst the duskier shelves of Edwardian racial theory (Dan Stone 31). His direct correlations between contemporary British *class bias* and contemporary *racism*, however, remains as a particularly vivid example of how eugenicists so often sought to justify the arbitrary privileges of an established authority by reframing those privileges in terms of biological inevitability. In fact, the most interesting aspect of the *Defence* is that Ludovici, by ‘racialising’ nobility, was inadvertently highlighting one of the most crucial discursive overlaps between *race as scientific conjecture* and *race as a set of arbitrary cultural traditions*; here, indeed, the pseudo-science of eugenics can be seen to merge with its original namesake: *eugeneia*, or, the quintessentially noble tradition of inherent and hereditary human superiority as expressed through the physical human body.¹

¹ For a full explanation of Ancient Greek eugeneia, as well as its attendant concept of arete and the rank known as eupatridae, see chapter 1.1.1.
another way, Ludovici’s racially superior nobility adheres to the same cultural paradigm as traditional tropes of ‘natural nobility’, with both concepts essentially playing out the Western idea that there exists an inherent hierarchy among humans, with certain individuals being born to lead, and other individuals being born to serve and obey those leaders.

In modern historiography, the term ‘nobility’ has been used to describe a remarkably diverse range of social elitism. It can pertain to the senatorial Patricians of Ancient Rome, but also the warring taoisigh of Gaelic Ireland; to the feudal chevaliers of medieval France, as well as the nepotistic cortigiani of Renaissance Italy; the blood-proud clan chieftains of Highland Scotland, and the modernising grandees of eighteenth-century London. It is a term, indeed, whose vast plurality of denotation only highlights the sheer persistence of its greatest singularity: hereditary privilege. Whether it has been expressed as a military, senatorial, courtly, spiritual or parliamentary entity, the notion of an exclusive, hereditary caste, which is somehow superior – morally, spiritually, or physically – to other people, has resurfaced with striking regularity over the last three thousand years, making it one of the most recognisable “longue durée” elements of the European hierarchical tradition (Leonhard and Weiland eds, 6). This same mythology of superior blood, as this study will show, was at the very heart of a genealogical mode of reasoning that, in the eighteenth century, can be understood as ‘race thinking’. That is, it was central to the establishment of basic tropes that would come to underpin the modern notion of human race: namely, the ideas that inherent superiority could be cultivated (or ‘bred’) over successive generations within one bloodline, and that this bloodline subsequently needed to be protected from contamination with inferior hereditary traits. Indeed, Ludovici’s modern paradigm of ‘racial’ excellence drew on a vast reservoir of Western traditions that imagined nobility as an archetypal corporeal and hereditary quality – his historical
references range from the sixth-century Greek poet Theognis of Megara who claimed that “neither from the bramble spring roses or hyacinths, nor ever from a bond woman a noble child”, to the eighteenth-century Tory politician Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, who held that the elite few “are they who engross almost the whole reason of the species, who are born to instruct, to guide, and to preserve” (qtd in Ludovici 9, 304, 306).²

This study examines how noble tradition fundamentally informed developing concepts of racialised humanity in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, bolstering a ‘race model’ of human stratification that, by the end of the century, would come to underpin the very structure of Western race thinking. It investigates the following three assertions: 1. that ‘race thinking’ is fundamentally based in noble tradition; 2. that this same ‘race thinking’ had a formative influence on the development of human variety theory, and 3. that noble tradition was thus crucial to the development of modern race. By analysing multiple texts from various domains – including philosophical and political texts, medical and scientific treatises, and literary sources – the study not only aims to highlight the web of interlaced relationships that existed between nobility and race thinking during the eighteenth century, but also to demonstrate how they both ultimately formed part of the same discourse of human hierarchy. The hegemonic strategies of noble tradition, as will be seen, can be understood to have underpinned some of the most basic paradigms of ‘race’ in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, thereby spearheading a system of ‘racialisation’ whereby other, subordinate racialised identities could be created and judged against this dominant ‘racial’ group (see chapter 2.1.). This same mode of understanding humanity as a grand hierarchy of ‘races’, this study argues, fundamentally informed the structure of eighteenth-century human variety theory, and thus the later delineation of ‘biological’ race distinctions.

² Ludovici takes his quotes from Theognis of Megara’s Fragments (fl. C. 550 B.C.; 183-192 and 535-538) and Bolingbroke’s Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism (1736) (2). For further discussion of both authors see chapters 1.1.1 and 2.1.3, respectively.
The following paragraphs will briefly review the material to be investigated over the course of this study’s three sections, but first it is worthwhile to clarify contemporary understandings of the terms ‘race’ and ‘nobility’. It is crucial, above all, to appreciate that the English word ‘race’ has undergone a considerable semiotic shift since the eighteenth century, and that the modern notion of human race as “one of the major groupings of mankind” was not formulated until the 1790s, and did not begin to gain widespread acceptance until the mid-nineteenth century (‘race’ n. OED). The distinct eighteenth-century concept of race (to be discussed in chapter 2.1.1) can be understood as just one of many cultural elements that contributed to the emergence of this modern paradigm. This study, therefore, makes extensive use of Hannah Arendt’s concept of ‘race thinking’, put forth in her Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), which, in turn, largely draws on Eric Voegelin’s extensive interrogation of race as a pattern in the history of ideas in his Race and State (1933) (Arendt 158-9; Voegelin, 8-19). It also makes frequent use of the idea of ‘racialisation’, by which is meant the discursive transition of ‘race’ during the eighteenth century from a cultural to a corporeal sphere. For more on the terminology of race, see especially chapter 2.1.1.

The eighteenth-century understanding of ‘nobility’, likewise, does not always accord with its modern usages. In particular, it must be noted that ‘nobility’ was not, at this time, synonymous with ‘aristocracy’, which described a system of government (as in democracy), rather than any specific body of people, while appellations of ‘aristocrat’ (again, like ‘democrat’) could easily take on pejorative connotations (Amanda Goodrich 17; for more on this distinction, see chapter 3.1.2). In this study, then, ‘aristocracy’ can generally be understood as pertaining to aristocratic modes of government (which did not necessarily include nobles), excepting, of course, in the many secondary sources which have used the term in its modern, synonymous sense. In addition, it should also be
appreciated that there were three distinct ‘nobilities’ in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, pertaining to the three peerages of England, Scotland and Ireland (which were only merged in 1707 and 1801 respectively). The term ‘British nobility’, frequently used in this study, should thus be understood in geographic rather than political terms, referring to nobles on the island of Great Britain before and after the Scottish Act of Union, while deliberately excluding the Irish nobility which, as this study will show, rarely accords with general statements about its British counterparts. For more on the terminology of nobility, see chapter 1.2.3.

Section 1 considers the origins of ‘hereditary privilege’ as a model of social elitism in Europe, beginning with an analysis of the *aristokratia* governments of Ancient Greece, the culture of *nobilitas* in the senatorial ranks of Rome, and the assimilation of hereditary privilege into Christian doctrine in the early Middle Ages. This section’s first chapter considers early notions of nobility and social order in Aristotle’s *Politics* (c. 350 B.C.), St Augustine’s *City of God against the Pagans* (c. 411 A.D), and Bede the Venerable’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (c. 731 A.D.), considering how various strategies of hereditary wealth transfer in elite European groups came to interact with Christian notions of universal hierarchy. The second chapter considers the rise of courtly society in late-medieval and early modern England in terms of the ‘civilising process’ theory put forth in Norbert Elias’s *On the Process of Civilisation: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (1939), and, through an analysis of Francis Nichol’s description of noble character in the *British Compendium; or the Rudiments of Honour* (1725-7), goes on to consider the institution of peerage, and the rise of the House of Lords as a stalwart of ‘mixed government’. The third chapter re-considers the previous two in terms of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ construct at the heart of Neoplatonic philosophy; it reviews Maurice Shelton’s notion of Japhetic noble race in his *Historical and Critical
Essay on the True Rise of Nobility, Political and Civil (1718) and Alexander Pope’s Essay on Man (1734), in order to better understand how the notion of universal order accommodated genealogical hierarchies – legitimating the ‘natural’ place of hereditary nobles on the same terms as the ‘hereditary’ ranks of inferior human varieties. This eclectic section, which traverses several centuries, religions, and cultures, is of crucial importance to this study on eighteenth-century thought for three main reasons: firstly, it demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of noble hegemonic strategies; secondly, it reviews two of the most idealised historical eras in eighteenth-century noble tradition (the ancient world, and feudal society); and, thirdly, it illustrates one of the most important characteristics of noble blood tradition – that it is at once inherent and performed, to be simultaneously assumed and enacted.

In Section 2, the concept of race is explored more thoroughly, and is placed in context with the new templates of empirical humanity that followed in the wake of the Homo sapiens, as imagined in Carolus Linnaeus’s Systema Naturae (1735-88). It considers the motif of genealogical race in the anonymous collection of stories titled The Lady’s Drawing Room (1744), the tradition of hereditary disease in George Cheyne’s medical treatise The English Malady (1733) and the idea of historicised noble race in Henri Bernard, Comte de Boulainvilliers’s Essais sur la noblesse de France (1732). The second chapter goes on to consider the various ‘human variety’ models that developed throughout the century, and how naturalists such as Buffon in his Histoire naturelle (1749-1789), Oliver Goldsmith in his History of the Earth and Animated Nature (1774), and Henry Home, Lord Kames in his Sketches on the History of Man (1774) classified humans into different groups according to observational data such as size, colour, shape, and level of civilisation. The third chapter subsequently considers how noble race functioned within the discourse of human variety theory, reviewing texts from three different colonial
discourses: the Clan system of Highland Scotland in Samuel Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland* (1775); the three competing ‘nobilities’ of colonial Ireland in Charles Macklin’s *Love-à-la-Mode* (1759); and theories of racially distinct nobility in Johann Reinhold Forster’s anthropological study of the South Seas, the *Observations Made During A Voyage Round the World* (1778).

Finally, Section 3 reviews how the motif of noble race influenced doctrines of human equality, especially during the second half of the eighteenth century. The first chapter analyses anthropological, political and literary texts that engage with the idea of the superior noble body in the context of the French Revolution and the Irish Rebellion of 1798, including Georg Forster’s infamous reply to Kant in the *Noch etwas über die Menschenraßen* (‘Something More about the Human Race’, 1786), Edmund Burke’s *Reflections of the Revolution in France* (1790) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui* (1809). The second chapter examines the counter-corporealisation of noble race in the context of increasingly genealogical understandings of heredity – how noble ‘breeding’ practices influenced developing understandings of pure-blood animals, both in equine manuals such as William Cavendish’s *New Method and Extraordinary Invention of Dressing Horses* (1672), and in literary works such Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). It goes on to investigate how ‘pure-blood’ nobility assumed a central significance in corporeal scales of humanity, providing a potential foil to ideas of a morally degenerate, racially corrupted human body in anthropological works such as Lord Monboddo’s *Origin and Progress of Language* (1774). This chapter ends with a short review of one the most interesting examples of ‘anatomical nobility’ in a racialised discourse: the ‘Royal Slave’ trope of abolitionist and reformist rhetoric, which, in texts such as Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688) and Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Slavery or the Times* (1792), aligned noble excellence with European physique, and by consequence, augmented human worth. This third section
concludes the present study with a review of the three statements proposed at the beginning of this introduction, re-tracing the different seams of noble and racialised humanity examined throughout the three sections, and bringing them together to better understand the vast influence of noble tradition over human race as it stood by the end of the eighteenth century.

In short, the following study offers an alternative perspective on traditional race historiography, asserting how centuries-old traditions of graded human *superiority* provided the essential framework for the paradigms of graded human *inferiority* formulated during the eighteenth century. The racialised expression of *super-humanity* in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, as the study will show, was fundamentally built upon the physiological ideals that already existed at the heart of traditional race – namely, the corporeally excellent and genealogically pure ‘true noble’. Indeed, it can even be said that the eighteenth-century British nobility existed as a race in the same way as black Africans, South Seas Islanders, or any other human variety – for, ultimately, *they had always existed as a race*; nobility was, in fact, the base template for human race itself. Rather, it was human varieties that *became* races like the ranks of nobility; the racialisation of physiologically defined groups by reason of genealogical descent was ultimately the application of noble ‘eugenics’ (so to speak) to the physical bodies of the non-noble, simultaneously assimilating the anti-European biases of empirical naturalism. Instead of stratifying dukes, earls, and barond, it stratified whole swathes of the global population, while the mythology of anatomical excellence in the truest, purest ranks of nobility was replaced with a scale of ‘purity’ from the black to the white body, from the non-European to the European, from the bad to the good, and from the *demos* to the *aristoi*. Through race,
old and new, the shadowy *blackness* of the common man was bound intimately, and indefinitely, to the gleaming *whiteness* of the ‘better sort’.
Section 1: From *Eugeneia* to Race Thinking

For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.

– Aristotle, *Politics* (1.5, 6)
1.1: The Tradition of Hereditary Privilege in the West: from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.

1.1.1: The Ancient World: Aristoi, Nobiles, and ‘Aristocracy’ in Ancient Greece and Rome

The remarkable persistence of noble models of elite governance throughout European history largely reflects equally persistent traditions of familial wealth transfer: when an individual becomes, for whatever reason, possessed of economic and political advantages, that individual will very probably desire to transfer these advantages to his offspring, and when an extended family becomes associated with these same accumulated assets (in Europe, usually translating to landed property) it is likewise probable that they should desire to maintain their resources within the bounds of that family. Nobility, can, in many ways, be understood as a collection of the most successful and resilient socio-economic strategies employed to fortify this process of wealth transfer. That is to say, when historians identify ‘nobility’ in different communities and in different eras, they are essentially identifying a patterned combination these strategies, which, considered together and over a long period of time, can thereby be understood as noble tradition. The following chapter does not intend to provide a comprehensive history of nobility, but rather to offer a select series of historical glimpses into the emergence of this noble tradition. It is a core construct, this study argues, that generally accords with the following six statements:

1. Some people are naturally excellent.
2. This excellence can be transmitted genealogically.
3. Familial excellence naturally correlates with an elite socio-economic status.
4. Inherited excellence should be re-performed in each generation.
5. There exists a specific corporeal expression of inherited excellence.
6. Integrity of genealogical, socio-economic, performative, and corporeal excellence – called ‘true nobility’ – is essential for the continuance of inherited excellence in future generations.

The texts discussed below have been chosen because they demonstrate some of the earliest and most significant manifestations of cultural traditions that formed the basis of noble identity in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland; they highlight the existence of a cult of family line, itself heir to a vast collection of traditions that, over time, have identified that hereditary power as a marker of human superiority.

Notions of nobility become evident in the earliest texts of Greek antiquity – finding expression in the oral poetry that marks the very beginning of the Western canon. Even in Homeric poetry, historians have regularly identified a “deep horizontal cleavage” between what Moses I. Finley calls the “aristoi” and “all the others” (61, qtd in D. Brown 149). Chester G. Starr notes the particular importance, for instance, of certain figures in Homer’s epics who are “more delicate and beautiful than ordinary people”, who were often titled basileis (βασιλεῖς) or ‘kings’, and who were marked out as being descended from Zeus and other illustrious ancestors (8). The Iliad’s Odysseus, too, notes H.C. Baldry, explicitly discriminates between those of ‘noble’ and ‘non-noble’ stock: when he disciplines his well-born seamen, they receive only a light reprimand; when he punishes “a man of the people”, his actions are violently physical (Iliad 2. 198-203, qtd in Baldry 15). Later in the poem, non-noble rank features as one of the primary criticisms of the commoner Thersites – a hunchback, a cripple, and the “ugliest man who had come to Troy”; conversely, in the Odyssey, when Odysseus discovers his father Laertes aged and dressed in rags, he instantly recognises him because “there is nothing of the slave to be seen in your build or stature, you look like a king” (2.216-19; 24. 252-3 qtd in Baldry 15). “Homer regularly assumes ...” notes Baldry, “a hereditary physical difference between nobles and the multitude, a
natural division separating them in bodily physique as well as spirit and way of life” (emphasis added, 15). Concurrently, the so-called genealogical poetry of Hesiod (a probable contemporary of Homer, c. 700-800 B.C.) offers an early example of the isolation of ‘superior’ bloodlines – proclaiming in works such as the *Theogony* to have traced the blood of royalty not just back to the divinities, but to the very origin of the world (Bury 2-5, qtd in D. Brown 139).

It was in the great oligarchies of the Greek city-states, however, that the concept of ‘aristocracy’ (from *aristokratia* ἀριστοκρατία, meaning ‘rule of the best’) first developed its familiar governmental form – that is to say, an assembly of the wealthy and wellborn, whose social status qualified them for rulership. Strict Athenian aristocracies were governed by the *aristoi*, ‘the best people’, for whom descent from a hero or a god was central to their claims of social precedence (Cartledge 44). In fact, the term *aristos* (ἀριστος) shares etymological roots with the Greek concept of *arete* ἀρετή – a sort of essential excellence present in every entity: speed in a horse, for example, or graceful flight in a bird (Jaeger 1.6; P. Burke 9). It must also be remembered, however, that this sense of superiority functioned within the parameters of a slave-owning society. Aristotle’s famous dictum of the fourth century B.C., a favourite with advocates of the slave trade right up to the eighteenth century, vindicated the social function of birthright hierarchy:

> For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule (*Politics* 1.5, 6).

For Aristotle, indeed, there was little doubt that a nobleman’s particular *arete* befitted him perfectly for his social function – his birth alone marked him out from the crowd: “For the well-born are citizens in a truer sense than the low-born …”, he asserts in the *Politics*, “those who are sprung from better ancestors are likely to be better men, for good birth is
excellence of race” (3.13, 70). Aristotle specified that aristocracy should be the rule of the “best men absolutely” and “not merely of men who are good relative to some hypothesis” (4.7, 92). In other words, they should demonstrate concrete, quantifiable advantages over everybody else: firstly, they should be possessed of landed wealth, so as to prevent them succumbing to temptation or avarice, secondly, they should be good at ruling, and thirdly, they should be possessed of that “superiority which is claimed by men of rank, for they are thought noble because they spring from wealthy and excellent ancestors” (3.12-13, 69-71; 5.1, 110). Paul Cartledge suggests that Aristotle’s understanding of aristocracy as ‘birth married with wealth’ proves that “it was not just Blut (blood) but Boden (earth – landed property)”, and particularly the pastoral capacity to breed horses in a largely arid land, that formed the basis of noble power in ancient Athens (51). The differentiation of aristoi from other people was technically in breach of the political theory of the polis, yet these distinctions of social caste can be seen on Athenian gravestones as far back as the ninth century B.C. (Starr 12). By the sixth century B.C., the aristoi of Attica were openly defined by their hereditary privilege – being regularly identified as eupatridae (εὐπατρίδαι), or “descendants of good fathers” (Cartledge 48).

Political distinctions of noble birth became particularly evident in 594 B.C., when the Athenian statesman, Solon, initiated a series of constitutional reforms with the aim of ousting these eupatridae from power. In order to undermine the link between heredity and rulership, Solon opened up prominent offices to candidates on the basis of wealth alone rather than social rank, and with apparent success: within about forty years the kakoi (κακοί, ‘the base people’), a commercial rank of usurers, had begun to significantly rival the aristoi in terms of wealth. Furthermore, they had begun to emulate the aristoi culture and value-systems, despite the fact that they were traditionally “scorned by those of ancestral lineage” (Starr 23). Consequently, the aristoi increasingly depended on the
intellectual argument that they, alone, were still the best in arete (24). There was, they argued, an essential quality to a true born aristos that no amount of kakoi emulation could ever achieve – an incontrovertible fact that, just for good measure, was to be advertised to the public as much as possible. By the later years of the century, notes Walter Donlon, claims of “mental and moral superiority” had become a regular feature of noble defence, while the aristoi “increasingly and explicitly asserted that those who were not members of their class were incapable of high ethical behavior or refinement of thought and feeling” (143). Good political leadership, the argument went, “required a certain spiritual nobility … the product of tradition, good friendships, and noble blood” (Wiser 4). In the wake of Solon’s reforms, the aristoi launched into an exaggerated and conspicuous display of old aristocratic values, with noble families going to enormous trouble and expense to reassert their eugeneia (from εὖ- {good} and -γένεσις {generation, genesis}, providing the adjective eugenes {εὖγένης}, or ‘well-born’; ‘eugenics’ n., ‘eugenic’ n. + adj OED). This was epitomised by the large-scale commission of marble nudes, or kouroi (κοῦροι), that were, perhaps unsurprisingly, just larger than life-sized (Cartledge 51). Certain aristoi poets publicly lamented the decline of noble culture, and predicted the fall of a civilisation under the charge of ‘new men’. In his elegiac poetry, probably dating from early sixth century B.C., Theognis of Megara warns his young noble lover, Cyrnus, to beware the decline of the eupatridae:

[D]o not keep the company of base men, but always cling to the noble. Drink and dine with them, sit with them, and be pleasing to those whose power is great. For from the noble you will learn noble things, but if you mingle with the base you will lose even the sense you have. Knowing this, associate with the noble, and one day you will say that I give good advice to my friends (l. 22-35, 181).

Later in the elegy, Theognis imagines a city of new men as a perversion of idealised family power, portraying tyranny as being ‘born’ from a grim culture of commercial greed:
Cyrnus, this city is pregnant, and I am afraid she will give birth to a man who will set right our wicked insolence [i.e. a tyrant]. Never yet, Cyrnus, have noble men destroyed a city but whenever the base take delight in outrageous behaviour … for the sake of their own profit and power, do not expect that city to remain quiet long… (l. 39-52, 181).

It is in the work of Theognis, notes Starr, that the term *demos* (δῆμος, ‘the people’) first took on “a pejorative meaning as socially inferior” (24).

Towards the end of the sixth century B.C., the Theban poet Pindar continued the tradition of defending noble culture against new wealth, albeit in a somewhat different manner. In a series of so-called ‘Victory Odes’, he systematically idolises the physical noble body – exalting it as replete with the heroic deeds of long-dead ancestors. In his celebration of the great athletic festivals of the *aristoi*, the athletes’ superior physiques become living, breathing vectors of historical glory, not only celebrating the human form at its most beautiful and strong, but praising it for encapsulating centuries of noble culture. “It is no marvel”, he writes,

that to be good athletes runs in their blood. The lords of Sparta and the wide dancing lawns dispose the ordinances of games in their beauty, with Herakles and with Hermes beside them. They care for men that are righteous. Indeed, the race of the gods fails not their friends (‘Nemea 10’, 124).

In ‘Olympia 11’, he sings tribute to the son of Archestratos for his prowess in boxing, all the while reinforcing the trope that his physical excellence is a direct consequence of his illustrious forbears. His is a family line that, as the last line of this extract makes clear, remains an exclusive stronghold of the *aristoi*:

I shall enchant in strain of song a glory upon your olive wreath of gold
and bespeak the race of the West Wind Lokrians. 
There acclaim him; 

... 
No 
thing, neither devious fox 
nor loud lion, may change the nature born in his blood (17).

The Ionian philosopher Heraclitus, writing c. 500 B.C., was rather less subtle about his views of noble superiority. His sayings, which survive only in the work of other authors, include such assertions as “[o]ne man is worth a thousand if he is aristos,” and “[w]hat mind or understanding do [the masses] have? They believe the poets of the dēmoi, and use as their teacher the crowd [homilos (ὁμιλος)], not knowing that hoi polloi [οἱ πολλοί, literally ‘the many’] are kakoi, and the agathoi [αγαθοί, ‘good, noble people’] are oligoi [ὀλίγοι, ‘the few’]” (qtd in Donlon 144).

The simple persistence of Ancient Greek terminology underlines, in itself, the extent to which Greek culture shaped the basic concepts of hereditary privilege in Europe: aristos and demos delineated a paradigm of the excellent few and the mediocre many, while the ideas of ‘aristocracy’ and ‘democracy’ translated this paradigm into dedicated systems of government. Most importantly for this study, Athenian aristokratia governments nurtured a profound relationship between social distinction and ‘pure’ family lines – between the ‘excellence’ of aristoi and the ‘excellent descent’ of eupatridae – encapsulated in the concept of eugeneia (a concept, as has been mentioned, from which Francis Galton derived the term eugenics in 1883³). Eugeneia linked the privileged ‘few’ with exclusivity of family, and, indeed, with the culture of tracing these families through lineal bloodlines. It constructed a cultural dynamic wherein a noble family has automatic social precedence over a non-noble family, even when both are possessed of the very same

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³ The term ‘eugenics’, explained Galton in his *Inquiries into the Human Faculty* (1883), refers to what the Greeks called: “eugenès, namely good in stock, hereditarily endowed with noble qualities. This and the allied words eugeneia, etc., are equally applicable to men, brutes, and plants … the science of improving stock … especially in the case of man, takes cognisance of all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing …” (1, 25).
wealth and power – for not only could the former claim that its bloodline was inherently superior, but this blood superiority could be asserted as more important than material assets. Furthermore, eugeneia frames these privileged bloodlines in the language of battle, exalting them as living links to historic military victories and heroic triumphs, and thus rendering non-noble emulation of noble lifestyle somehow illegitimate – even facetious. It is no coincidence that this direct opposition between noble and nouveau riche seems to foreshadow later European histories: the assertion that nobility is more than simply an organised group of powerful families is not just at the very root of the tradition, it has remained one of its most consistent strategies for survival. The same intellectual argument for a noble ‘quality’ that arose in the Athens of the sixth century B.C. persisted as a mainstay of hereditary elitism for centuries to come, functioning as an inbuilt system of status limitation, and protecting the cultural superiority of the elite ranks even in the face of fundamental economic or political shifts.

While Ancient Greece gave rise to the construct of a nobly born 'aristocracy', it was within the nepotistic oligarchies of the Roman senate that the sheer power of hereditary privilege in the ancient world found full expression. Since the founding of the city, the dynastic families of the Roman capital had harnessed the culture of hereditary privilege as an economic mechanism. Rather than consolidating their riches “through primogeniture or entails”, notes Peter Brown, the Roman elites built their fortunes over countless generations of strategic marriage: "intermarriage was the secret of their vast fortunes … massive coagulations of wealth … occurred as cousins married cousins within the charmed circle of nobility” (95). Interestingly, Roman nobilitas (signifying “renown, distinction, or superiority” and derived from gnobilis, literally “knowable”) was not granted on the basis of birth or wealth alone; rather it had to be validated with a high-ranking official post in the
Roman senate (Salzmann 213; ‘noble’ adj. OED; P. Brown 96). For the established families of the Roman capital, however, such posts were expected as a matter of course. These were the Patricians – a network of families who claimed descent from Romulus’s first senators (*patres*), and who dominated high office from the regal period until the late Republic⁴ (Cicero, Berry ed. 340; Brunt 1). Their distinction from the lesser Plebeians, with whom they were forbidden to intermarry according to the ancient Law of the Twelve Tables, was, in the words of Edward Gibbon, “the proudest and most perfect separation which can be found in any age or country between the nobles and the people” (2.163).

Although the Patricians were, according to the fourth-century A.D. statesman Quintus Arelius Symmachus, “the noblest of the human race” (*nobilissimi humani generis*), they were, in their turn, graded according to the antiquity of their family line – those who could trace it back the furthest were *gentes maiores*, and the newer bloodlines were assigned the lesser title of *gentes minores* (qtd in P. Brown 96). Furthermore, even though their senatorial status was generally guaranteed, high office still had to be nominally attained. While all Patricians were considered *nobiles*, the two terms were not synonymous: Patricians were the ‘noblest in the world’ because they belonged to Rome’s oldest families, and had access to the best senatorial positions. *Nobilitas*, on the other hand, depended on the bearer’s ancestor having attained a consulship. Thus, a Plebeian *novus homo* who demonstrated sufficient *virtus* (“manliness, valour, worth”, from *vir*, ‘man’) to be named consul, could introduce hereditary *nobilitas* to his family – even though that family would never be Patrician (37-9; ‘virtue’ n. OED). Apart from a few notable cases, however, notes D.C. Earl, “few men without senatorial ancestors succeeded in reaching the consulship in any age” (Henderson 14; Münzer 16; Earl 18). Thus, here we see two parallel

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⁴ The Roman Republic declined gradually, with a series of civil wars seeing the rise of Julius Caesar as dictator in 44 B.C. and the establishment of an autocratic mode of government by Augustus, who assumed the title of *Princeps Civitatis* (“First Citizen”) in 27 B.C. The historian Catherine Steel traces the beginning of the Republic’s descent into autocratic governance to the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C. (*Roman Republic and Empire*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 152-4; Steel 2).
notions of hereditary privilege: the Patriciate, based around the blood of the ‘first fathers’, and the nobilitas, which defined a hereditary senatorial elite. The interplay of one with another highlights the fact that, in ancient Rome, the twin noble ideals of Blut und Boden were both subject to a higher cause: political power.

Conspicuous display was, to say the very least, as important to the Roman nobiles as it had been to the Greek aristoi. “From the moment the senatorial aristocrat awoke in the morning,” notes Salzmann, “he was concerned with status and its manifestation” (20). Clothes, jewellery, domestic ornaments, appointments, and a carefully selected entourage were carefully choreographed into a nobleman's public image, all regularly paraded through the “ceremonies, rituals, festivals, and holidays” of Patrician-dominated priesthods (20). Only the nobiles, notes Donald E. Brown, were permitted to erect wax imagines (death-masks), which literally exhibited the faces of their family tree. The entrance halls to noble houses were festooned with monuments to ancestral virtues – trophies, mementoes of war, and genealogies (163). “Top drawer families made themselves famous where they could,” notes Henderson, “and arrivistes [novi homines] paid more than lip service to this business by rustling up some fitting past for their domus (household)” (14). Then, of course, there was the instantly recognisable clavus striped tunic, which constantly and publicly proclaimed the wearer’s senatorial status. In addition, Roman nobles followed the Greek tradition of forging genealogies that merged with epic poetry, popularly claiming ancestry from heroes of the Aeneid or Silius’s Punica, as well as recording their family’s illustrious feats on tombstones (14).

Not everyone, however, was as reverent of the nobiles' high status as they might have been themselves. Negative critique of noble culture was, in fact, considerable – much of it calling for the abolition of hereditary privilege altogether. Indeed, traditions of criticising the notion of hereditary privilege have ever been as persistent as noble tradition
itself. Many critical texts that argued against hereditary privilege, such as Juvenal’s ‘Eighth Satire’ written at the turn of the first and second centuries A.D., employed arguments that were still being rehearsed (as will be seen in chapters 3.1 and 3.2) in the anti-noble rhetoric of eighteenth-century England and France. Consider, for instance, this passage from the ‘Satire’ in which Juvenal feigns advice to an aspiring candidate to consulship:

What use are family trees?
…
Why should a Fabius, born in Hercules’ house, take pride
In the great altar and the Gallic title
If he’s altogether more pampered than a Eugânean lamb?
…
Though you deck your hall from end to end with ancient waxes
On either side, virtue is the one and only true nobility
…
Tell me, O scion of the Trojans,
In the case of dumb animals,
Who,
Considers them highly bred unless they are strong?
…
a thoroughbred horse, whatever his pasture, is the one whose speed
takes him clear of the others … ⁵ (Rudd ed. lines 6, 13-15, 19-20, 54-61).

What is perhaps most interesting about Juvenal’s attack on noble culture is his emphasis on the nobles’ physical inadequacy, comparing the “pampered” noble body with the demi-god heroes of their genealogies – and finding them wanting. Indeed, his subsequent likening of noblemen to badly-bred animals places all the more focus on this implied bodily deficiency: their lifestyle has made “lambs” of them, instead of the speeding horses they are expected to be. Such criticisms are telling; for Juvenal, *ideal* nobility (which the contemporary nobles have failed to embody) implies a certain corporeal elevation above

⁵ The comparison of noble genealogy with animal breeding would remain popular with critics of nobility for centuries, and assumed special significance in relation to new ideas of ‘pure breeding’ in eighteenth-century Britain, especially as regarded thoroughbred horses (see chapter 3.2).
others – not just superficially claiming descent from great warriors, but actually manifesting the same discernible valour and virtue as their ancestors.

Even more striking is the grand anti-noble rhetoric of the Plebeian historian Gaius Sallustus Crispus, better known as Sallust, who denounces the nobility’s physical deficiencies in historical accounts such as the *Conspiracy of Cataline* (c. 40-50 B.C.) and *The War against Jugurtha* (41 B.C.). His hagiographical account of the rise of Gaius Marius, one of the most notorious Plebeians to have ever attained a consulship in the second century B.C., demonstrates that a sophisticated intellectual argument against the hegemony of noble culture had already been well formulated by the final years of the Roman Republic. Calling on a vast assembly to support his war effort in the face of noble opposition, Sallust’s Marius makes an impassioned defence of his own status of novus homo:

Now compare now, my fellow citizens, new man that I am, with the arrogance of those nobles. What they knew only from hearsay or from reading, I have either seen or done; what they have learned in books, I have learned in the field of battle … They scorn my humble background, I their insolence … If they [the Patricians] rightly look down on me, let them also despise their own ancestors, whose nobility, like mine, sprang from their virtue … I cannot, to inspire confidence, display the portraits, or triumphs, or consulships of my ancestors … I can show spears, a banner, trappings, and other military honours, not to mention the scars on the front of my body. These are my family portraits; these are my nobility, not bequeathed to me in an inheritance, as theirs was to them, but won by dint of countless toils and perils on my part (*War against Jugurtha* 85.13-30).

Like Juvenal, Sallust’s Marius is not as much denying the essence of nobilitas, as he is re-asserting it as an extra-hereditary value: something to be earned and proved by virtus on the battlefield rather than cultivated in the right company from birth. Indeed, the importance of physical superiority in this ‘true’ nobility is once again stressed through Marius’s battle scars – his body literally is his nobility, since it is the physical sum of his military glory, his human excellence, and his elevation above the greater mass of mankind.
As with Juvenal, Sallust’s emphasis on the fact that hereditary nobles have failed to inherit the super-human bodies of their glorious ancestors implies that a certain degree of physical prowess had been expected of them: the nobles “envy” Marius the “toils”, the “abstinence” and the “perils” by which he has forged his own personal nobilitas, while the “more illustrious” the lives of the Patricians’ ancestors, the more the “decadence” of their existence is brought to light (85.22, 149). Marius’s physical hardiness, then, necessarily impugns their physical deficiencies: he has learnt to “fear nothing save dishonour, to endure winter’s cold and summer’s heat; to sleep on the ground; and to bear hunger and fatigue at the same time”, while they “make love and drink; … spend their age as they did their youth, in banquets, and feasting, slaves to their bellies and their bodies’ basest part” (85.33, 41; 152-3).

Not only does Marius argue that nobles are not as physically impressive as their ancestors, he cleverly undermines their political power by using their own signifiers of social superiority – something he himself is lacking – as evidence of their moral and physical inferiority. “Should [the Patricians] choose to reply to me,” he claims, “there would be any number of fine elaborate speeches they could make”,

My words are without polish; that means very little to me … Nor have I studied Greek literature. I did not care much for a study which did nothing to help its professors attain virtue … They say I am common and uncouth because I do not know the proper arrangements for a smart dinner party … [but] I learned from my father … that elegance suits a woman, toil a man, that every good man should have more glory than money … (85.26, 31, 39; 152).

Marius’s audience, it appears, can plainly tell that he is not a Patrician – not simply because of material indications such as his lack of clothes or slaves, but also because of the manner in which he speaks and acts. The Roman nobility’s passive social attitudes and educational particularities were, it would seem, fundamentally exclusionary tools in themselves. What is yet more interesting is that Sallust has managed to turn these same
mechanisms on their heads – denouncing them, so to speak, as foppery rather than fine manners, mere byproducts of debauchery and luxury. This inversion is played out in the form of the speech itself: Marius’s declaration that he does not need high rhetoric to prove his nobility paradoxically showcases a masterful use of rhetoric – effectively having succeeded in inverting the traditional signifiers of Patrician nobility and Plebeian rusticity. Matching the images of a robust, ‘natural’ human physique against a noble body that has been tainted with an excess of culture, Marius reframes his ignorance of Patrician decorum as proof of greater, original, virtue-based nobility.

Patrician dominance in Rome eventually fell into decline as Rome’s Republic made its gradual transition into Empire. By the time Octavian had assumed the autocratic title Augustus in 27 B.C. a decidedly different balance of power had taken hold in the senate. While a significant number of traditional Patrician families disappeared during the first decades of the Empire, however, the ideals of nobilitas remained central to the imperial elite. In fact, Augustus actively tried to promote the merits of nobility in his reformed senate, aiming to transform it into an assembly of excellence, free of immorality, corruption, and baseness. Some three hundred senatorial offices were abolished during his reign, in an effort to undo the senatorial ‘inflation’ that had taken place during the reign of his great-uncle Julius Caesar, while sanctions were put in place to ensure that all future entrants met the highest requirements of nobilitas. The senate was now reserved for members who were worth over one million sesterces, as opposed to the previous ‘equestrian’ limit of 400,000 (Bowman et al. 325). Likewise, the latus clavus tunic would now only be authorised for senators whose fathers had been senators before them – novi homines were not permitted to wear it. And, perhaps most tellingly, third-generation senators and their families were now legally defined as a “class” who were granted social and electoral privileges, and, so as to maintain the dignity of the upper orders, were
during their respective rules, Caesar (49-44 B.C.), Augustus (27 B.C.-14 A.D.), Claudius (41-54 A.D.) and Vespasian (69-79 A.D.) all tried to revive the dying ranks of the Patricians by creating new Patrician families – a process which, ironically, involved the large-scale elevation of Plebeian nobles to Patrician rank, thus distancing the senatorial elite further than ever from the supposed ‘first fathers’ of Rome (Gibbon 2.164). Even these ‘new’ Patricians, however, did not last: by the fourth century A.D., the emperor Constantine was re-introducing the title of ‘Patrician’ as a life-honour rather than a hereditary rank (2.165). Yet if Constantine’s empire saw the end of one manifestation of Roman nobility, it heralded the introduction of another – a nobility that would claim precedence not only from the blood of glorious ancestors and righteous upbringing, but from the hand of a Christian God.

As with that of Ancient Greece, the vocabulary of Roman hereditary privilege – noble, nobility, patrician – bears witness to some of its most lasting concepts of hereditary privilege. While the ghostly patres of the Patricians consolidated the importance of glorious bloodlines and ancient warrior stock, the ideals of nobilitas introduced a strikingly practical dimension to noble culture. If the excellence or arete of the ancient Greeks was reinvented in the idea of Roman virtus, then nobilitas inducted it into a purely political scheme of precedence: the blood-legacy of consulship, unlike the legacy of warrior ancestors, thereby granted the hereditary elite a claim to the most relevant centre of power in Roman society. Furthermore, by offering hereditary status to the sons of consuls, nobilitas ensured the continuous and self-perpetuating dominance of high officials – assimilating new blood wealth, while overwhelmingly favouring existing political
dynasties. Perhaps the most important influence that the Roman nobility would have on eighteenth-century Britain, however, was their self-styled position as a fundamental building block of government: a ruling caste, born and bred for their positions and standing as a formidable force between the mighty emperor and the anarchic masses.

1.1.2: Nobility in Early Christianity and Anglo-Saxon England

The Gospel of Matthew's aphorism that it would be "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" made it clear that the wealth-proud, materialistic, exclusionary traditions of the nobiles in fourth-century Rome were scarcely compatible with incoming doctrines of Christianity (Matt. 19:24). Nevertheless, by 370 A.D. there were already several Christians in the Roman senate (D. Brown 103). In fact, notes Salzmann, as more and more noblemen began turning to Christianity, it was the Christian doctrine, and not the noble tradition, that would gradually learn to adapt. After all, Matthew’s Gospel also recommended that the rich gain access to heaven by giving up their riches, and it was through the celebration of ‘charity’ that the Roman elite found a way to reconcile their society’s economic inequalities with the tenets of their new faith. Michele Renée Salzmann notes that some of the most influential figures of Roman Christianity made concerted efforts to promote the idea of charity as a path to salvation for the rich – transforming the corrupt nature of wealth into something more sanitary, pure, and even divine. "You have money, redeem your sin,” implored St Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the fourth-century, “The hand is not venal, but you are venal ... redeem yourself with your works, redeem yourself with your money" (De Elia et Jejunio 1.9.29, qtd in Salzmann 206). St Jerome, a contemporary of Ambrose, also used the idea of
JEROME SUGGESTS an early form of hereditary nobility to illustrate the spiritual ‘elevation’ of a Christian convert. In a letter of 406 to the nobleman Julian, he explains that Christian nobles have a distinct advantage over their pagan contemporaries: “You are of noble birth, so are they […] but in Christ, they are made nobler still”. Quite simply, claims Salzmann, “Jerome confers a higher nobilitas on those who already possess a conventional aristocratic ‘nobility’ of family and office” (Letters of Saint Jerome no. 66, qtd in Salzmann 215). Jerome even managed to introduce Roman-style nobility into the founding texts of Christianity: his Vulgate Bible contains eighteen instances of the term nobilis in the Old Testament, seven in the New Testament, and eleven in the apocryphal books of the Maccabees (J. Nelson 44). Indeed, the spiritual and moral benefits of charity seem to have been understood by many as a sort of promotion in spiritual rank. Salzmann draws attention to the remarkable epitaph of the fourth-century nobleman Probus, inscribed on a marble column behind the altar of St Peter’s, which interprets heavenly salvation in terms of augmented social distinction:

Noble titles you rose above when, in time, you received the gift of Christ. This is your true office, this is your nobility. Previously you rejoiced in the honour of the royal table … Now, closer to Christ … you enjoy a new light …[you] are now a dweller in unaccustomed mansions … [the late Probus] lives in the eternal abode of Paradise … [he] put on the new garments of his heavenly duty (456).

The language of pagan social hierarchy here dominates the very understanding of salvation: Probus’s entrance into eternal life is directly comparable to the mortal honours of the royal table, with ‘closeness’ to royalty echoed by closeness to Christ. Probus, it seems, had reached the zenith of social prestige on earth, and his experience in Paradise was in many ways an accession to the next hierarchical stage, complete with new and better mansions, and new and better togas. This induction of Christianity into noble tradition, interestingly, could work both ways: by the fifth century, nobilitas had effectively become a status held by churchmen, rather than a secular rank (216).

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6 Salzmann refers this citation to Brian Croke and Jill Harries, Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome (1982, 117).
St Augustine was probably the most authoritative of the fifth-century voices to make a case for nobility within the Christian religion. His *City of God Against the Pagans* (c. 411 A.D.) entered the Western canon as a grand defence of Christianity against Roman nobles who blamed the new religion for the sacking of the capital in 410 (Augustine, Dyson ed. xii). Augustine’s seminal philosophical construct of two cities – one earthly and one divine – re-imagined traditional Roman citizenship as part of a greater divine plan (Wiser 97-9). The state itself is re-positioned as a postlapsarian product of sin, rather than the natural extension of human society that had been put forth in the *polis* tradition of Plato and Aristotle. All earthly power, then, good or bad, had to be understood as divinely ordained. In this way, nobles were held ultimately accountable to God, while also being offered a justification for their own positions as privileged elite: this, claimed Augustine, was simply how the maker had designed the world. “To some,” he writes in Book 5 of the *City of God*, “[God] grants powers, and to others he does not. For just as he is the creator of all natures, so he is the giver of all powers” (5.9, 202). Though Man is free to do as he pleases, his freewill is nonetheless subject to the “sovereign guidance” of Divine Providence – that is to say, God always “moves our wills” to his liking (McCann 6§2). Thus, when God cursed a people with a bad ruler, it was, according to Augustine, to be seen as a punishment upon his subjects; likewise, a good ruler was to be seen as a reward. To support this argument, Augustine pointed to the *Book of Proverbs* 8:15, “By me kings reign and tyrants possess the land”, as well as *Job* 34:30, “He maketh the man who is a hypocrite to reign by reason of the people’s wickedness” (5.19, 224). Ideal rulers, he suggests, if people are fortunate enough to be blessed with them, “make their power the handmaid of his majesty by using it for the greatest possible extension of his worship” (5.24, 232).
As will be further explored in chapter 1.3.1, Augustine’s vindication of rulers as divinely chosen fed into a growing philosophical conceit that would become one of the defining elements of the Christian worldview: the idea of universal order. “Order is the government of all things put in place by God” he wrote in *De Ordine* (‘On Order’) just after his conversion in 386 (Bk 1, 9.27-10.29). Though a “savage” or a “public executioner” were some of the most terrible elements in human society, they were nonetheless essential for the balance of that society. “What is filthier, uglier, and more disgraceful than whores … [?]” he asks his readers; “remove prostitutes from the social order, however, and lust will destroy it. Let them rise to the same status as married women, and you will dishonour matrimony with an unseemly stain” (Bk 2, 4.12 – 50.13). Nobility, likewise, was not just God-given, but was implicated in a greater system of universal order that made it essential to society as a whole. Thus, Augustine’s ordo carved out a philosophical niche for Roman-style nobility in the Christian tradition, yet it also deeply affected the concept of *nobilitas*. Senatorial nobles had heretofore claimed *nobilitas* by virtue of family and high office, but now the possession of either of these attributes had to be understood as a divine gesture. Distinctions between Plebeian and Patrician, Christian and Pagan, were all subject to a greater plan – now, one attained *nobilitas* because God had decided as much. No matter who ascended to the political elite, be they Plebeian or Patrician, pagan or Christian, it was ultimately an expression of divine will: “he who gave power to Marius,” declares Augustine, “also gave it to Gaius Caesar … He who gave it to Christian Constantine also gave it to the apostate Julian” (5.22). The divinely ordered hierarchy of Christianity, claims Janet L. Nelson, came to incorporate “traditional Roman notions of family, rank, and office”, not only investing *nobilitas* with a new spiritual dimension, but also emphasising its virtues of “self discipline and (if in a new sense) public-spiritedness” (43-4). Indeed, the idea of a divinely chosen elite would far outlive the
Roman nobility themselves, enduring for centuries as one of the cornerstones of hereditary privilege in Christian Europe.

Long after the decline of the Roman Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries, the idea of *nobilitas* lived on as an ecclesiastical concept, no longer delineated as a ‘rank’ through processions and ritual, but incorporated into a sense of divine organisation and spiritual hierarchy (Duby 1978, 95). By the reign of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), the Augustinian vision of Christian order, permeated as it was with Roman traditions of *nobilitas*, had been disseminated throughout the Christian World, not least in early-medieval England. Indeed, an eighth-century sermon by the Wessex missionary St Boniface demonstrates the degree to which *ordo* could combine the tradition of stratified economic castes with the philosophical tenets of Divine Providence. In the Christian Church, he declared, there was: “an *ordo* of rulers, another of subjects; one of rich, another of poor men”. Each had its own role to play in society, “just as each member has its own office in the body” (*Sermo* IX PL 89, qtd and trans. in J.H. Burns ed. 263). Ordo, explains historian Georges Duby, had by this time become synonymous with *gradus*: “Les pasteurs du peuple fidèle considérèrent qu’il existe parmi les hommes DES ordres, divers … Qu’il sied d’ordonner les laïcs selon des dignités, des rangs, puisque, en raison de leurs mérites, certains sont élevés au-dessus des autres” (96).

In Anglo-Saxon England, of course, systems of hierarchical order had long pre-dated Christianity. Hereditary rulership traditions in England, notes Paul Fouracre, as in the rest of the former imperial provinces, had probably been significantly influenced by Roman model, though the relative dearth of property records prior to the eighth century makes the extent of this influence difficult to gauge (19). Nonetheless, in early medieval

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7 “Nam alius ordo praepositorum est, alius subitorum; alius divitum, alius pauperum ... sicut unumquodque membrum habet suum proprium in corpore officium” (J.H. Burns ed, 263).
8 “The shepherds of the faithful flock believed that there were several orders among men … they deemed it appropriate to order laymen according to dignities and ranks, for merit raised some people above others …” (trans. Goldhammer, 73).
England “the emergence of an elite – a nobility – and a language to describe it, can be readily discerned”, and is accompanied by a considerable catalogue of hierarchical titles such as “ænlic, eorlic, hlāfordlic, pesnlic (lordly, noble) … æpel (noble condition, based on birth) … weorp (honoured) …aldorpesn (senior, noble), pesn (noble)…” delineating a complex system of precedence that was based in part on birth and in part on military feats (Anne J. Duggan ed. 4). Elite burials from the sixth century onward provide evidence that certain families were honoured above others, while this same period witnesses the emergence of under-kings and local potentates in written documents (Lapidge et al. 424). Some of the earliest surviving compensation laws make clear distinctions between the retribution owed to slaves, freemen and a ‘seigniorial class’, and though early elites probably rose to power through war, claims Michael Lapidge, by the eleventh century “the possession of land became one of the definers of social rank” (424). Indeed, the possession of land was both a deciding factor in military success and a consequence of that success, with acreage often being awarded by monarchs in return for loyalty in battle. Thus, by the time the territories of the Danelaw and the West Saxons were unified in the tenth century, “a few outstanding families within the major landowners became established as earls, with control over areas as large as Kent or East Anglia …” (Lapidge 424). According to great Anglo-Saxon surveys such as the Domesday Book and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, intermarriage between these families seems to have been generally expected (P. A. Clarke 13, 119). It is interesting to note that the Roman concept of nobilitas seems to have survived in certain circles as a potential complement to Anglo-Saxon hierarchy: in the witness lists of the court of Edward the Confessor between 1042 and 1061, the pesn Beorhtric, is denominated by the Roman titles of nobilis and consilarius – probably, suggests Peter A. Clarke, because of the vastness of his estate (133).
As in Greek and Roman manifestations of hereditary nobility, both documentary and archeological evidence support the idea that conspicuous display was central to social status in the Anglo-Saxon world. Residences, weaponry and military paraphernalia were at the centre of elite symbolism, with swords probably being limited to the upper ranks (Crawford 32). Helmets and armour too, such as were discovered at the Sutton Hoo burial site, seem to have been highly symbolic. Simple helmets, notes Sally Crawford, would have been made out of leather, while a high-ranking warrior would have worn a metal one, along with a layer of chain mail (33). The presence of such expensive armour in the graves of young children and the elderly suggest that the social significance of such items was perhaps more important than direct connotations of military glory (Crawford 36). Like Roman nobilitas, too, Anglo-Saxon nobility needed to be ‘re-enacted’ with each successive generation – though this was accomplished through military feats rather than political office. The nobles that are awarded military titles in Beowulf (traditionally dated to c. 1000) for instance, notes Anne J. Duggan, represent “an aristocracy of war” that is always underlain with “the recognition of birthright … the obligations that attach to ‘noble’ birth” (4). Indeed, the warrior’s high birth seems to have stood as one of his main motivations for military glory in Anglo-Saxon society, asserting his family’s historical supremacy through war, and thus maintaining the image of the family itself as a glorious entity. In fact, some Anglo-Saxon interpretations of nobility as a physical, recognisable characteristic of the body bear remarkable similarities to Greek and Roman traditions of corporeal nobility. In Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People (731), for instance, a work that was widely read throughout Europe during the eighth century, the historian recounts the story of the nobleman, Imma, who was cut down in battle and captured by enemy soldiers. Fearing for his life, Imma lies to his captors: he claims to be a simple peasant, with a wife at home, who had come to the battlefield only to bring food to the soldiers. Though the
story is initially believed, suspicions about Imma’s origins are soon aroused. Peasant though he may be, notices the (noble) gesith, no fetters will bind this man’s feet (this is, incidentally, on account of the prayers of his priestly brother). After some time spent in captivity,

those who watched [Imma] closely realised by his appearance, his bearing, and his speech that he was not of common stock as he had said, but of noble family. Then the gesith called him aside and asked him very earnestly to declare his origin … the prisoner did so, revealing that he had been one of the King’s thegns. The gesith answered ‘I realised by every one of your answers that you were not a peasant… (4.22, 403).

Imma is no more able to disguise his nobility than Laertes, Odysseus’s father, had been able to do so in the Iliad. Likewise, his social rank translates in his very attitude and comportment, just as Sallust’s Marius had instantly betrayed his Plebeian status by his manner and accent. Furthermore, Imma’s recognition by the gesith, his social equal, underlines the decidedly persistent trope of a noble quality – a subtle, but recognisable dimension of human identity which, in this text as in others, is apparently undetectable by the non-noble.

The accommodation of hereditary nobility in Christian tradition not only ensured the survival of this ancient pattern of precedence under monotheism, it fundamentally shaped the development of Christianity itself. The idea of divine order gave theological legitimacy to the Roman ranks of nobilitas, but also established a sense of universality to European elites. The pesns of Anglo-Saxon England could, via Christian doctrine, be conceptually grouped with the Patricians of ancient Rome (not least in the occasional adoption of Roman titles, as above) because both had ultimately been ordained to rule by the will of God. This development of an intimate relationship between moral and social hierarchies gave the tradition of nobility a set of quasi-religious characteristics that would become one
its most recognisable aspects. Furthermore, it established the notion of superior bloodlines as something more than an indication of illustrious ancestors: it was proof of a certain social, political and, above all, spiritual distinction.

1.1.3: Feudalism, Knighthood, and the Division of French and English Nobility

“If one wished to sketch a picture of the nobility which would remain valid for the whole of the Middle Ages,” suggests Timothy Reuter, “one would have to confine it to a few characteristics: in particular the importance of blood” (190). Indeed, insofar as nobility remained a hereditary honour, blood was one of the few stable elements of elite culture during this time. Feudal society (a term which has been derived from the medieval practice of holding _feudum_ , or fiefs) witnessed a decided shift in the concept of Western nobility, both semantically and practically speaking. It is not insignificant that the French term ‘noble’ became largely absorbed into the vocabulary of the Church during the early feudal age, only to re-emerge as a moniker for “the elite of wealthy, powerful, and endogamous families” in the thirteenth century (Evergates 12). This did not only reflect the growing importance of ecclesiastical hierarchies, but also the changing nature of lay elites: across Europe, religious or custom-based hereditary rulers were giving way to a network of warring feudal lords, for whom the demonstrable qualities of military lifestyle overshadowed the more ‘essential’ and indeed legal nature of _nobilitas_. ‘Order’, certainly, continued to regulate social groupings, but this was a hierarchy of doing, rather than being; a society of three great estates: those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked. This is not to say, however, that concordant ideas of _nobilitas_ entirely disappeared during the Middle Ages – rather they were made subject to a different social order,
wherein senates and Patricians were replaced by embattled keeps and bands of private retainers. Hereditary privilege would become a function of military power, and its attendant discourse of nobility would have to adapt accordingly.

The enduring symbol of military hierarchy in feudal France and England was the knight – a figure whose strict codes of conduct and relentless training for the battlefield makes for a striking contrast to the hereditary politicians of ancient Rome. Indeed, the knight’s constant obligation to prove himself a worthy warrior had direct implications for the idea of hereditary privilege: by the eleventh century, knighthood had been well established as a hereditary honour, but birth alone was not sufficient to grant privilege – just as a Roman Patrician had to ‘complete’ his nobilitas with a high senatorial office, and an Anglo-Saxon pesn with military glory, a knight’s heir could only claim his title if he devoted himself to a life of knightly duties. For certain families, thus, knighthood could potentially offer the opportunity for social mobility, but since such a vocation required a significant reserve of expendable income, it was largely restricted to those of ‘allodial’ (propertied) backgrounds (Donald E. Brown 190). Concordantly, knighthood was not synonymous with the notion of nobility this time, which continued to exist alongside chivalric tradition as “a community of well-born, from which the highest office holders, both lay and ecclesiastic, were recruited” (Evergates 17). According to Marc Bloch, one of the most influential twentieth-century theorists of Feudal society, the exact parameters of the community referred to as nobilis between the ninth and eleventh century had become highly variable and had no precise legal definition: “Il se bornait à marquer ... une prééminence de fait ou d’opinion, selon des critères presque chaque fois variables. Il comporte, presque toujours, l’idée d’une distinction de naissance ; mais aussi celle d’une
By the later years of the eleventh century, however, noble identity was becoming increasingly bound up with the brand of protectionist authority provided by vassalage. Indeed, as Bloch pointed out, the knight’s way of life was creating a new kind of rank distinction between the powerful rich and the dependant poor; since a life devoted to military activity ruled out any direct engagement in economic activity, a professional warrior lived, by definition, on the labour of other men (403). And this, claimed Bloch, fundamentally underlay the evolution of medieval nobility: through the culture of military vassalage, the very concept of nobility was transformed, from a passive, inherent quality to an active vocation – from the old idea of a “race sacrée” to the new concept of “noblesse par genre de vie” (403).

With the Norman Conquest of England in the eleventh century, the diverse Anglo-Saxon network of local potentates was violently reorganised into a drastically smaller and more centralised elite – separated from the rest of society not only by its lifestyle, but also its use of an alien language (Warren 57). Nevertheless, though the Conquest revolutionised the very idea of rulership in England, the titles of the conquering elite betray the emergence of a particularly English brand of Norman nobility. Indeed, brutal as the Conquest had been, English territory was nonetheless the locus of considerable cultural hybridity, not least in the idea of local rulership. Important epithets such as duc and baron came to exist side by side with more senior Anglo-Saxon titles at this time, with hlaford becoming ‘lord’, hlæfidinge becoming ‘lady’, þegn turning to ‘thane’ and eorl to earl (Roberts 83). Indeed, this hybridity of noble hierarchy reflects the very particular political circumstances of that hierarchy in a freshly conquered England – circumstances which would fundamentally alter its structure from that of Norman France.

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9 “Nobility] simply indicated an actual or an accepted pre-eminence, in accordance with a variety of criteria. Almost invariably it involved the idea of a certain distinction of birth; but it also implied a measure of wealth” (Bloch, Manyon trans. 350).
The vast new tracts of English land that came with the conquest were a source of constant turbulence for the Norman landed elite, leading to bloody usurpations and depositions as well as a mass of new title creations and hereditary claims (Green 126, 143). Thus, it was the possession and retention of land that came to dictate the progression of hereditary power, with the more dominant families constantly aspiring to expand their territory. By consequence, and following from Anglo-Saxon traditions, England developed a peculiarly small and diverse elite body, whose power was directly concordant with their landed wealth: at the top was the greatly reduced rank of earls and barons, who held dominion over vast swathes of the country; these were followed by an oligarchy of “manorial lords, of warriors or chieftains, of royal officials and of ‘knights of the shore’”, followed by those who possessed just enough ‘allods’ to perform knightly services (Bloch 52; Green 198). In France, on the other hand, relative political stability meant that bloodline, rather than land, had remained the most important element of noble power. The emergence of the continental *patriciat urbain*, whose members used commercial wealth to buy manors and aspire to knighthoods, re-emphasised the practicality of restricting elite positions to traditionally elite families (Bloch 447). Furthermore, as militarily-based knighthood gradually fell into a gradual decline, the instance that it be ‘re-performed’ in each generation declined with it (447). Whereas traditionally a knight had been forbidden from inheriting his father’s title if he did not assume the duties of a knight himself, by the end of the thirteenth century the increased prestige of birth alone meant that these requirements were largely disregarded (Bloch 453). France, in the thirteenth century, thus came to favour a legally defined concept of nobility, with birthright at its very core; French nobles were banned from trade, and integrated into a juridical system of regulation: the so-called ‘letters of nobility’.
This early divergence between French and English styles of hereditary elitism during the feudal age had a profound effect on their development during the following centuries. In England, with property persisting as the primary source of power, the country’s elite grew to rely on certain inheritance strategies that worked towards the security and expansion of these properties. The most notable of these strategies was, of course, the practice of primogeniture, which prevented large holdings from being divided into smaller ones through inheritance, while facilitating their potential for expansion (234). Similarly, the large-scale adoption of toponymic names, generally referring to one’s largest estate, identified certain family lines with whole parcels of the countryside. As a consequence, by the fourteenth century, the top end of the English hierarchy was dominated by a tiny network of barons and earls, whose disproportionate property holdings made them the most powerful members of the lay elite, as well as some of the most influential figures for the royal council. Conversely, the lesser landowners, despite their distinctions of birth, found themselves on a much lower political tier — firmly kept at the periphery of a power mechanism that was ultimately controlled by the extraordinarily wealthy. England had thus established the seeds of two traditions that marked its hereditary elite out as unique in Western Europe: on the one hand, there was the ‘peerage’ (a word which first described the political elite in the Rolls of Parliament of 1454) — a small and exclusive network of wealthy families who had intimate connections to the royal court and could claim the highest honours of noble privilege — and on the other hand there was the ‘gentry’ (which would be used to express ‘high birth’ in English, at least since its utterance by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath in 1384) — a large and heterogeneous rank of landowners who, while maintaining a sense of their own ‘gentle birth’, were nonetheless socially and politically subordinate (‘peerage’ n., ‘gentry n.’ OED). That is to say, feudal English government established the framework for a two-tiered elite that at once shared a culture of
hereditary landed privilege, and were yet divided by a profound chasm of rank. As Bloch has observed: “de s’être ainsi maintenue tout près des réalités qui font le vrai pouvoir sur les hommes, d’avoir échappé à l’ankylose qui guette les classes trop bien délimitées et trop dépendantes de la naissance, l’aristocratie anglaise tira, sans doute, le meilleur d’une force qui devait traverser les âges” (460).

One common element in the feudal societies of England and France was the corporeal ideal of knighthood, which gave renewed significance to the elite body as an instrument of military excellence. Tombs dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries offer a particularly insightful vision of the archetypical knightly physique: regardless of the age or condition of the interred, their effigies invariably present a forever-young human of perfect proportions, pristine armour and muscular limbs. Many portrayed their subject in a battle pose, turning to strike an enemy or in the action of unsheathing his sword (Lawrence James points to the mid-thirteenth-century knight of Dorchester Abbey as a prime example of this trend; 2004, 118). Yet, it must also be remembered that the symbolic importance of the warrior physique was reinforced by the very real, and very imposing, physical presence of a well-fed, highly trained vassal – especially when equipped with the impressive regalia of medieval warfare. James suggests that the combination of a carnivorous diet and relentless physical exercise would have given the high-medieval nobility a significantly grander stature than that of the hungry, stunted field-workers who farmed their food. “Knights were not just taller and stronger than their inferiors,” notes James, “Popular chivalric romances constantly drew attention to [their] fine features and complexions …” (2009, 25). The remains of a fourteenth-century Knight of the Garter, Bartholomew de Burghersh, he notes, revealed a robust and muscle-bound man of five feet and ten inches, considerably taller than most of his non-noble

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{It was mainly by keeping close to the practical things which give real power over men and avoiding the paralysis that overtakes social classes which are too sharply defined and too dependent on birth that the English aristocracy acquired the dominant position it retained for centuries” (Bloch, Manyon ed. 405).}\]
contemporaries. Horst Fuhrmann, in his analysis of German noble burials, has come to similar conclusions. The exhumations of eleventh- and twelfth-century Salian mausoleums in Komburg discovered entire noble families whose members who were close to six feet tall (10). He also found that the average age of death for a German king was somewhere close to fifty years, while the statistics for common people in the same region display an average lifespan of between fourteen and twenty years. Aside from a relatively comfortable lifestyle and nutritional regime, Timothy Reuter has suggested that the striking anatomical differences between elite and common physiques were also the product of brutally exclusionary traditions within noble families. Promoting the idea of nobles as particularly beautiful and healthy, he claims, was part of the noble “equipment” for which to “express and actualise their dominance”; members who did not fit this description, therefore, were routinely hidden from public view. Monasteries, notes Reuter, were “a dumping ground for the old, and physically and mentally disabled members of aristocratic families … by literally shutting ‘imperfect’ members of their family away from view aristocrats collectively preserved a social image of themselves as different from others … exempt from such scourges” (90).

The feudal idea of nobility represents both a break in the European noble tradition and an essential medium for its continuity. With its focus on war and military glory, it re-imagined the rank of nobility as an active caste of warrior princelings, ultimately at the service of their monarch and thus to God. Concurrently, it allowed for the advancement of hereditary privilege – and of the idea of the lineal family itself – in a world without senates or ancestral patres. Adapting to the culture of vassals and knighthood, nobility found new expression in the dominant elite – where it was land and conquest, rather than renown that made a family great. Most importantly, the Middle Ages shaped the very foundations of
the English (and later the British) parliament, establishing ranks and honours that would characterise English monarchs, lords, and commons for the next five hundred years. Though the elite of England would soon look again to the example of Rome, the influence of feudal hierarchy had left an indelible mark on the physical and cultural landscape of the country, profoundly influencing the direction of its history.
1.2: Performing Pure Blood: Discourses of Noble Authority in Early modern Britain.

1.2.1: Renaissance England: ‘Performing’ Hereditary Privilege in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

Before exploring developments in noble traditions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is worth first reviewing one of the period’s most influential texts: Baldassare Castiglione’s *Cortegiano* (1508 – 28). Averaging at one new edition a year for over ninety years after its initial publication, the *Cortegiano* was one of the most widely read books of the century, and became widely accessible to an English-speaking readership in 1561 with Tomas Hoby’s translation, *The Book of the Courtier* (Burke 15). The narrative recounts a gathering of young nobles at the court of Urbino, where they discuss what makes for an ideal courtier. Noble blood is of course one the courtiers’ primary concerns, but so too is the a mastery of languages, physical condition, sporting prowess, artistic, and musical skills, and sense of self-presentation. Count Lewis of Canosse, for his part, stresses the importance of noble ancestors: “Nature in everye thing hath deeply sowed that privie seed …” he argues, “and maketh it like unto her selfe” (31-2). Good generally comes from good, he contends, as in graft cuttings from trees, or “in the race of horses and other beastes”. Any fault in such ‘husbandry’, he continues, must be the fault of “the husbandman” (32). The highest-born nobles are so well formed – that is, they are of such good stock – that Lewis questions whether any further cultivation is necessary. One of his acquaintances, he recalls, the young Lord Hippolytus, “hath had so happy a birth” that even the ancient prelates considered him an authority, so much “he were more meete to teache, than needfull to learne” (33). In addition to this superior ‘material’ quality of the
nobly born, Lewis asserts that they possess a unique moral obligation; the wellborn will naturally wish to honour their ancestors with virtuous behaviour in a way that the non-noble never can. Moreover, noble birth instantly wins the respect of common people, allowing for the full and immediate realisation of a courtier’s potential (34-5).

What is most remarkable about Lewis’s contribution to the discussion, however, is his recommendation that a courtier study the art of *sprezzatura*, which Hoby translates as ‘grace’. Simply put, this is the art of feigning natural talent. Though a courtier is expected to put a great deal of time and study into his many skills, he must nonetheless make it seem that “whatsoever he doth and saith, to do it without paine, and (as it were) not minding it … Therefore that may be saide to be a verie [veritable] arte, that appears not to be arte, neither ought a man to put more diligence in any thing …” (46). It follows that the most important skill for a nobleman to study is the art of making it seem as if he has never studied at all. This idea is echoed in the very structure of Castiglione’s narrative: the Italian nobles, supposedly possessed of the merits of a courtier, are essentially discussing how the role, and its ostensibly inherent features, should be best *performed*. With its attendant sentiment of *sprezzatura*, claims David M. Posner, the *Book of the Courtier* exposes the noble culture as a “kind of multilayered deception”. Nobles must put an enormous amount of effort into persuading their audience of “a noble identity, which – if it actually were what it claims to be – would need no rhetorical help to impose its intrinsic veracity…” (12).

In light of the chapter 1.1.3, the theatrical precepts of the *sprezzatura* nobleman are all the more remarkable. How, exactly, had the functions of nobility been so transformed? How, in the space of a few short generations, had a legion of knights – warriors whose very tombs portrayed them in the throes of war – developed into a rank that was judged on the ability to sing, or dance, or swordfight, or indeed to act as if
singing, dancing and sword-fighting were second nature to them? How, in short, had the knight become a courtier? According to the ‘civilising process’ theory of Norbert Elias, this emergence of a ‘court society’ in fifteenth-century Europe was the consequence of hereditary privilege following a shifting source of cultural authority. “The concept of civilité,” claims Elias in his On the Process of Civilisation: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations (1939) “acquired its meaning for Western society at a time when knightly society and the unity of the Catholic Church were disintegrating” (21). The increased emphasis on courtesy and proper conduct among the European elite during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, he suggested, came in response to more extensive systems of social and military organisation. In place of local warlords with private retainers, the nobilities of England and France were now being integrated into more modern methods of warfare – “a Europe-wide revolution in military technology, requiring much larger forces, centrally mobilised and supplied …” (Adamson ed. 15). Concordantly, high birth and noble rank were increasingly characterised as elements of government, rather than war – a “domain of councils, dominated by a new bureaucratic cadre, the noblesse de robe, and their ilk” (15). The royal courts of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries replaced the battlefield as the most prominent locus of noble display, and accordingly they offered entirely new opportunities for social mobility and political influence. In this world, the violence of conflict and allegiance could be expressed through the minutiae of comportment and debate, and the power of the sword could be subsumed into the arts of rhetoric and gesture. Likewise, the court presented a fresh medium of rank vindication – an arena for the non-noble to compete with the noble and indeed for the nobility to enforce the limits of what was noble and what was not. This move from the battlefield to the court, claims Elias, doubly reinforced the ranks of noble hierarchy, and their system of signifiers. “Societies without a stable monopoly of force”, he asserts, as had
been the manorial lordships of feudal England and France, “are always societies in which
the division of functions is relatively slight”; societies in which the monopoly of force has
reached a certain degree of stability, however, are “embodied in a large princely or royal
court, in which the chains of action binding individuals together are longer and the
functional dependencies between people greater” (408).

At court, brute force could no longer be employed as a definitive declaration of
power; instead, strength had to be expressed through displays of restraint. The way one
blew one’s nose or wiped one’s mouth steadily began to acquire a hierarchical
significance, nourishing a new and decorous discourse of ‘civility’ – a delicate
choreography of self-control that instantly communicated ideas of rank, family and
political power. Elias notes an exemplary instance of emergent civility in the use of what
might seem a definately unpretentious object – the fork. Unlike the knife, which in itself
imported the weaponry of the battlefield to the domestic sphere, the fork was an
unnecessary element of a medieval meal – standing in as an arbitrary substitute for the
fingers. Indeed, the use of forks only became widespread during the emergence of court
society toward the end of the fifteenth century. It was, claims Elias, an instrument of pure
restraint, acting only as an added and conspicuous barrier between the food and its
consumer. And it was the constant, quotidian display of restraint such as this, he suggests,
that codified the medieval hierarchy of physical power into a Renaissance discourse of
civility – a translation of physical force into a ‘conspicuous’ restraint of the mind (126).

Indeed, there is no better example of this softening of governmental authority than
the rising popularity of clever, nuanced, political theory – particularly nourished by newly
discovered texts from the ancient world. In The Boke of Noblesse of 1475, for example, the
English chronicler William Worcester, lamented the contrast between the contemporary
London court, and the “vaillaunt Romayns”, who, if they had “sufferd theire sonnes to
mysspende theire tyme in suche singuler practik”, would not have conquered “Cartage ayenst alle the Affricans” (78). Henry VI’s recent war with Normandy had been lost, he claimed, because those “descendid of noble bloode” were no longer adequately trained in the military arts (Worcester 77; Hughes 26). The “sonnes of princes [and] lordis” he repined, had abandoned “usage of scole of armes” to embark instead on “singuler practik [and] straunge [faculteeȝ]” – namely the study of the law and an engagement with shireholdings and court sessions (77). They had forsaken their high vocation, in short, only to “embrace and rule among youre pore and simple comyns of bestialle contenaunce that lust to lyve in rest” (77). Of course, by virtue of the fact that Worcester uses the example of Roman civilisation to denounce contemporary court society, he is betraying himself as a member of that very society. For, the study of ancient history was itself a conspicuous benefit of a relatively leisured life at court, while a growing interest in Greek and Roman political theory reflected the escalating importance of diplomacy and ‘soft power’ for courtiers like Worcester. In fact, the “new and almost dithyrambic worship of all things ancient” which began to permeate the cultural landscape of England during the fifteenth century, had been largely promulgated by those of Worcester’s own circle (Hughes 1). One of his direct superiors, the First Duke of Bedford, is largely credited with bringing classical learning across the English Channel. During his time as Regent of France during the English conquest of Normandy, Bedford had been astonished by Charles V’s French translations of Livy, Cicero, Seneca and Aristotle and imported the first ancient texts to the London Court. From there, the texts were introduced to “households” of courtiers by figures such as Sir John Fastolf (an inspiration for Shakespeare’s Falstaff), to be studied, discussed, and advanced by groups of young nobles not unlike those of the Cortigiano (26).
The historical chronicles and political commentary of Ancient Greece and Rome offered up an extensive new catalogue of test cases for would-be Renaissance politicians, where the causes and outcomes of constitutional formulae could be meticulously scrutinised, and the various claims of social ranks could be weighed against each other. Niccolo Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* (1531, *Discourses on Livy*), which argued in favour of social unrest and war instead of peace and stability, was one of the most striking examples of how the authority of ancient texts could be used to transform hegemonic perspectives on government. Machiavelli directly compares ancient Rome and Sparta to their modern ‘equivalents’, Rome and Venice. In Sparta, as in Venice, he suggests, a hereditary and socially privileged nobility could be maintained in relative peace, since in these small, unambitious cities “there was an equal poverty … nor did the nobles, by treating them [the Plebeians] badly, ever give them the desire to hold rank … the Plebs neither had not feared rule, the rivalry that it could have had with the nobility was taken away” (21). Thus, rule by the few could be maintained peacefully, and this, claimed Machiavelli, was an ideal situation as long as it could be maintained. For truly ambitious states, however, constant discord between social ranks was not only inevitable, it was desirable. The violent disputes that periodically arose between Rome’s Patrician and Plebeian ranks were, in his view, an essential element to the success of a great city. Having conquered vast swathes of land, it was inevitable that the elite should desire to keep its attendant power for themselves, and that the jealous underclasses should desire to take it from them. And it is this situation, ultimately, that Machiavelli concludes to be preferable: “I believe it is necessary to follow the Roman order … ” he claims, “and to tolerate the enmities that arise between the people and the senate, taking them as an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness”

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11 The *Discourses* and *The Prince* (1532) were not officially published in English until 1636, possibly because they had been banned. Complete translations, however, were circulated in manuscript form, and Allesandra Petrina notes that the correspondences of English courtiers prove that Machiavelli’s works were being read in English as early as the 1530s. The above translation is from the definitive modern edition by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Petrina 16-17; France ed. 485).
With great empire came great riches, and with great riches came great jealousy; a disproportionately wealthy and socially exclusive nobility, therefore, was the unfortunate side-effect of a successful state, as was a discontented and envious commonality. In the end, remarks J. G. A. Pocock, for Machiavelli “the disunion and strife among nobles and people was the cause of Rome’s attaining liberty, stability, and power …” (1975, 194).

The study of the ancient world, however, also influenced the idea of nobility as a performance, especially for those who admired the ‘individual’ virtues that ostensibly characterised the ancient roman republic. Leonardo Bruni, whose colossal *History of the Florentine People* (1415-44) stands as a seminal work of Renaissance historiography, was one of the principal proponents of a new kind of ‘civic humanism’ that was emerging in fifteenth-century political theory (Baron 225). To be wellborn, he argued in the *Oratio in Funere Nannis Strozae* (1403), meant nothing more than to possess “industry and natural gifts and lead a serious-minded and respected way of life; for our commonwealth requires virtus and probitas in its citizens” (trans. Baron 419). Only in republican Florence with its revolving panel of statesmen, claimed Bruni, was “the supreme power … prevented from becoming tyrannical,” (*Laudatio florentine urbis*, 1403-4, trans. Baron 415-19). For Bruni, such assertions not only re-awakened the anti-noble, pro-virtue arguments of Juvenal, but recontextualised them for the court society. Bruni’s virtus and probitas do not call for military excellence and battlefield bravery; rather, in the context of an urban court, he appeals for “serious” intellectual capacity, moral sincerity, and, that most essential quality of civilité: a “respected way of life”. Indeed, his nobility is an inherent nobility, which, though it is independent of birth and rank, must nonetheless be performed, assessed, and applauded – one must not only be a good ruler, but, as a matter of course, be a master of the codes of civility.
Florentine assertions of humanism were enormously influential in the court society of Tudor England. In fact, one of the fifteenth century’s most notable dramas (and the first surviving play on an entirely non-secular theme in the English language), Henry Medwall’s *Fulgens and Lucre* (1497), is a direct retelling of the highly popular *Controversia de Nobilitate* (1428), composed by one of Bruni’s contemporaries, Buonaccorso de Montemagno the Younger (Baron 423, Nelson ed. 1). Montemagno had championed the idea of individually merited nobility by reviving the anti-senatorial sentiments of Sallust’s *War against Jugurtha*. His original story recounts the tale of a virtuous Plebeian who struggles to win the hand of a beautiful heiress over a corrupt Patrician rival. On winning his bride, the Plebeian hero delivers a speech that is directly modelled on that of Sallust’s Marius. Unlike Marius, however, notes Hans Baron, Montemagno’s Plebeian does not deride *learning* as refined foppery – rather “it is culture and learning which have made it possible for the victor to attain true nobility of spirit …” (420). Interestingly, the subsequent English translations of *De Nobilitate* tended to underplay, and even contradict Montemagno’s emphasis on individual *virtus*. The *Declamacion of Noblesse* (1481), a translation by John Tiptoft, First Earl of Worcester, fundamentally altered the story’s political message by leaving it up to the reader to decide whether the Plebeian’s victory was a truly favourable outcome (in the original this is assumed throughout). By the time Medwall composed *Fulgens and Lucre* in around 1497, the victory of Plebeian Flaminius is no longer portrayed as a vindication of ‘individual’ nobility at all; instead, it is posited as a reminder that sometimes there are *exceptions* to the general order of things (Baron 423). When the Lady Lucre accepts the hand of Faminius, she pointedly advises the audience that this unusual transgression of rank hierarchy will not have any lasting effect on the greater social order:
And for all that I wyll not dispise
The blode of Cornelius I pray you thinke not so
...
and all other that be of lyke blode also
but unto the blode I wyll haue lytyyl respect
where tho condycions be synfull and abiect.
I pray you all syrs as meny as be here
take not my wordis by a sinister way
(Medwall 87-88, lines 759-767).

It is not difficult to imagine why there might have been a greater reluctance to question the rank of landed magnates in England than in Florence. Inheriting the two-tiered system of landed elites that had developed during the Middle Ages, the Tudor nobility was both remarkably small – there were only fifty-seven titled nobles at the start of Elizabeth’s reign in 1558 – and possessed of unrivalled influence (J. Dickenson 285). “In the localities,” notes Janet Dickenson, “it was only where the great noble families had died out … or otherwise been removed¹² from power that the gentry rose to take over the significant local offices” (290). Otherwise, Tudor nobles dominated both the Royal Privy Council and the top provincial offices, not to mention that they were the only people in England wealthy enough to “provide and equip a substantial number of [privately armed] men” (289-293). Furthermore, Susan D. Amussen suggests that English society was particularly wary of subverting the established social order precisely because that order was steadily becoming divorced from its reality: a rapidly growing population, as well as the increasing wealth of farmers and merchants (and the consequent inflation this encouraged) had significantly disjointed the abstract hierarchy of English society from its economic actuality. While the Elizabethan populace adopted ever-stricter systems of rank distinction, the survival of traditional hierarchies depended on “their very fuzziness. What was imagined as fixed was in reality fluid” (281).

¹² A primary motivation for Tudor nobles being ‘otherwise removed’ was, of course, the decline of Catholic landowners after the Reformation. As G.W. Bernard has noted, however, in the long run the “continuities” of noble traditions during the religious upheavals at this time “seem more significant than novelties” (3).
Certainly, the maintenance of ‘traditional’ social order was an unremitting element of everyday-life in Elizabethan England. Rank precedence was reinforced by the way people addressed each other (in particular the practice of doffing hats), by strictly assigned seating arrangements at the local church, and distinct ceremonial duties at public occasions (Amussen 275; L. Stone 34). Then, of course, there were the sumptuary laws, which explicitly stratified social status by dictating which materials could be legally worn within a given rank, with particular care being taken to guard the exclusivity of luxury textiles (277-8). The quantity and quality of food a given citizen was allowed to purchase was also regulated by rank, while some legislation even dictated which sports were appropriate for certain orders – bowls and tennis, for instance, were reserved for those with an income of over £100 (Stone 28). Intrinsic to these superficial markers of precedence was the over-arching philosophy of universal order, which, as will be explored further in chapter 1.3.1, had been reinforced in early modern Europe through the teachings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, the assertion that one’s social order was part of a greater divine plan was regularly invoked to justify the increasingly minute distinctions between human beings in England. William Seger, for instance, a royal Officer of Arms from 1585-1633 – an office whose sole purpose was to codify and certify supposed bloodlines and their attendant rank – proudly explained the universal nature of social rank in his Booke of Honour and Armes of 1590:

In earth [God] hath assigned and appointed kings, princes, with other governors under them, in all good and necessary order. Every degree of people in their vocation, calling and office, hath appointed to them their duty and order: some are in high degree, some in low; some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects; priests and laymen, masters and servants, fathers and children, husbands and wives, rich and poor; and every one [sic] have need of other: so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God. (1.54, qtd in Amussen 272).
Crucially, the developing concepts of universal order at this time, combined with an influx of ancient literature, made it possible to argue that hereditary elites across the ages were all manifestations of the same divinely chosen ruling caste. Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* of 1583 presented a ‘discourse on the commonwealth of England’, wherein he uses direct classical comparisons to explain the ranks of civil society. The appearance of “one of the best kindes of a common wealth, that which is called *Aristocratia* where a few and the best doe governe” he claims, began in the domestic household, where the natural order of precedence placed authority in the father and set a pattern for the rest of society (23). In the elite ranks of sixteenth-century England, he continues, there exists a *nobilitas maior* and a *nobilitas minor*. The former, he proclaims, “doeth answere to the dignitie of the Senators of Rome, and the title of our nobilitie to their *patricij*” (32). This upper nobility is peopled by “dukes, marquises, erles, vicountes and barrons”, and while their younger sons are technically considered esquires, “in common speeche, all dukes and marquises sonnes, and the eldest sonne of an earle be called lordes” (32). The ‘minor’ nobility, accordingly, is comprised of knights, whose title, Smith explains, is not hereditary, and “aunswere in part to that which the Romanes called *equites romanos* [the equistrian rank]” (33).

Perhaps the most interesting of Smith’s categories, however, is the rank of ‘Gentleman’. This is a title, he explains, which denotes “those whom their blood and race doth make noble and knowne, εὐγενῆς [eugenēs] in Greeke, the Latines call them all *nobilis*” (38). Here, Smith’s definition highlights the curiously paradoxical nature of the English gentry in the early modern period. For, gentility was a quality shared by the noble and non-noble alike; all noblemen were gentlemen, while only a handful of gentlemen were noblemen. The gentry then, while being non-noble by definition, shared in the tradition of an *essential elite quality*; this, in turn, was bolstered by their ‘secondary’
adherence to noble templates of eugeneia and nobilitas. In many ways, the gentry could almost be seen as a sort of ‘nobility-in-training’: the purity of a gentleman’s minor bloodline somehow upheld the greater purity of the major bloodlines above him, and could, even by merit of this purity, one day come to supplement a major bloodline itself. That is, by the very fact of being a second-tier elite based on lesser eugeneia (‘good birth’) and lesser nobilitas (genteel socio-economic status), the gentry validated and disseminated the hegemonic value of eugeneia and nobilitas, while maintaining the crucial exclusivity of a first-tier elite who are better born and of a higher socio-economic standing than them. Critically, however, and unlike the lesser nobilities of continental Europe, the English gentry were deprived of any legal definition that could assure that their social status authentically represented the inherent elite quality that stemmed from an intimate affinity with eugeneia and nobilitas. “Gentlemen”, Smith declares, “be made goode cheape in England”. Anyone, he claims, who has studied at university or in the liberal sciences, who can “live idly and without manual labour”, and who can imitate “the port, charge and countenaunce of a gentleman, he shall be called master” (38-9). In other words, imposter gentlemen, who were identical to gentleman in every way, but who lacked the inherent elite quality conferred by genteel birth, were destroying the very basis of gentility itself. Nor indeed could genealogies be trusted to indicate who was a ‘true’ elite, Smith laments, for if ancestral significance is missing, the unscrupulous Officers of Heralds will, “for mony”, provide them with “armes newly made and invented” (39).

Smith’s outrage was not unfounded. The large-scale forgery and sale of heraldry, fuelled by growing wealth in the commercial, legal and political professions, ensured that the sixteenth-century gentry “was changing in composition with unprecedented rapidity” (Stone 38). While in 1433 there had been only forty-eight families in the gentry of Shropshire, notes Stone, by 1623, four hundred and seventy families were laying claim to
the title. In fact, the rank had become so devalued by the beginning of the seventeenth century that an official registrar was proposed, whereby pretenders to genteel blood would be subject to a fine – or allowed to purchase an ‘official’ version of the heraldry they had already assumed (69-70). Such legislation, however, never materialised – and with good reason. In this period of massive economic fluctuation, the successful absorption of new wealth from various sectors of society into the traditional ranks of landed gentry helped to maintain the dominant value system of ‘good birth’, while reinforcing landownership as the “primary source of political influence” (Stone 41). Even the widespread denunciation of audacious social climbers implicitly vindicated the ‘authentic’ gentry families that they were supposedly infiltrating, constantly reaffirming the difference between mere wealth and superior bloodline. Indeed, above and beyond minute rank distinctions, the idea of gentility ultimately bolstered a “two class society of those who were gentlemen and those who were not” – a separation that, in the manner of nobility, was fundamentally reliant on blood (49).

The meticulous distinction of different elite ranks in a text like Smith’s was, in itself, a kind of performance. After all, each rank and file had its own heraldic system of symbolism and display, which could be paraded within and without of Court. Indeed, displaying one’s superiority of rank at every level was a highly effective method of vindicating the rank system itself, expounding and celebrating its every echelon. Moreover it was a primary manner of vindicating the most important echelon of all: the monarch. In many ways, the (loyal) nobility of Tudor and Stuart England served as a public advertisement of the monarch’s legitimacy – a performance of civility that overlay vast claims to political power. The divine qualities of English royalty, constantly radiating from the motto Dieu et mon droit was “carved, painted and embroidered in a thousand forms throughout the royal palaces”, while the choreographed ceremony of the court, “much of it
liturgical or quasi-religious in form”, bolstered a sense of monarchical right (Adamson 101). Flamboyant rituals of royal service likewise reinforced the importance of land in the English noble tradition, with those of “the greatest estate” undertaking the most prestigious of royal services (105).

Elizabeth I’s ‘Procession Portrait’, notes Adamson, probably painted by Robert Peake c. 1601, vividly illustrates the degree to which the performance of Tudor nobles could function as an extension of monarchical hegemony. The image (fig. 1), depicting Elizabeth being carried through the streets of London on the shoulders of noblemen as an audience of gentleman pensioners look on, displays the three main loci of contemporary political power – the monarch, the lords, and the commons. Indeed, the scene bears a remarkable similarity to a description made by Monsieur le Maisse, Elizabeth’s French ambassador, when he described how the queen would travel from place to place in 1597:

the Lord Chamberlain walks first, being followed by all the nobility who are in court, and the knights of the order that are present walk after … after come the six heralds who bear maces before the queen. After her march the fifty gentlemen of the guard … and after that the maids and ladies who accompany them, very well attired (Maisse, Harrison ed. qtd in Roy C. Strong 31).

The intrinsic theatricality of the scene is compounded by the strikingly different manner in which each element of the ensemble is portrayed. Elizabeth, radiant and immobile “like a Marian statue”, has been reduced to her most basic representational components: bleached face, wasp waist, orbicular shoulders, and a vigorous flourish of youth despite the fact that the painting was completed in the very last years of her reign (Adamson 103). Even her proportions are peculiarly small, adding to the sense that she is more effigy than living woman – indeed, the lady-in-waiting who mirrors her stance from behind (and whom Roy C. Strong Identifies as Lady Anne Russel) seems to offer a real-world shadow to Elizabeth’s symbolic manifestation (Strong 30). The nobles who carry her, on the other
hand, are not only portrayed in the full flesh of humanity, they are also the largest, most dynamic figures on the canvas. Their ‘stock portrait’ faces are deliberately recognisable, while their fashionable stylised outfits lend them the air of earthly agents to this ethereal idol.

Each noble in this painting is portrayed in a different stance, some looking ahead, some behind, some straight at the viewer, and each is even assigned his own uniquely coloured leg-wear. It is only the queen’s import of royal symbolism that casts an umbrella of unity over her cortege of fiercely independent noblemen: each strutting grandee represents a different region, a different family, and a different set of political influences, whose proud and dignified self-assurance is nonetheless subject to the transcendence of royal authority, enacting “a celebration of the reciprocity of power and authority between the crown and the ancient nobility” (Adamson 103). Finally, at the furthest remove is a homogenous line of (non-noble) gentlemen, uniform in their black capes and gilt-pole axes, surveying the scene at the forefront of the urban multitude. Their relative anonymity and dutiful deference only highlights their relationship with the mass of mankind behind them, symbolically and literally providing the audience for this theatrical spectacle of nobility and its cast of local celebrity magnates. Indeed, as Adamson notes, even the background scenery of the painting seems to recall the conventions of the theatre, representing Italianate architecture of a kind that existed nowhere in England at the time (105).
The ‘civilising’ of the nobility in Britain saw the traditions of brute, martial rule give way to a template of elite governance that was increasingly based on courtly influence and political theory. More than this, however, this same ‘civilising process’ in many ways constructed a new, and purely ‘British’ form of *nobilitas*, juxtaposing the conventional obligations of chivalric honour with a ‘modern’ interpretation of bloodline traditions from the ancient world. Indeed, like Roman *nobiles*, the early modern British nobility laid claim to a long-past military tradition as evidence of their own essential virtues, explicitly incarnated in an extensive schema of chivalric heraldry; like the *nobiles*, too, the idea of lineal bloodlines and illustrious ancestors was fundamental to these military claims, distinguishing certain dynasties above others for their familial glory and antiquity. And, like the *nobiles*, the British nobility’s *nobilitas*, so to speak, was not complete without a significant parliamentary office – a ‘patrician’ governmental position, which answered hereditary privilege with special political, legal, and social concessions. It was this parliamentary office, indeed, which was developing into what would be the most important political expression of nobility in Britain for centuries to come: it was, of course, the peerage.

### 1.2.2 British Nobility in the Seventeenth Century: Divine Right Theory and the English Civil War

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (King James Bible, *Romans* 13:1)

By the end of Elizabeth’s reign, Britain’s nobility had more or less adopted the institutional template that it would maintain throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Government was divided into a basic triad: the monarch, the House of Lords and the
House of Commons – a structure which, since the late sixteenth century, was commonly asserted as the ideal balance between “the few” and “the many” (Paley et al. 5-6). Indeed, political theorists often referenced both ancient texts and medieval histories to support the notion that, “if one of [these elements] became predominant, the state might degenerate into tyranny, oligarchy, or a crude democracy … monarchies could slip into tyrannies … aristocracies might challenge monarchies …” (6). The nobility, then, were represented through the House of Lords, which was in turn a parliamentary representation of the peerage – an explicitly codified and regulated system of noble ranking. Initially, there were separate peerages for England, Ireland, and Scotland, which, following the Anglo-Scottish Acts of Union (1707), evolved into the ‘Peerage of Great Britain’, and following the subsequent Acts of Union with Ireland (1801) eventually became the ‘Peerage of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland’. Peers were the only members of society with noble titles, comprising – in descending order of prestige – the ranks of ‘duke’, ‘marquess’, ‘earl’, ‘viscount’, and ‘baron’, as well as their female counterparts ‘duchess’, ‘marchioness’, ‘countess’, ‘viscountess’, and ‘baroness’ (Jones ed. 3). Titles, in themselves, were a complicated matter: individual peers could don and shed several titles over their lifetime, with peerages not only being passed down through families – i.e. the first, second, and third Earl of Shaftesbury – but also being recycled for other families once they had disappeared from their original lines (McCahill x). Scottish and Irish peers, if elevated to the English peerage, were recognised in Westminster only by their highest English title, even if this was several rungs lower than their primary peerage – thus, before the unions of 1707 and 1801, Scottish and Irish peers (respectively) could only sit in Westminster if they also possessed an English title (Paley et al. xx-xxi). Those with lesser hereditary or life titles, it must be remembered, such as knights or baronets, were not members of the peerage and their titles did not confer nobility. To a more limited degree,
the peerage also incorporated the eldest sons of peers, who were often given courtesy titles ('lord'), and could be called to parliament with, or in place of, their fathers (Jones ed. 3).\textsuperscript{13}

A peerage afforded certain legal, social, and political privileges, which could be asserted under two claims: the privileges of parliament, and the privileges of peerage. Although the House of Commons, too, was granted parliamentary privileges, each House interpreted them to its own ends. The right to freedom of speech in parliament, for instance, note Ruth Paley \textit{et al.}, could be used as a protection against litigating debtors, while the parliamentary protection afforded to members’ household, property and land could be used to protect peers’ servants and even tenants from arrest. The privileges of peerage, on the other hand, “encompassed a collection of rights and immunities founded partly on custom, partly on statute, and partly on the whim of the House of Lords” (185). The most important of these was the right of all male peers to claim a seat in the House of Lords, which thus provided direct parliamentary representation for great land-owning families and their economic interests. Peers were also protected from arrest, except in the case of treason, felony, or breach of peace, and could not be outlawed or legally tortured; they were not obliged to testify under oath nor to sit on juries, had special right of access to the monarch, and had the right to be tried by a commission of fellow peers; they were protected against slander by a statute known as \textit{Scandalum magnatum}, their taxes were directly assessed by the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Treasurer, and, on a more unofficial level, they were generally given the highest positions in the military and lieutenancies (Swatland 40; Stone 55). Peers could also vote to nominate chaplains, who, according to the ‘statute of pluralities’ were exceptionally allowed to claim several incomes at once from different official posts (Paley \textit{et al.} 185)

\textsuperscript{13} During the eighteenth century, for instance, notes Cannon, eighteen peers’ sons sat in the House of Lords in place of their fathers, a considerable number considering the house’s highly restricted membership (see chapter 1.2.3. (13).
An important distinction, however, must be made between a peer and a noble. Since only the head of a noble family could claim a peerage title, and since this title could only be transmitted through primogeniture or direct ennoblement, it is not sufficient to look to titles alone in order to identify the noble ranks of Britain and Ireland. Peerage titles, rather, bestowed a sense of nobility on the entire family of the bearer, inducting them into a close-knit circle of ancient, landed dynasties for whom the peerage stood as a parliamentary representation. “Any definition that confined the [British] aristocracy to peers would be too narrow …” note McCord and Purdue, “their immediate families would have to be included, and it would not be easy to decide just how far ‘immediate’ could reasonably be taken to extend” (103). Indeed, this process was, in itself, a survival technique that had long been embedded in British noble tradition: elevation to the peerage theoretically required a pre-existing nobility of family, which most likely meant that a member of one’s family had already been elevated to the peerage – ensuring that control of the House of Lords could be cyclically maintained within a relatively small group (this point will be further discussed in chapter 1.2.3).

Before further considering the political and spiritual roles of the nobility in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, however, we must first appreciate the profoundly formative events of the seventeenth century – an era during which the abolition of the Monarchy and House of Lords had upturned the very idea of hereditary rule in Britain. Certainly, at the dawn of the seventeenth century the relationship between political legitimacy and spiritual order in Britain reached a new level of intensity with the Stuart assertion of the divine right of kings. Two of the most influential texts on divine-right theory were, rather appropriately, authored by a Stuart monarch, James VI and I. The first of these, the *Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) was largely a reaction by James against contemporary theories of ‘popular sovereignty’, which held that monarchy was an implicit
‘contract’ between the ruler and the ruled. Indeed, one of the most prolific champions of this theory had been James’s own former tutor, George Buchanan, who claimed in his *De jure regni apud scotos* of 1579 that if a monarch were to breach his contract with the people by neglecting his rightful duties, the people were likewise exempted from obeying him – thereby justifying his forceful removal (Mason 116). It was a theory, indeed, that Buchanan had put into practice during the forceful deposition of James’s mother, Mary, Queen of Scots (Mason 116). James’s *Trew Law* rejects popular sovereignty at every level: a king was born into a certain line of heredity, he claimed, precisely because God wished him to be king, and there could thus be no other king but the born king (104). Such an assertion, indeed, appealed to traditional Augustinian understandings of spiritual hierarchy, as previously discussed in chapter 1.1.3, which held that all rulers, good or bad, ruled by the will of God. Just as a good king was sent to lead his country, James declared, “[a] wicked king is sent by God for a curse to his people, and a plague for their sins” (Mason ed. 102). Indeed, no matter how ‘wicked’ one’s monarch turned out to be, warns the *Trew law*, the people could never assume the right to overthrow him.14 For the king – through the destiny of his heredity – had been put in place by God, and was thus answerable only to divine judgement:

[S]hall it lie in the hands of the headless multitude, when they please to weary of subjection, to cast off the yoke of government that God has laid upon them, to judge and punish him, whom-by they should be judged and punished [?]… [H]e is their heritable overlord, and so by birth … [B]y remitting [kings] to God (who is their only ordinary judge) I remit them to the sorest sharpest schoolmaster that can be devised for them, for the further a king is preferred by God above all other ranks and degrees of men, and the higher that his seat is above theirs, the greater is his obligation to his maker (104-5).

14 Somewhat paradoxically, James later notes that if a popular uprising does occur, it should nonetheless be interpreted as God’s preferred method of judgement (104-5).
James’s second great text on the idea of divine right, the *Basilikon Doron*, was a manual of kingship in the form of letters from the king to his son, and was published only a year after the *Trew Law* in 1599. It would contain what was to become one of the most notorious assertions of divine Stuart kingship: “He that has made you a man …” it declared, “[has] made you a little God to sit on his throne & rule over other men” (4). The nested layers of significance in such an affirmation offer an interesting insight into the Stuart concept of divine ordination: James’s vision of monarchs as ‘little Gods’ was, of course, a metaphor for the absolute power of his reign, yet it also worked on a more literal level – not only promoting his unique ‘closeness’ to the divine, but imagining his political authority as a vector of God’s will, a conduit of orderly creation: by doing God’s work on earth, in the name of God, and by the will of God, James’s autocratic rule truly did make him a ‘little God’. Indeed, God’s own endorsement of divine kingship, that is to say the sacred texts of scripture, would soon be channelled through the voice of James himself in the form of the *King James Bible* (1611). In Romans 13:1, where St Paul defends the legitimacy of all royalty, even that of pagans, James could speak the biblical defence of kingship in his own words: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,” it reads, “For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (*KJV Romans* 13:1).

The consequences for nobility in the Stuart vision of divine right, however, were not entirely clear. On the one hand, nobility posed one of the greatest threats to a monarch’s power in pre-war England, possessing the means and the motivations to overthrow a king or queen, as well as holding bloodlines that were all too often the key to the throne. There was a “natural si[c]kness” in the British nobility, James wrote in the *Basilikon*, an “arrogant conceite of their greatnesse and power” which they drank “in with their verie nurishmilke”, and though they were but second in rank at parliament, they were “over-farre first in greatenes and power either to do good or euil as they are inclined” (53).
On the other hand, the nobility was an impressive embodiment of James’s concept of society as an interdependent human body: if the monarch was the head of this society, he asserted, “they must bee your arms and executers of your lawes” (57). Likewise, if the monarch was the great patriarch of the nation, the nobility were the “peeres and fathers of [the] land” (57). Indeed, in the Basilikon James implores his young son to ensure that the court is filled only with the nobles of the purest blood: “verte followeth oftest noble blood”, he advises, “the worthiness of their [noble] ancestors craueth a reuerent regard to be had unto them” (56-7). While he recognises that nobles will always be some of the most dangerous people at court, he ensures that as long as all closest attendants are of “the noblest blood that can be had ... their seruice shal bred you greate goodwill and least ennui (contrary to that of start-ups), ye shal oft finde vertue followe noble races” (83).

Much though he valued the virtues of ‘noble blood’, James was certainly not adverse to introducing ‘new men’ to his peerage – in fact, whereas Elizabeth had only created eight peers during her entire forty-four-year reign, James created an astonishing sixty in just twenty-two years (Firth 1; Stone 58-9). Concurrently, in the first four months of his reign he “dubbed no fewer than 906 knights”, including 432 dubbings on his coronation day alone (Stone 74). While most new peers could boast the ancient families and large estates which traditionally befitted their appointed positions, James’s new creations often lacked the “long and distinguished services to the state” that Elizabeth had always required before considering ennoblement (Firth 3). “Contemporary opinion,” noted Charles Harding Firth, “apparently held birth the most necessary qualification; at least it was the most inclined to express dissatisfaction when that was lacking” (3). This dramatic inflation of honours, however, also reflected the changing political functions of nobility at this time (see chapter 1.2.1), who were not only becoming an ever-greater presence at court, but were also turning “eagerly to joint stock adventures, urban development, and
mining speculations” (Stone 58). New blood and new wealth were quite simply being brought together in a spirit of “political careerism” – a regulated process of social mobility which was highly profitable in and of itself (59). The seventeenth-century House of Lords could mingle “family politics and private interests” with “public life and national concerns” to an astonishing extent, note Paley et al. “Members could and did use it to promote their own businesses, solving their disputes by exploiting their privileges or by obtaining private legislation” (xix). And James I was more than happy to do the same: the entire order of the baronetage, for instance, was essentially a commercial venture, created by James in 1611 so that he could sell off ‘baronet’ titles at £1,000 a piece (even this monetary value was ephemeral – only ten years later, the title of baronet was worth a mere £220). Meanwhile, between 1603 and 1641 the Stuarts created eighty new Irish peers, devaluing the worth of an Irish viscountcy to only £1,500 by 1624 (as compared with £8,000 for an English barony) (116). Unsurprisingly, criticism of the expansive new ranks of nobility was rife, with petitions from older noble families being presented at court well into the reign of Charles I (Firth 19). The Commons, for their part, began to increasingly disregard the inflated House of Lords in diplomatic affairs – an unsurprising reaction considering that the upper house’s new members often lacked any serious understanding of legislation (20).

Lawrence Stone considers this social and economic transformation of the House of Lords to have been a fundamental factor in the English Civil war, engendering a state of ‘crisis’ in the upper house by undermining “deference society” (748-9). That is to say, while the Stuart regime allowed the gentry to get richer, it simultaneously undermined the dignity of those who had traditionally sat atop the economic pyramid, thus dissolving both the economic and cultural boundaries that had demarcated social order. Certainly, the nature of anti-noble rhetoric in the pre-war period often demonstrates a remarkable
inversion of traditional deferential relationships between nobility and commonality. The rhetoric of the ‘Norman yoke’, a theory based on medieval texts which gained considerable recognition during the 1640s, is a prime example of such inversion. The ‘Norman yoke’ theory envisioned nobility as a foreign, hereditary caste of Norman invaders who had been locked in battle with the liberty-loving Anglo-Saxons since 1066, thus turning the bloodline traditions of eugeneia and nobilitas against themselves. Instead of employing the old anti-noble argument that inherent noble virtue was fictitious and arbitrary, it firmly asserted that noble blood was fundamentally different from that of the ‘common’ English – and this, ironically, was its greatest failing (Hill 57). The Levellers, in particular, capitalised on this inversion of bloodline tradition in order to discredit the authority of the peerage: the tyrannical heirs of William the Conqueror, wrote Richard Overton in Regall Tyrannie Discovered (1647) “made dukes, earles, barrons, and lords of their fellow robbers, rogues, and thieves … Away with the pretended power of the Lords” (qtd in Hill 75). At his trial in 1649, Henry Marten instructed the Jury not to doff their hats in order to manifest superiority over the rest of the court. “You that call yourselves Judges of the Law,” declared the agitator John Lilburne at his trial in the same year, “are no more but Norman intruders” (qtd in Hill 77).

In his landmark study The House of Lords during the Civil War (1910), Charles Harding Firth established a lasting image of the pre-war peerage as “reactionary, obstructive, and the butt of ridicule” (J. Adamson 9). While this characterisation may well have been influenced by the author’s own (twentieth-century) political opinions, there is little doubt that the Lords’ parliamentary inadequacies hurried on the demise of their own institution, which suffered one disaster after another during the mid-century (Firth 74). Even though a full two-thirds of the Lords sitting in the Long Parliament of 1640 owed

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Adamson notes that Harding Firth describes the seventeenth-century peerage obstructions in almost exactly the same terms as the press was reporting the Tory peerage’s obstructions of Lloyd George’s ‘people’s budget’ in 1910, suggesting that his study contained shades of contemporary political criticism (9).
their hereditary titles either to Charles I or his father James, by 1642 the House had already become so fractioned that a full quarter had sided with the lower house in an effort to ensure their own survival, while another quarter were so indisposed by various circumstances that they could not take an official position in Parliament at all (75). In fact, attendance at the House of Lords in the years leading up to the war was so poor that it was unusual to see more than six peers in the chamber at any one time – while only about thirty Lords were regularly present at Westminster during the entire duration of the war itself (Jones ed, 1; Cannon 1982 432-4; Swatland 9). By 1645, increasingly popular calls for democracy in Church and State saw the idea of hereditary authority fall from favour amongst both military and civilian ranks. When the Leveller John Lilburne was imprisoned for having publicly questioned the legitimacy of the House of Lords in an incendiary pamphlet of 1646, there was widespread public outrage, not least from the ‘middling ranks’ of London, and the very next year the upper house itself was attacked by an angry mob who broke the windows and forced their way inside (Firth 156-65, 71-2). Soon, the very same rhetoric of divine order that had underpinned James’s claim to immutable kingship was being invoked by Cromwell and his son-in-law Henry Ireton to justify a removal of the House of Lords: “If God saw fit to destroy, not only King and Lords, but all distinctions of pedigree […] ” Ireton wrote, “I hope I shall with quietness acquiesce […]” (qtd in Firth 180).

Even those who advocated the rule of an absolute sovereign did not necessarily envision a future for politically privileged nobility. Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651), often considered an early example of ‘social contract theory’, offered a vision of absolute monarchy that was dissociated from both the person of the monarch and his particular line of heredity (Hobbes, Shapiro ed x). The king’s ‘right’ to kingship, for Hobbes, is indeed divinely sanctioned, but only in that it represents the right of all subjects to protect
themselves: the institution of monarchy is, in essence, an agreement wherein the people place their right to self-preservation in the hands of the sovereign, who is then charged with upholding his end of the contract. As it follows, the heir to the throne – an uncrowned prince, for instance – is without special consequence until he too accepts the terms of this bargain, having no inborn, implicit rights to rule (xi-xii). Nobles then, Hobbes continues, while forming a traditional part of the governmental system, are dependent on the current monarch, rather than any hereditary birthright to render them politically relevant. Employing a ‘Norman Yoke’ style argument, he claims that hereditary privilege among nobles is primarily a legacy of ancient Germanic conquests; it had been humoured by society thus far, but must now be abandoned. “Good counsel comes not by lot, nor by inheritance;” reads the *Leviathan*,

and therefore there is no … reason to expect good advice from the rich or noble in matters of state … ; Whereas in these parts of Europe it hath been taken for a right of certain persons to have a place in the highest council of state by inheritance, it derived from the conquests of the ancient Germans; wherein many absolute lords, … [ever since] by the favour of the sovereign they may seem to keep; but contending for them as their right, they must needs by degrees let them go, and have at last no further honour than adhereth naturally to their abilities (Ch. 30, 211).

For others, however, the nobility and their traditions of hereditary privilege were an essential component in vindicating traditional monarchy and divinely ordained lines of kingship. One of the most notable counterparts to Hobbes’s theories was Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings*, not published until 1680, but originally composed at some point before the Civil War (see Filmer, Somerville ed. xxxii-iv). For Filmer, rulers were fathers to their people, and kings possessed a natural and divinely ordained authority over their subjects just as fathers assumed as much over their families. This patriarchal tradition, he claims, was inaugurated by Adam himself, and passed down
through every generation of mankind until the present day, enshrined in the institution of
kingship (8-9). “Kings be not the natural parents of their subjects,” he wrote, “yet they all
either are or are reputed to be as the next heirs to those progenitors who were at first the
natural parents of the whole people” (10). Thus, not only was the inheritance of political
precedence essential to Filmer’s idea of kingship, it formed a direct ascending link to
Adam and his creator, God. The forced deposition of such a king, like everything else,
could be seen as the work of divine judgement, but did not therefore justify the actions of
the overthrown rulers: “God’s judgement without commission is sinful and damnable”, he adds,
“God doth but use and turn men’s unrighteous acts to the performance of his righteous
decrees” (11). Filmer’s ‘patriarchal’ focus on heredity and lineal patriarchal family also
lent renewed significance to the tradition of hereditary nobility. The union of great
families, he claimed, was the origin of the first great monarchies, and since the exact
genealogies of these families had been largely lost in time, “most princes hath thought fit
to adopt many times those for heads of families and princes of provinces whose merits,
abilities, or fortunes have enabled them [to rule]” (11). In the absence of illustrious family,
in other words, equally excellent men had been substituted for noble heirs, thereby
maintaining (if not intensifying) noble families as a lineal, patriarchal system of born
rulers. In *The Free-Holder’s Grand Inquest* (1648) Filmer countered the Norman Yoke
theory of his Leveller counterparts by asserting that, during the golden age of Anglo-Saxon
England, it was the *Barons*, and not the Commons who “were the common council or
parliament of England”, just as it had been in antiquity and from time immemorial up until
Henry I (Filmer, Sommerville ed. 82-3). He points to the parliamentary ‘writs of
summons’, (the official document admitting a peer to the House of Lords), which declared
that the king should “treat with the prelates, great men and peers”, but which bore no
mention of ‘Commons’ at all. “The Lords sit [with their heads] covered at all conferences,”
he adds, “[which] is a visible argument that the Lords and Commons are not fellow commissioners or fellow counsellors” (74).16

On the eve of the abolition of the House of Lords, noble apologists were still making use of the practical reasoning that had defended noble institutions for hundreds of years: nobles, they claimed, by virtue of their lifestyle and education, were simply better governors. “Peers of noble birth and education”, protested William Prynne in an anti-leveller pamphlet of 1648, *A Plea for the Lords*, were possessed of “more generous heroic spirits than the vulgar sort of men […]” and thus they were “not so apt to be over-awed with regal threats, terrified with menaces […] nor seduced with rewards […] as ordinary commoners, and men of meaner rank and fortunes” (qtd in Firth 193). This time, however, this rhetorical defence was all but futile. In May 1649, only two days after the abolition of the office of king, the upper house was declared “useless and dangerous”, and the bill for its abolition was passed by forty-four votes to twenty-two (Rawson Gardiner ed. 387, Firth 213-5). “[N]o peer of this land,” read the ‘Act Abolishing the House of Lords’, “not being elected, qualified, and sitting in the parliament … shall claim, have, or make use of any privilege of parliament, either in relation to his person, quality or estate …” (Rawson Gardiner ed. 387).

Peerage itself, however, was not abolished, and though they maintained a lower profile than usual, nobles continued to assert their peerage titles. Nor did the abolition entirely neutralise the considerable landed interest that the Lords had represented in parliament, since many of the ousted peers – such as Lords Pembroke, Salisbury and Howard – were directly re-elected to the House of Commons (Kelsey 338, Harding Firth

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16 The writs of summons were a particularly sensitive matter, since they had long been identified with dubious claims of nobility amongst the untitled. Medieval writs had not always assumed the conferral of a hereditary barony, as they generally did in the seventeenth century, leading many of Filmer’s contemporaries to claim ‘unrecognised’ peerage titles on account of an ancestor having once been summoned to the upper house (Paley et al. 46).
From a cultural standpoint, however, the loss of the Lords represented a catastrophic blow to the hegemonic authority of nobility and family line. The privileges that Lords had once enjoyed might have been modest compared with those of some continental elites, but they nonetheless represented a fundamental economic and social distinction between the titled and the untitled (Swatland 9). Moreover, since many privileges protected the nobles’ landed economy, they had also given a certain distinction to noble property: “privileges” notes Michael Bush, “assumed that not only nobles and commoners, but noble and commoner estates were juridically different” (1). The loss of their privileges, therefore, not only signalled the loss of any real legal distinction between peers and commoners, and thus a remarkable degradation of the idea of peerage and title, it also directly countered measures that had been designed to protect (and celebrate) the peers’ economic security, imposing considerable financial burdens on the former Lords. “A nobleman was now just like any other Englishman”, notes Swatland, “he could not even avoid arrest for non-payment of debts, which he had been able to do during a parliamentary session” (11). Indebtedness, the financial impact of the recent war, as well as fines, taxes and confiscations imposed by the new parliament not only impoverished the great families of Britain, but also posed a threat to their most valuable asset: their land (Swatland 11-12).

When the House of Lords was eventually restored in 1660, it found itself at the helm of a profoundly altered society. Unlike the now-inflated House of Commons, the new upper house only comprised 131 members (excluding minors, as well as the gravely brain-damaged Thomas Howard, fifth Duke of Norfolk), who were joined by twenty-six bishops in 1662 (29; Paley et al. 152). Between 1660 and 1710 this number rose to 190, incorporating new peers who were deliberately chosen for their support for the new political regime, especially the institutions of monarchy and the High Anglican church (29; Paley et al. 3-4). Yet, even though the new peerage had their former privileges fully
restored, notes Firth, their “legal superiority” was “no longer regarded as part of the natural order of things … much of the divinity that used to hedge a peer had vanished” (292). Indeed, re-establishing the peers’ legal and parliamentary privileges on the grounds of religious principle was a concern of many noble apologists. Consider, for instance, the arguments made by Richard Allestree, provost of Eton College in his Gentleman’s Calling of 1660, which called for the recognition of nobility in government as a fulfilment of scriptural providence. The frontispiece of Allestree’s work immediately aligns noble deference with religious devotion, portraying an allegory of Nobility standing aside her sister, Religion, while the family crest she holds is counterbalanced with the Bible. Tomes entitled Divinity, Morality, and History hover between the two allegories, ostensibly dependent on a union of the two. The quote from Corinthians 7:24 on the title page spells out the essence of Allestree’s argument: “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called”. Denial of nobility, he claims, “whom God hath made little lower than the angels,” is denial of universal order and thus an affront to God. Each individual, he writes, “is furnished with an ability, which qualifies him for one sort of calling”, and the nobility’s refined education, extraordinary wealth, and abundance of leisure time, makes it clear that they have been called to rule. They were, he suggests, “the undoubted heirs of the Israelites blessing … who were to possess houses full of good things which they filled not … as it is Deut. 6. II. …” (8).

Conversely, numerous restoration pamphlets openly disseminated sceptical views of the newly re-empowered nobles. Edward Chamberlayne’s Anglia Notita or the Present State of England (1673), for instance, pays the Lords a glibly back-handed compliment by positing the grim realities of their recent history in close apposition with traditional rhetoric of hereditary excellence:

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17 Compare with Plato’s Republic: “One individual is by nature quite unlike another … they differ in their natural aptitudes … different people are equipped to perform different tasks” (qtd in Davidson 78).
If some of the English nobility by a long continued peace, excessive luxury in
diet, want of action, etc., were before the late wars born more feeble in body than
their ancestors […] [and] were rendered weaker in mind; and then during the late
troubles by too much licentiousness and want of fit education, were so debauched
that it was lately difficult to find […] the courage, wisdom, integrity, honour,
sobriety and courtesy of the ancient nobility; yet it is not to be doubted but that
under a warlike enterprising prince all those virtues of their forefathers may spring
afresh (qtd in Firth 292).

The restored peers were themselves acutely aware of the grave indignities their rank and
institution had suffered. Eleven years without their legal privileges, notes Andrew
Swatland, had been a deeply humiliating experience, wherein they were not only punished
as commoners for ‘traditional’ noble indiscretions such as duelling and debt, but also
suffered the full weight of the law in response to their Royalist activities during the war
(39-40). In an apparent effort to reassert their former standing, the restored House of Lords
brought over two hundred concerns about the peers’ legal privileges to parliament between
1660 and 1680, made the issue a regular source of dispute with the House of Commons,
and bitterly punished those who disrespected peerage rights (39). Indeed, widespread
exploitation of the restored privileges of peerage – such as the forging of parliamentary
legal protections for nobles’ family, servants and tenants, and particularly the use of
Scandalum magnatum for massive financial gain (in 1682, James, Duke of York, used the
clause to fine a slanderous London sheriff for the extraordinary sum of £100,000) –
became the subject of pointed criticism in the House of Commons, and would be
significantly (if not entirely) reformed after the Glorious Revolution (48).

The Exclusion Crisis of 1679-81 brought the contentious issue of hereditary rule
under renewed scrutiny, and raised new questions about what exactly government was for.
It was around this time that John Locke composed his Two Treatises of Government
(1689), which, in the words of Harold J. Laski, “destroyed the foundations of Divine
Right,” by interrogating hereditary rule in terms of ‘Natural Law’ (Locke, Laslett ed. 60; Laski 9; Lessay 1998, 32). The first of the Two Treatises systematically refutes Robert Filmer’s pre-war Patriarcha (published posthumously, it will be remembered, nine years previously). Filmer’s vision of patriarchal government, Locke claims, may have been “as fashionable as French was at court”, but on closer inspection it failed to withstand even basic interrogation (1P§5). If monarchical power could be genealogically traced to Adam, he noted, not only should there exist somewhere one ‘true heir’ to Adam’s kingdom – which essentially invalidated all other monarchical power – but that heir would have to compete with every other direct heir to Adam, that is to say, everyone else on earth (11§106-9, §111). An argument for uninterrupted hereditary rule, Locke proclaims, “helps nothing to establish the power of those who govern, or to determine the obedience of subjects”; the succession of rulers can only be decided by the “Ordinance of God and Divine Institution” which is expressed through the “Law of God and Nature” (11§126). Locke’s ‘Law of Nature’ is more fully explored in the second of the Two Treatises. In a state of nature wherein all individuals are free and equal, he asserts, ‘Natural Law’ results from the God-given human desire for self-preservation; in order to preserve humanity, one must avoid harming oneself and one another, and indeed punish those who would do so – thus engendering a Natural Law based on reason, which is, in turn, the root of all civil laws (II.2§1-12). Unlike Hobbes, Locke identifies civil society with nature, rather than against it – seeing it as a means of adhering to a divine law that exists inherently in creation (Laski 30). Government, accordingly, essentially served “a practical purpose, not any particular set of values” – since its practicalities followed a “rule of reason which is integral to [Men’s] character” (Miller 23; Laski 31). Locke’s thesis, crucially, does not exclude hereditary rule, but identifies the functions of such rule as pertaining to an adherence to Natural Law; if hereditary rule strays from Natural Law, then it has no value in and of
itself (Miller 23). And so, Locke suggests, a father and child are, by nature, equally free – but they obey hierarchised inheritance traditions in order to accord with their society, which in turn aims to accord with Natural Law (II.6§70-74). “Thus the natural fathers of families … laid the foundations of hereditary, or elective kingdoms under several constitutions” not from a right of patriarchy, but as a limited, and possibly temporary contract between ruler and ruled (II.6§76).

Locke’s political reasoning highlights a certain philosophical shift in the concept of hereditary rule at the end of the seventeenth century. The perspective he expounded – which would underlie much later Whig political thinking – has the power to vindicate a ruling authority (be it hereditary or not) as legitimate and natural, while nonetheless heavily charging it with the practical upkeep of the natural order it represents (Ashcraft 184). Arguably, the bitter unpopularity of the Restored House of Lords stemmed from the fact that they failed to recognise this shift quickly enough, instead falling back on outdated patterns of divinely sanctioned hereditary right to support their political claims. After all, the outrage following the abolition of the upper house had essentially revolved around the fact that peers were being judged by the same standard as other gentlemen – that their blood and ancestry was no longer to be collectively acknowledged as innately different. The Lords’ reclamation of power, when it finally came, was ultimately a reassertion that, though they had spent a decade living like commoners, they had never been like commoners. Their reassertion of privileges, likewise, was an open declaration of superior heredity which more than ever marked out the ‘few’ from the ‘many’. The partial collapse of this older pattern of hegemony, then, when it eventually (and perhaps inevitably) arrived, cleared the way for noble tradition to integrate with the economic, political, and indeed philosophical realities of the coming century. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, just a generation or two after the collapse of the House of Lords, English peers (if
not Irish and Scottish) were already beginning to emerge as one of the age’s “most successful of all ruling elites” – not because of the privileges of peerage, but because of a fundamental change in their political role, which allowed them to harness a very real, and very practical legislative and oppositional authority. The British House of Lords would, in the eighteenth century, play host to one of the most politically active and economically unhindered hereditary elites on the continent, leaving a cultural and political legacy so powerful that it would mark out the age more than any other, as John Cannon has put it, as the “Aristocratic Century” (1).

1.2.3: Peers and Nobility in Eighteenth-Century British Society

In 1688, five English peers signed an invitation asking William of Orange to invade Britain; and when William finally arrived, it was another peer John Granville, Earl of Bath, who offered him a harbour and military base in Plymouth; it was a collaboration of peers too, along with bishops, who formed the provisional government after the flight of James II and the outbreak of anti-Catholic rioting in London (Paley et al. 158-60). Though the House of Lords was certainly not unanimous in its support of a Williamite invasion (Edward Henry Lee, Earl of Lichfield was perhaps the most notable English peer to remain loyal to James throughout the revolution – and was quickly dismissed from office after the King’s abdication), the great majority seem to have followed the evident shift of power in an effort to maintain their place in parliament at all costs (Paley et al. 58, 162). Nonetheless, the forced replacement of one monarch for another constituted a serious affront to the principle of hereditary rule, causing considerable tension between the Lords and the Commons and between the political factions in each. During the establishment of the new constitution, the Tory Lords vehemently demanded that William be considered
Prince Regent, rather than the ‘successor’ of James, but the Whigs only responded by summoning Lords who were normally absent from the House to vote in William’s favour (164-5). Eventually, the Houses of Lords and Commons not only welcomed William and Mary to the throne, but collaborated in the creation of a new constitutional document, the Declaration of Right, which would irrevocably alter the role of the peerage – and indeed of the entire governmental regime of Britain and Ireland.

The 1688 Declaration of Right inaugurated a new relationship between monarch and parliament, with the former gradually losing power to the latter from that moment on (Miller 68-9). This, indeed, held interesting implications for the peerage: while statutory restrictions on the monarchy also undermined the nobility’s hereditary, spiritual, and hegemonic authority, liberating measures for both Houses of Parliament opened up vast new political fields of potential for each (69). Indeed, the increased responsibilities attributed to the House of Lords quickly began to outshine their former preoccupation with privileges, and instead presented an opportunity for very real political dominance. For, the House of Lords had a unique advantage in this area: its powerbase was fundamentally different from that of the Commons, and it could thus exploit its new political potential in very different ways. Rather than relying on clear-cut party divisions, the Lords were characterised by “intense personal and family ambitions, rivalries, friendships and loyalties … in which even newly ennobled peers, linked to the same families by blood and marriage, were equally involved” (Paley et al. 195). In the area of taxation, for instance, which had escalated during the post-revolutionary war with France, the House of Lords could band together against the House of Commons using both the influence of its powerful individual ministers, and the influence of a collection of such individuals working as a single body (Paley et al. 195). There were also particular interest groups in the upper house, such as Scottish representative peers following the 1707 Act of Union, or
investors in colonial plantations and the slave trade, who would be sure to attend parliament sittings in high numbers when issues relating to their projects were to be raised (McCahill 9). Above all, the Lords’ common interest in the preservation of their own institution gave the upper house an added political dimension that could simply not exist in the House of Commons. While, like the House of Commons, the Lords were divided into Tories and Whigs, they were also Magnates and Royal councillors, cousins and brothers in law; collectively, they all shared the memory of their institution’s humiliating abolition, and collectively, they were all invested in its advancement. And advance it did: by the beginning of the eighteenth century the upper house had not only overcome the legacy of its abolition, it had established itself as the most important house in parliament for the next hundred and fifty years (Jones ed. 1). The practical reforms that resulted from the Revolution also helped to rebuild the House of Lords’ reputation, as well as promoting its role as a tempering agent against monarchical despotism. Parliamentary sittings, once rare and short, now made for regular, lengthy events, and dealt with a dense collection of both public and private bills (R. Brown 272; Paley et al. 219). Voting sessions, which had previously been judged by opponents shouting ‘content’ or ‘not content’ (with the loudest shouts effectively winning), were officially reformed in 1691 so that each member’s vote was counted individually (Paley et al. 252). And, of course, a far greater jurisdictional authority was asserted by Westminster peers over the neighbouring peerages of Scotland and Ireland, the former of which was soon subsumed into the British peerage, and the latter of which was subjected to a great deal more scrutiny than before (Paley et al. 268). By 1720, government or court offices were being held by a full quarter of the British peerage, many of which “allowed the incumbent to take commission from contractors, gifts, and use the public money as if it were their own”, while re-establishing peers as figures of public and private patronage (R. Brown 272). By 1750, the upper house was functioning as a
“revising chamber”, with members using their judicial knowledge in particular to exercise “a disproportionate influence over the content and form of legislation” – most especially in the area of property rights (McCaill 2009, 6-7). Such influence was the envy of many continental elites: “la vie brillante, mais frivole, de notre noblesse, à la cour et à la ville”, recalled the Parisian Comte de Ségur in his Mémoires (1824), “ne pouvait plus satisfaire notre amour-propre lorsque nous pensions à la dignité, à l’indépendance, à l’existence utile et importante d’un pair d’Angleterre” (qtd in Cannon 94-5). ¹⁸

In 1715, there were 213 peers who had a right to sit in Westminster’s House of Lords, a number which steadily rose to 267 by 1800. It was not numbers alone, however, that marked out the political relevance of the upper house (Paley et al. 152; McCahill 14). Indeed, less than a hundred peers were usually present in the house, leaving it largely in the hands of a few of the most dedicated members (Paley et al. 152). The hereditary nature of their parliamentary appointments also meant that peers started their political career particularly young, and subsequently continued in it for decades: during the (active) reign of George III (1760-1811) over half the British peers who inherited their titles were still in their twenties, with a further 21.4% in their thirties – consequently, over three quarters of peers during the same period sat in parliament for over twenty years. Scottish peers, after the Union of 1707, enjoyed nowhere near as much security, with a new election of sixteen representatives to sit at Westminster being held at each new parliament (Irish peers, incidentally, when incorporated in 1800-1, were elected for life) (McCahill 2009, 44). Moreover, from the first of these Scottish elections in 1709, the process was subject to numerous clauses, which aimed to ensure that the whole process “would not become the focus for Jacobite unrest” (Paley et al. 139). The elections were also preceded by the contentious “crown list”, drawn up by ministers, which explicitly announced which peers

¹⁸ “The sparkling, but frivolous life of our nobility, both in town and at court, no longer gave us pride when we thought of the dignity, the independence, the useful and meaningful existence of an English peer (my trans).
the Westminster parliament, and the monarch, wished to see elected. Aside from these, there were twenty-six bishops or ‘Lords Spiritual’ who, though not technically part of the peerage, could vote in the upper house, and exerted a highly enviable influence in ecclesiastical matters (140).

The most obvious difference between the British peerage and the elite institutions of continental Europe was that it was extremely small – in fact, only 1,003 individuals held a British peerage throughout the entire eighteenth century (Cannon 10). The second most obvious difference was the peers’ relative dearth of privileges compared to their continental counterparts – in particular their lack of tax exemptions, which, though perhaps exaggerated in modern historiography, was certainly remarked upon at the time. Voltaire, notably, was particularly impressed by the relative lack of pretentiousness he perceived in the House of Lords. English Peers had become so alienated from the old, decadent traditions of nobility, he wrote in his Lettres philosophiques (1734) and indeed from their original claims over the land (the Duke of Dorset, he noted with disbelief, had no actual property in Dorsetshire), that nobility would soon disappear in this country, if it were not for the king’s continual ennoblements. The English peerage, he proclaimed, was thus largely made up of new men, ennobled only to counter the power of the Commons:

Tous ces nouveaux pairs ... reçoivent du Roi leur titre et rien de plus ... ils ont du pouvoir dans le parlement, non ailleurs ... Un homme, parce qu’il est noble ... n’est point ici exempt de payer certaines taxes ... Chacun donne, non selon sa qualité (ce qui est absurde), mais selon son revenu; il n’y a point de taille, ni de capitation arbitraire (72).

19 Cannon casts doubt on the traditional view that the French nobility (who were exempt from paying the direct taille tax) paid much less tax than the English, suggesting that if all economic situations were considered one could argue that French nobles actually paid more (142-3).

20 “No man, because he is noble ... is ever exempt from paying certain taxes ... One is taxed not in accordance with one’s quality, which is absurd, but in accordance with one’s income; there is no taille [direct land tax], nor arbitrary poll-tax” (my trans.).
Moreover, he marvelled, English nobles did not consider themselves above commercial trade, in fact they took pride in it – even “Milord Townshend” (Charles, Viscount Townshend, the Secretary of State) had a brother who was a City merchant (46). Voltaire’s vision of the British peerage as open, evolving, and dynamic has had a profound influence on subsequent historiography, which, until relatively recently, has often portrayed the British peerage as a foil to the *anciens régimes* of continental Europe (Goodrich 72).\(^\text{21}\) In reality, however, the idea of an ‘open aristocracy’ in eighteenth-century Britain is mostly baseless. As John Cannon has noted, a straightforward survey of peerage elevations during the eighteenth century amply demonstrates that the reverse was true: of the 229 English peerage creations between 1700 and 1800, a full 87.3% were either related to an existing peer (54.9% by blood, 14.8% by marriage) or already possessed peerages in Ireland or Scotland (17.9%) (24). Even the meagre 12.7% of elevated peers who did not already hold direct family connections – a sum-total of 23 people – were invariably drawn from the very highest ranks of society, boasting a plethora of indirect connections that more than compensated for their deficiencies (some, for instance, belonged to pre-war peerage families) (25). The figures, notes Cannon, suggest that, far from being an ‘open’ institution, the eighteenth-century peerage engendered “a considerable narrowing of the social heights” (33).

In fact, access to the peerage was overwhelmingly dominated by a close-knit network of noble families – a community that Richard G. Wilson has referred to as a “peerage class” and Roy Porter as the “magnate class” (Wilson 159; Porter 75; Mingay 23).\(^\text{22}\) “The towering strength of the proprietorial order”, notes Porter, “lay in their

\(^{21}\) Richard Brown identifies the nineteenth-century historiographers W.H. Lecky and Alexis de Tocqueville, the late social historian Harold James Perkins, and the historian Roy Porter (1982) as proponents of a British “open dynamic aristocracy” (157). J. C. D. Clark’s *English Society 1688 - 1832* (1985), has probably been the single most influential work to question these assumptions (see Clark, 95).

\(^{22}\) Maura A. Henry identifies a similar group of the peers and their family as the ‘British aristocracy’, though this term, as has been previously mentioned, is problematic in an eighteenth-century context (312).
comprising a tight, self-reproducing oligarchy of the extraordinarily wealthy and influential, a club exceedingly difficult to join” (57). Members of this ‘peerage class’ were not just set apart by their prestigious family names and vast landed estates, they also represented an entirely different economic sphere from the great bulk of the elite. Between them, the four hundred richest magnate families of England and Wales owned about a fifth of all the cultivatable land in both countries, while their incomes, ranging between £5,000 and £50,000 per annum and averaging somewhere between £5,000 and £8,000, unambiguously distinguished them from even the wealthiest knights and baronets who only brought in £3,000-£4,000 on average (Mingay 23). Indeed, even the untitled younger sons of a peer, according to contemporary surveys of English society (such as that of Guy Miège in 1718), ranked well above a baronet or a knight in terms of prestige (165).

These same younger sons ensured that the House of Commons, too, was largely controlled by the ‘peerage class’, with three fifths of its members before 1761 consisting of Irish peers, younger sons of British peers, and the wealthiest gentry (Mingay 113). In 1784, notes Wilson, there were 107 younger sons of peers in the Commons, a number which could be doubled if one included those connected to peerage families by marriage (160).

The disproportionate representation of large landowners in parliament through the House of Lords, however, was nonetheless entirely reliant on the constant maintenance of noble hegemony: without the conviction that hereditary peers somehow deserved their right to a parliamentary seat, that they were more suitable for high office than, say, City merchants or colonial nabobs, the political authority of the ‘peerage class’ was simply baseless. To consolidate their success in parliament, therefore, the eighteenth-century British nobility had to incessantly reaffirm their inimitable position at the top of the social

23 The term ‘untitled aristocracy’, often interchanged with ‘nobility’, was used throughout the following century. Consider this extract from Burke’s Genealogical and Heraldic History […] of 1871: “For it must be remembered that Nobility, a larger word than Peerage, is not exclusively confined to titled families … The constant and close alliances which take place between our titled and untitled aristocracy prove that this virtual equality is understood amongst ourselves” (366).
hierarchy, and thus made abundant use of one of the oldest strategies in noble tradition: spectacular, conspicuous display. “[R]oyal entries, progresses, birthdays, weddings, coronations, and funerals”, regularly paraded the minute distinctions of noble honour to the greater public, with each member of each rank distinguished by an intricate set of heraldic symbols (see fig. 2) and a hierarchically determined position in the procession (Cannadine 48). Such display, indeed, was closely monitored by the College of Arms, to ensure that the symbolism of rank was respected and controlled. In 1668, note Paley et al., a painter-stainer named Parker was imprisoned by Sir Edward Walker, the then ‘Garter Principle King of Arms’, for having displayed eight pearls, rather than six, at the funeral of the fourth Baron Gerard (167). Most importantly of all, this mutli-faceted performance of noble rank had to maintain a sense of ease, even inevitablity – a Castiglionian sprezzatura – so as to express wealth, prestige and honour as natural aspects of the noble condition. After all, conspicuous consumption ultimately distinguished the upper orders by equipping them with a set of signifiers that no one else in society had access to; the nobility’s assertion of a natural, intimate, and indeed hereditary affinity with these same signifiers thereby characterised noble rank itself as fundamentally inimitable (Veblen 22-23). Indeed, the simple suggestion that opulent possesions were not a natural extension of noble rank could, at times, become the subject of scandal. When the private letters of Phillip Dormer Stanhope, Fourth Earl of Chesterfield to his illegitimate son were published in 1774, they immediately caused widespread consternation by (among other things) frankly discussing ‘true nobility’ as something that could be learned. “Attend carefully to the manner, the diction, the motions of people of the first fashion, and form your own upon them” Lord Chesterfield advised,

The lowest peasant speaks, moves, dresses, eats and drinks as much as a man of the first fashion; but does them all quite differently; so that by doing and saying
most things in a manner opposite to that of the vulgar, you have a greater chance of doing and saying them right … the language, the airs, the dress, and manners of the court are the only true standard; des manières noble, et d’un honnête homme (2.61).

Some commentators such as the Anglican minister Vicesimus Knox, notes Jenny Davidson, would later look back on such statements as a principal source of anti-noble radicalism in the 1790s. The Letters had falsely led the “plebeian orders” to believe that “what they have usually admired as all-accomplished, has been mere varnish”, wrote Knox in his Personal Nobility (1793), but just because the morally questionable Chesterfield believed his noble manners to be ‘teachable’ certainly did not mean the same was true of ‘truly’ virtuous nobility (320). Alas, he lamented, by portraying nobility as a mere choreography of airs of graces, Chesterfield had “opened the eyes of the people, and taught them to look unhurt, and with a naked eye, at that splendor, which formerly dazzled like the sun” (316).

And certainly, it is fair to say that the ‘splendours’ of the eighteenth-century British elite had, for most of the century, been ‘dazzling’ at the least. Right up until the Revolutionary period, levels of conspicuous leisure and pecuniary culture had been rising to new and unprecedented heights. A considerable influx of commercial and material wealth into Britain rapidly intensified quotidian rank displays with each coming year, leading at times to a “veritable orgy of conspicuous consumption” amongst the upper orders (Porter 60). Between 1696 and 1804, overseas trade steadily swelled the national income from £43m to £222m, and during roughly the same period imports into Britain escalated by 500 per cent; the population, accordingly, rose by 250 per cent during the century (Koehn 49; J. Black et al. 156). One of the most magnificent and, indeed, visible expressions of noble wealth in the eighteenth century was the construction of extensive

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24 To borrow two terms from Thorstein Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class (1899)
residential developments in London’s West End, which became bastions of noble symbolism in Europe’s largest capital. Since the ‘court’ was considerably less important to the diminutive British peerage than in neighbouring countries, the city itself became a primary locus of hierarchical spectacle (R. Brown 273). Great developments such as Bloomsbury and Covent Garden built by the Bedfords, and Mayfair and Belgravia, built by the Dukes of Westminster, not only exhibited noble ideology on a grand scale in the modern, urban sphere, but also reflected the new financial interests of English peers in banking and trade (R. Brown 271). Each new development glorified the social and economic dominance of its benefactors: entire squares were built around (and named for) the mansions of grandees; a network of private parks and gardens imported the leisure of country estates into the heart of the metropolis; insignias of great dynasties were engraved into doorways, gateways, and porticos, emblazoned on the brightly-coloured liveries of domestic servants; and crested, gilt-laden carriages paraded magnates through newly-constructed malls they had designed themselves for optimum display. In the countryside, where peers were traditionally seen as local figureheads of authority, the mansions of the “rural patriarchs” became paradoxes of exhibition and exclusivity, being “symbols of economic power and political authority” and enhanced where possible in the latest architectural fashions, while also being built at an increasing distance from local villages, shielded from the public eye with a “cordon sanitaire” of high walls and wooded parkland (R. Brown 272; Porter 60, 78; Henry 320). “Where possible,” notes Henry, “houses were reoriented to sit in the centre of the park through the practice of engrossing and enclosure… [which] literally insulated the house and its occupants from the unwelcome noise from roads, markets, and local villagers” (322). Where parks could not be enlarged, the villages themselves were sometimes demolished and rebuilt elsewhere, as was the case with Sledmere in Nottinghamshire, which was replaced with a landscape of trees in the
1790s. Furthermore, these great houses – ‘private’ as they were – were regularly ‘open’ to people of quality, so that genteel visitors could admire art works collected on the Grand Tour, or attend grand social events held in the stately rooms (322). Whether it was in London or in the provinces, the nobility’s wealth allowed them largely to “dictate taste and fashion” throughout the country, with their conspicuous spending proving “tangible proof of the authority and status of hierarchy” (R. Brown 273).
Perhaps the most astonishing tool of rank distinction among British nobles (and non-nobles who could afford to imitate them) was the spectacle of the elite body itself, expressly contrived to convey hierarchical superiority. “Expenditure on dress has this advantage over most other methods [of conspicuous consumption]” claimed Thorstein Veblen in his landmark *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899),

that our apparel is always in evidence and affords an indication of our pecuniary standing to all observers at the first glance … the law of conspicuous waste guides consumption in apparel, as in other things, chiefly at the second remove, by shaping the canons of taste and decency (111-112).

The fashion trends that steadily developed throughout the eighteenth century exploited the aesthetic of exaggerated bodily proportions in order to exhibit material wealth to an extraordinary degree. The much-maligned hoop petticoats of the mid-century, for instance, may have been the subject of endless satire in the London press, but the reality often far surpassed their caricatures: one fashionable pannier ordered by Lady Elizabeth Purefoy in 1741 specified a circumference of three and a quarter yards (three metres), while the widest ‘court dresses’ from the period, some of which are still on display in London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, measure over six feet across (see fig. 3; Vincent 73). The most remarkable of these constructions could incorporate several yards of Indian textiles and up to three tiers of whalebone supports, so that when dressed for court, many English ladies of the highest order often could no longer sit down, nor could they pass through traditional doorframes (Willet and Cunnington 26-7). Spiral-laced stays and stiff-board stomachers likewise became so restrictive that long-term use led to muscle atrophy and the subsequent physical elongation of the wearer’s waist – a condition that the great naturalist

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25 Conspicuously wasteful apparel, according to Thorstein, is based on three principles: the excessive use of expensive materials; the incapacitation of the wearer in respect to practical or vulgar labour (as with corsets, top hats, or wigs); and a constant need to update to new fashions, rendering the objects worn almost instantly outmoded (111-124).
Carolus Linnaeus was moved to include in the *Monstrosus* taxon of his *Systema naturae* (1758) (20, see chapter 2.2.2). Meanwhile, the faces of women and men alike were regularly whitened with alkaline chemicals and decorated with pictorial felt patches; their heads were crowned with towering wigs, built around cages of imported human hair, powdered starch and bear grease; and, when outdoors, their height could be augmented several inches by way of raised pattens or clogs (see fig. 4; 26-27; Vincent 72-73). Nor was all of this bodily display entirely artificial: Roy Porter notes that the well-fed upper orders (not unlike the chivalric nobility of medieval England discussed in chapter 1.1.3) would have been noticeably taller, would have reached sexual maturity considerably earlier, and could have expected to live much longer than other people (30). In fact, by 1801, members of the peerage were living an average of fifteen years longer than the untitled (Hollingsworth, 56-7).
Fig. 3. A ‘Mantua’ court dress, made in England c. 1740-5, 1.8 metres in width. Victoria and Albert Museum, (British galleries, room 53a). V&A Collections Online. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>.

Fig. 4. Pair of pattens, made from wood, iron, leather and velvet, probably made in Great Britain c. 1720-30. Note the slight depression in the rear to accommodate a high heel, as well as the pointed tip and the velvet latchets, suggesting that these pattens (despite their crude appearance) were the property of a considerably wealthy woman. Daintier pattens were often made with thick leather soles. Victoria and Albert Museum (currently in storage). V&A Collections Online. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>.
Aside from their physical appearance, nobles invested an enormous degree of effort into exhibiting their nobility of mind and moral virtues. One of the few but highly valued privileges maintained by the peers (commonly claimed by their entire household) was the right to trial by fellow peers, which the House of Lords had convinced the House of Commons to sign into a clause of the ‘Bill for Safety and Preservation for the King’ on their return to power in 1661 (Swatland 41). This particular privilege – which was, incidentally, only abolished in 1948 – not only safeguarded peers from malicious litigation, but actually provided some of the greatest opportunities for noble self-aggrandisement throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Swatland 41; Krischer 67). Trial by peers was rare, in fact there were only forty-four cases in England between 1500 and 1935, but when they did occur they were a “spectacle of justice”, a “remarkable occasion to represent [the defendant’s] aristocratic status before the public in attendance … a distinguished arena in which to stage noble distinctiveness by the performance of notable aloofness, resolution and civility” (68, 89). An audience of about four thousand people was generally expected at an eighteenth-century London peer trial, with details of the defendant’s conduct flooding into the press with each passing day (80). The pomp and ceremony of legal process on these occasions was “usually carried to extremes”: the Lords literally paraded into the court accompanied by their full retinue, all exhibiting symbols of their titles and distinctions (71). The spectacle, notes Krischer, was largely based around the peer accepting his adversity with honour and dignity: it was ritual, for instance, that he be first offered and then refuse assistance from a defence council, relying instead on his own inherent skill for rhetoric. It was ritual, too, that a guilty verdict be received with good grace and even thanks to the judges, with the Jacobite Lord Balmerino actually apologising to his judges for having wasted their time with his death sentence (77-8). Having one’s close friends and family decide one’s punishment, of course, also tended to result in rather
more lenient sentences than usual. One of the most notorious instances of corruption in peer trials was the case of Charles, Fourth Baron Mohun, who was tried in 1693 for having kidnapped an actress and stabbed her lover to death – he was acquitted by 69 votes to 14 and walked free, only to be charged with murder a further three times before being killed in a duel in 1712 (Paley et al. 182-4). Similarly, both Edward Rich, Earl of Warwick (1673-1701) and William, Baron Byron (1722-1798) notes Krischer, exploited their ‘privileges of peerage’ so as to reduce their charges of murder to the relatively trivial crime of manslaughter, while Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1653-1683) and Charles, Baron Cornwallis (1655-1698), who had both brutally lynched a common man, managed to convince their juries to deliver a verdict of manslaughter (70).

Bodily display and inherent morality were both essential tools in noble rank distinction precisely because the notion of hereditary nobility conveyed a certain corporeal difference. After all, it was the noble’s blood – a concept linked to both body and soul (see chapter 2.1) – which essentially defined the parameters of noble privilege. Since the body itself was implicated in the demarcation of rank distinction – that is, one was born into a clearly defined social echelon – this body became an essential object of rank display. For a duke to look like a duke was paramount to the idea that dukes were different, that they were inimitable, that not just anyone could be a duke – indeed, that being a duke meant anything at all. This, of course, was the very raison d’être of noble insignia: they imprinted, so to speak, the abstractions of noble hierarchy onto the human body that ostensibly manifested them. Three collections of noble iconography from the early eighteenth century, compiled by the herald Francis Nichols “to distinguish the many different branches descended from the same stock”, provide a fascinating insight into quite how much the symbolism of nobility was dependent on the idea of the nobleman as a certain ‘type’ of person, a human exemplar of a peculiarly precise and inflexible dimension
of human superiority (iii). Nichols’s *British Compendium or, Rudiments of Honour* [England] (1725), *The British Compendium* [Scotland] (1726), and *The Irish Compendium* (1735), provide a remarkably detailed description of the respective peerage families in England, Scotland and Ireland at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Dozens of pages at the beginning of each tome are devoted to representing each family’s coat of arms, starting with the king and working down the noble hierarchy to the barons. The action of moving through these pages functions, in itself, as an expositor of noble hierarchy: the number of crests on each page, for instance, increases exponentially as one moves down the social ladder, steadily ordering the train of distinctions into a conceptual pyramid of exclusivity. Most interesting of all, however, is the portrait that accompanies each degree of nobility (see fig. 5). The dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts and barons of each country are represented with an indicative portrait, invariably an upright, stately man, who displays the full ceremonial regalia of his order. Indeed, just as the parliamentary robes of each and every portrait are individualised according to his rank, the wearer himself is portrayed individually in every picture, sporting a different hair-style or a assuming different posture. After all, the wearers’ robes are different because they represent a different type of person, and the individualised bodies only corroborate this idea. For, while these individuals are not representations of any one person, each represents a set of very real families: they are a personification of what this set of families have in common – their ‘dukeness’ or their ‘earlness’, and this humanisation of heraldic symbolism is as naturally aligned to each order as the king’s recognisable portrait is aligned with his own crest.
Fig. 5: A selection of images from the three volumes of Nicol’s British and Irish Compendium (England top, Ireland middle, Scotland bottom) demonstrating the differences between a duke, a viscount, and a baron in each kingdom. Printed, respectively, in Francis Nichols, *The British Compendium or, Rudiments of Honour* [England], London: R. Nutt, 1726; *The Irish Compendium*, London: Betteworth and Hitch, 1735; *The British Compendium or, Rudiments of Honour* [Scotland] London: C. Meere, 1725.
Furthermore, the progressive representation of these ‘types’ of humans is directly correlative with the tome’s progressively intricate scheme of heraldry. On the very last page of Nichols’s catalogue of Scottish heraldry, is the empty template of a coat of arms. Presumably placed there only to give symmetry to the page, this empty crest inadvertently draws attention to how the rising status of the heraldry is systematically communicated throughout the three *Compendium* volumes. Baronial crests only involve minimal elaboration on the basic design, shading in the shield and scroll with simple chivalric imagery. As the crests rise in social status, however, they become more and more ‘cluttered’, with new symbolism crowding around the central design, colonising new fields of blank space with lions, mermaids, stars and fasces. Displaying more symbolism on one’s heraldry, of course, suggests a richer ancestral background, but it also gives the impression that each coat of arms builds on the crest immediately below it: the heraldry of an earl has everything of the heraldry of a baron, and more – a duke is not just ‘different’ from a viscount, he is everything a viscount is and better. The human portraits follow the very same progression in their representation of ceremonial robes. In depictions of the Scottish peerage, the baron only dons two bars of white ermine, while the viscount adds another half-bar, the earl has three and so forth. The English depictions follow the same progression with rows of black sealskin spots on the wearer’s mantle and points and strawberry leaves on his coronation crown, while the Irish version makes use of swords, brocade and pearls. The human being inside, differentiated along with his robes, seems little more than another exhibition of rank – another element of noble ‘intensification’. Certainly, the King and the Prince of Wales, whose stock portraits stand as unambiguous symbols of royalty, perfectly complete this rising system of hierarchical symbolism. Their

26 Devoting an entire page to one baronial coat of arms was probably not an option, since this technique is used to highlight the exclusive, superior status of dukes at the top end of the scale.
coats of arms swell to encompass an entire page each, and the backgrounds to their portraits, just like their crests, are embellished with all the rich details of a royal household.

The explosion of conspicuous display amongst the British ‘peerage class’ in the eighteenth century, though essentially part of a greater cultural strategy to reinforce its hegemonic superiority, provides us with an unprecedented insight into the assumptions and the mechanics behind this particular kind of human superiority. The intense codification and ritualisation of minutely distinguished human hierarchies, unrivalled in British society at the time, also allows us to observe how the hierarchy itself could be used and exhibited in order to exploit socio-political power. The stylisation of the noble body, the noble mansion and the noble retinue invite the observer to dwell on the hierarchy that justifies that same noble’s arbitrary privilege; riches and power, in short, justified riches and power. That considered, it is vital to recognise that this hierarchy also functioned in the greater system of human evaluation; that this one version of a particular human’s cultural superiority was understood in terms of humanity itself. In order to do this, we must look beyond the privileges of parliament and peerage, and consider the contemporary philosophies that underpinned the very idea of hierarchy on which eighteenth-century nobility was built – the very idea of superiority and inferiority in the Great Chain of Being.
1.3: Nobility and Spiritual Order in Eighteenth-Century Britain

1.3.1: The Great Chain of Being: A Western Philosophical Tradition

Vast chain of being, which from God began,
Natures æthereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect! what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,
From thee to nothing! – On superior pow’rs
Were we to press, inferior might on ours:
Or in the full creation leave a void,
Where, one step broken, the great scale’s destroy’d;
From Nature’s chain whatever link you strike,
Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike.


Chapter 1.1.3 briefly reviewed how St. Augustine’s vision of divine order integrated pagan systems of social hierarchy into a Christian framework, and indeed worked to adapt Christian philosophy to a traditional Roman framework. The lineal, hierarchical structure of Augustine’s *ordo*, however, was itself part of a much older tradition of interpreting the universe in the West. ‘The Great Chain of Being’ is a term that, in the history of ideas, identifies one of the most fundamental elements in the Western hierarchical tradition: the idea that the universe is comprised of a great, inter-connected, chain of individual entities; “a hierarchical continuum that spans, without really including, the two endpoints of nonexistence and God” (W.E. Burns 122). Right up until the end of the eighteenth century, claimed Arthur Oncken Lovejoy, who published his landmark study *The Great Chain of Being: The Study of the History of an Idea* in 1933,

philosophers, most men of science, and, indeed, most educated men, were to accept without question … the conception of the universe as a ‘Great Chain of
Being’ ... ranging in hierarchical order from the meagerest kind of existents ... through every ‘possible’ grade up to the ens perfectissimum ... the highest possible kind of creature, between which and the Absolute Being the disparity was assumed to be infinite – every one of them differing from that immediately above and immediately below it by the ‘least possible’ degree of difference (59).

Lovejoy’s identification of the ‘Great Chain of Being’ as a unitary element in the History of Ideas was not the assertion of one philosophical movement; rather, it was the recognition of a general current of thought which appears with pronounced consistency in Western science, philosophy, and social organisation (Weiner ed. 325). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this interpretation of hierarchy, which relied on the three principles of plenitude, continuity, and gradation, had already permeated European notions of order for millennia, but was rapidly acquiring a new significance within the discourses of empirical science and rational philosophy; it was at this time, in fact, that this ancient philosophical trope would come to attain its “widest diffusion and acceptance” (Lovejoy 183). The Chain of Being mentality is crucial to this study because it asserts the importance of a common construct of lineal ordering, which ultimately underpinned both racialised difference and noble rank. That is, the very ideas of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ were intrinsically linked with a certain spiritual quality, a reflection of proximity to the divine, and above all, a means of understanding human hierarchy.

In many ways, the Chain motif simply expresses the structural necessities of the Western hierarchical tradition – the recognition of a lineal scale of precedence whose very existence requires the implicit participation of everyone (and, as it follows, everything). The development of the Chain of Being as a theological framework, however, meant that – as a divine, universal, all-encompassing hierarchy – it could function as a transcendental ‘super-hierarchy’ by which all other hierarchies could be vindicated – against, despite, or in conjunction with one another. Disparate notions of social, spiritual and scientific

27 Lovejoy described his approach to the History of Ideas as “analogous to ... analytic chemistry” in the fact that it identified unitary doctrines within heterogeneous historical backgrounds (3).
precedence could, by this conceptual mechanism, be considered in direct relation to one another – as equal constituents in the greater scale of creation, sharing the same subordination to a divine ladder of precedence.

The principles of plenitude, gradation and continuity, though popularised throughout Christian theology by St. Augustine and his contemporary the Pseudo-Dionysus, actually pre-dated these men by about nine hundred years. The first principle, plenitude, can be traced to Plato’s *Republic* (c. 380 B.C.), wherein the ‘Idea of the Good’ – as the “summit” of knowable things – “provides the logical basis of a world of *sensibilium* conceived as graded with respect to perfection” (Weiner 325). The principles of plenitude, gradation and continuity, though popularised throughout Christian theology by St. Augustine and his contemporary the Pseudo-Dionysus, actually pre-dated these men by about nine hundred years. The first principle, plenitude, can be traced to Plato’s *Republic* (c. 380 B.C.), wherein the ‘Idea of the Good’ – as the “summit” of knowable things – “provides the logical basis of a world of *sensibilium* conceived as graded with respect to perfection” (Weiner 325).28 Knowable elements of the universe, claims Plato, are inherently diverse because they reflect the constituent parts of unknowable perfection: “we shall not deign,” he declares, to compare the demiurge with anything that could be considered a ‘part’ of nature, “we shall affirm that the cosmos, more than aught else, resembles most closely that living creature of which all other living creatures, severally and generically, are portions” (*Timaeus* 30c, Goold ed. 57). That is to say that if the universe reflects its maker, and its maker is perfect, then the universe must also be perfect – and thus complete in every way.

The second principle, gradation, is most clearly defined in Aristotle’s interpretation of life as a *scala naturae*. In his treatise ‘On the Soul’ (c. 350 B.C.), he posits a natural hierarchy in which “each higher order possess[es] all the powers of those below it in the scale, and an additional differentiating one of its own” (Lovejoy 59; Aristotle 414a 29-415a 13, Goold ed. 77-79). In other words, each degree of the scale has built upon the rung immediately below it, creating something more complex, more powerful, and indeed more perfect. Animals further down the chain, for instance, notes Aristotle, tend to lack lungs, have cold blood, and lay eggs rather than giving birth to live

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28 “For the things which are known, say not only that their being known comes from the good, but also that they get their existence and being from it as well – though the good is not being, but something far surpassing being in rank and power” (*Plato 509b*, *Republic*, Ferrari ed. 216).
young, while those found further up the scale acquire each of these complexities one by one: “Nature’s rule”, he explains,” is that the perfect offspring shall be produced by the more perfect sort of parent”. Man then, being the most perfect of earthly entities, sat at the top of earthly creation (Generation of Animals 733b, 139).

The third principle, continuity, can also be attributed in part to Aristotle. For, one of the interesting features of the scala naturae is the co-existence of multiple, even contradictory hierarchies that are nonetheless intertwined by their shared purpose of expressing universal order. In his Metaphysics (c. 350 B.C.) Aristotle asserts that,

fishes and birds and plants, are ordered together in some way but not in the same way; ... Everything is ordered together to one end; but the arrangement is like that in a household, where the free persons have the least liberty to act at random and have all or most of their actions preordained for them, whereas the slaves and animals have little common responsibility ... (emphasis added, Metaphysics XII 1075a, Gould ed. 169).

Though the scale is not necessarily linear, it is a whole that depends on constituent parts in order to function correctly; whatever be the immediate differences between one being and other, there is a greater order at play in which everything has a role. Like a household, the chaos of individual interest is ultimately governed by an implicit and authoritative order; indeed, like a household it is those who are most aware of the scale that must take the most heed to respect its form. It is in this sense of hierarchical relationship, Aristotle asserts, that “things are said to be continuous whenever there is one and the same limit of both wherein they overlap and which they possess in common” (Metaphysics X, 1069a, qtd in Lovejoy 55).

The three principles of plenitude, gradation, and continuity were initially brought together in the Neoplatonist teachings of Plotinus and Porphyry\(^{29}\) in the third century A.D.,

\(^{29}\) See Ennead 3.3.7, Gould ed. 135.
but it was the Christian interpretation of the *scala naturae* in the Middle Ages which most powerfully established it as a template of Creation itself. Following Augustinian assertions of divine providence, medieval philosophers such as Pierre Abélard in the twelfth century, and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth, asserted the notion of divine hierarchy as the fundamental structure of the universe. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (c. 1264) Aquinas asserts that the earthly abundance of beings, actions, and sentiments serve to reflect the true abundance of their creator:

> [t]he best thing in Creation is the perfection of the universe, which consists in the orderly variety of things … Thus the diversity of creatures does not arise from diversity of merits, but was primarily intended by the prime agent … There is then diversity and inequality between creatures, not by chance … but by the special intention of God (Blackfriars ed. 2.44 - 2.45).

Aquinas also affirmed one of the major tropes of the Chain tradition: the idea that Man forms a ‘mid-point’ on the Chain, since he is composed of both earthly and spiritual matter. The human constitution of *aequaliter complexionatum* (equal temperament), he claims, is situated at the very bottom of the ‘intellectual’ chain, as well as standing at the very top of the ‘earthly’ chain, and thus contains equal parts of soul and body – “the horizon and boundary line of things corporeal and incorporeal” (*Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.68, qtd In Lovejoy 79).

By the later seventeenth century, however, the Chain model of creation would be influenced in a radically different way by rationalist and empiricist philosophers, including, most notably, the German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Having been an avid reader of Scholastic theology in his youth, Leibniz went on to re-imagine the medieval traditions of a Great Chain in terms of materialistic atomism – a classical theory of invariant prime matter that had recently been revived by philosophers such as René

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30 Neoplatonist philosophy was particularly attractive to early Christians, notes John Marenbon, since it provided the complex, abstract discourse of pagan philosophical tradition (lacking in early-Christian doctrine) while nonetheless emphasising a monotheistic perspective (9, 14).
Descartes and the Irish physicist Robert Boyle (Leibniz, Rescher ed. 8). The ‘fullness’ of the universal chain, claimed Leibniz, was evident in mathematics itself: arithmetic did not favour one number over another, but rather demonstrated an ostensibly infinite chain of difference (Lovejoy 147). Matter, he asserted, is in a state of perpetual fullness, with every tiny molecule (or ‘monad’) geometrically linked to the next. The organism, a divinely created machine, becomes, for Leibniz, “an automaton with an inherent teleology – an implicit purposiveness of its own … [in] a nested hierarchy of functional complexity” (Leibniz, Rescher ed. 225). In this mathematically full universe then, Leibniz can reiterate the principle of sufficient reason to assert that every entity exists with good cause, since God created it – every degree of a circle is a crucial support for that circle’s perfect roundness, and therefore even ‘bad’ entities are functional elements of an ultimately good and perfect universe (Leibniz 1714, 17; Lovejoy 144-7).

In fact, as a subject of empirical enquiry, the idea of a Chain of Being – which ostensibly asserted a definitively Christian model of diverse creation – could actually be used to undermine the basic tenets of Christianity, and for that matter, the idea of ‘diversity’ in creation itself. The controversial Dutch philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, surmised from the Chain model that, if everything is a reflection of God, then “there can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God” (Ethics Prop. 14, 10). God’s intellect was the sole cause of all things, and thus these things had both an “essence” and an “existence”, he claimed, so that two people can be practically identical in their essence but are necessarily different in their existence; likewise, if the existence of one of them were to be extinguished, the other would survive, while if their essence were to be destroyed, neither could possibly continue to exist (Prop. 17, 14). In Britain, John Locke used the Chain model to interrogate, rather than to support, the idea of graded ‘kinds’ of being: if all entities continuously flow into one another through minute gradations of difference, he
Posited, then our ideas of them as different ‘types’ can only ever approximate their real essence (Atherton 267). “Things are ranked under names into sorts or species,” Locke asserted in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), but “only as they agree to certain abstract ideas” (emphasis added 3.3.15). A cat may be nominally known as ‘cat’, but its infinite and unique divine essence is like no other cat nor any other being in creation; ‘cat’ is merely a term of convenience, and like all other classifications, only exhibits humanity’s inability to fully appreciate the complex diversity of the universe (3.6.6). Moreover, Locke’s engagement with the idea of corpuscularianism – a theory of all matter as being composed of minute particles – gave this assertion of abstract classification an even more interesting dimension: not only is the difference between a cat and a dog only a ‘perceived’ one, those perceived differences stem from different composition of the same corpuscular elements (Atherton 267, Guyer 145). The hierarchies employed by British society, then, can essentially be considered in much the same way: they are a human interpretation of an unknowable and essential gradation which is both spiritual and material, and which, both physically and materially, “by gentle degrees, ascend[s] upwards from us toward [God’s] infinite perfection” (3.6.12).

Perhaps the most interesting element of the Chain tradition during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, was its influence on the development of practical philosophies – particularly the natural sciences. The work of Robert Fludd, a physician and alchemist at the court of James I in the early seventeenth century, is a perfect example of how early modern natural philosophers could employ the idea of the Great Chain of Being to interrogate the properties of the physical world, while carefully respecting the limitations of traditional spiritual ordo. For Fludd, the human body was a ‘microcosm’ of the entire universe; this, he held, was what God had meant when he had made Man ‘in his

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31 It might be noted that Leibniz strongly disagreed with this idea, objecting to the idea that ‘nominal’ essences were somehow ‘less real’ than ‘real’ ones (Locke 3.6.6; Leibniz *New Essays* 288-294).
own image’ (J. Godwin 18). Creation, Fludd suggested, could be understood as God’s
divine light shining through dark “prime matter”, creating three regions “according to their
degrees of purity and impurity” (Fludd, qtd in J. Godwin 14). These were the empyrean
world, where light outshone darkness, followed by the ethereal world where light and
darkness existed in equal measure, and finally “the elemental world, where darkness
predominates over light, producing the traditional four states of matter: fiery, gaseous,
liquid, and solid” (J. Godwin 14). The idea of the Great Chain of Being, in Fludd’s
alchemistic discourse, thus delineated an unfinished map of the universe, where the
unknown realms of creation could be charted along their observable hierarchical course (J.
Godwin 5; Weiner (327). His depiction of *Integrae naturae speculum artisque imago* (‘The
Mirror of the Whole of Nature and the Image of art’), in his great opus the *Utriusque cosmi
maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica, atque technica historia* (‘Metaphysical,
Physical, and Technical History of Macrocosm and Microcosm’, 1617) provides a
fascinating depiction of this universe as a diagram of knowledge and discovery (fig. 6).
Fig. 6: Robert Fludd. *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica* (Oppenheim, 1617). History of Science Collections, University of Oklahoma Library <http://hos.ou.edu/>.
The image is a starburst of circular gradations, radiating up through the chain from the central earthly sphere. It begins with the basic elements of land and water, and ascends through minerals, vegetables, animals, and the heavenly bodies. In the outer circles, angels revolve around the universe in a series of flaming rings, marking the limits of the knowable world from the infinite perfection of higher divinity. Dominating the scene is the figure of nature, who stands in the outer circles; her hand is animated by the hand of the maker (shackled, literally, by a chain), while she herself puppets the hand of an ape – who represents human artifice ‘aping’ nature. Notably, the inner spheres of this diagram, dominated by the ape of artifice, represent the scale of earthly entities that result from Man’s actions; this not only establishes the divine ranks of human activity, but also positions it at the centre of the natural world, just as the ape sits in the centre of the circle surrounded by a universe of natural resources. Closest to the earth are the arts of distillation and mineral purification; next in line is arable cultivation and horticulture; then come the arts of livestock cultivation, including bee-keeping and medicinal extraction; and finally the liberal arts, among which are counted engineering, painting, arithmetic, and music (J. Godwin 22). Furthermore, each artificial realm is arranged so that it mirrors a natural realm in the outer circles – the realm of minerals, for instance, corresponds with distillation, vegetables with horticulture, and animals with farming, and the liberal arts with the heavenly spheres (22). Likewise, the Ape watches over the human realms just as Nature watches over the natural realms, while the whole is ultimately part of the same divine ladder of creation.

The image is remarkable in many respects: firstly, it envisions the Chain as the universe in all of its multiplicity, assimilating science, alchemy, astrology, astronomy, theology, society and indeed humanism into one great plan. Secondly, it poses the figure of nature (and her mimic artifice) as a kind of medium for all these aspects to be understood
together, her haloed head in the domain of the angels, her feet firmly planted on the ground and in the sea, and her hand moving by the will of God. Thirdly, and most importantly, it frames the Chain of Being as a diagrammatic structure by which one might try to understand the relationships between different areas of creation: Man, for instance, is aligned with the sun, and a vineyard, while Woman is depicted beside the moon, and a field of wheat; both hold a position at the top of the chain of animals, representing the summit and the breadth of living beings on earth. Likewise, while the liberal arts appear to mirror the realm of the planets, the astronomical spheres are used to chart astrological influences on the natural world, which in turn influence the elemental matter of the artificial world (snails, for instance, can thus influence the art of horticultural cultivation, but also the practice of medicine). The Chain of Being, here, is not only being asserted as a great pattern into which all of creation ultimately falls, it is also being imagined as a method of understanding the complexities of creation – an existing template of divine plan as a whole.

The English divine Thomas Sprat’s 1669 ‘encyclopaedic’ programme for the Royal Society, notes Weiner, was “witness to this symbiosis of the techniques of experimental research and the idea of a full and hierarchical universe” (327). The task of natural philosophy, according to Sprat’s model, was to retrace each and every element of the universal chain. All new experiments into all known things, he proclaimed, will always be useful, perhaps not immediately, but for future generations – for all things are necessarily implicated in the greater scheme of creation, and so the most obscure entity can shine new light on the workings of nature.

[T]his is the highest pitch of human reason; to follow all the links of this chain, till all their secrets are open to our minds … to rank all the varieties and degrees of things, so orderly one upon another, that standing on the top of them, we may perfectly behold all that are below … (Sprat 110).
The idea of the universe as a Great Chain of Being, then, not only delineated a cosmic hierarchy to which all things belonged, it functioned a theoretical schema of the unknown: a construct by which philosophers could continue ranking things, indefinitely, in recognition of universal interdependence and ultimate unity.

Thus, by the eighteenth century the philosophical concept of a Chain of Being had been thoroughly established as a “powerful, if occasionally hackneyed, device with which to assert the divine underpinnings of the natural world” (Petty, Lewis ed. 23). Perhaps most importantly, however, it was far from coherent. On the contrary, it incorporated centuries of extrapolation that was often built on remarkably tenuous arguments – Leibniz, for instance, when faced with the conspicuous absence of ‘missing links’ in the natural world needed to prove his theory of continuous plenitude, stated simply these entities were probably “hidden in the bowels of the earth and the depths of the sea” (Leibniz, Letter to M. Hermann, 1753, cxi-cxii, qtd in Lovejoy 147). Such incoherence was, in fact, central to the Chain tradition. For, ultimately, the idea of universal order served to bolster an arbitrary, and usually desired, scheme of established hierarchy, be it ecclesiastical, political, social, or naturalist. That is, the Chain did not exist in isolation; it was informed by its hierarchical context in every age, and in every society wherein it was employed. Great philosophers discussed the Chain in terms of metaphysical abstraction, and their teachings were indeed disseminated through the structure of Church, State, and Academy – yet those philosophers themselves were inescapably informed by the hegemonic hierarchy around them. Thus, while hierarchies could be modelled on abstract notions of the Chain, the Chain was always and by its very nature built around the established, dominant hierarchy – an aspect that will be further explored in the next sub-chapter. This endemic arbitrariness of the Chain mentality, and indeed the Western notion of inherent hierarchy
in general, would stand as a crucial aspect, as will be seen, in the development of both noble and human ‘race’ in the eighteenth century.

1.3.2: The Chain of Being and Early Modern Human Hierarchies

Just as the Great Chain of Being functioned as an ‘unfinished map’ of the natural world, it could also be invoked as an ‘unfinished map’ of human society – a correlative and indicative hierarchy for the disparate and ostensibly unrelated elements of humanity. And, in this regard, it was rather particular. For, the Chain of Being, after all, was a human invention; whether it addressed the celestial fires of heaven or the atomic make-up of mud, it did so from the perspective of Western humanity, and its categories were, as such, inextricable from the various categorical biases of Western societies. By and of itself, then, the Chain of Being was a profoundly political construct – acting as a vast mechanism of power and subordination that permeated science, society and spirituality. For, in the very act of implicating society in the ‘natural’ course of the universe, the Chain of Being implicitly validated a certain vision of that society, and signalled the dangers inherent in its transgression. Consider, for example, the first act of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1602), wherein Ulysses portends a grim end for Troy. The city has lost all control over deference and hierarchy, he warns, and has upset the natural order so profoundly that utter chaos is imminent. His speech, indeed, is worth quoting at length:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, in all line of order.
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and spher'd
...
[B]ut when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues and what portents! what mutiny,
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,
...
O, when degree is shaked,
Which is the ladder of all high designs,
The enterprise is sick!
...
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?
Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows … (1.3. lines 84-9, 92-6, 100-3, 105-9).

Here, hegemonic social structures are seamlessly incorporated into the Chain of natural hierarchy. Not only does the (particularly British) transgression of “primogenitive and due of birth” invite the destruction of the world through the unbalancing of order, the natural world itself is described in the language of social rank. The planets “observe” their “degree, priority, and place”, while sun is “enthroned” in noble eminence; appropriate deference to “age, crowns, sceptres, [and] laurels” is put forth as part of the fabric of the universe itself, which must be maintained in its full textural complexity for the good of the whole universe. The elite echelons of social hierarchy do not only form a link in the chain, they provide an entire language of hierarchy and order with which to understand the chain.

The Chain, then, was remarkable in that it could become a mechanism of vindication for any given political reality, so long as it was sufficiently favoured by the established authority. The witchcraft debate in the mid-seventeenth century, for instance, instigated the very same arguments as had been raised by Shakespeare’s Ulysses before the fall of Troy. If society were to ‘untune that string’ by abolishing witchcraft, claimed the Cheshire medical scholar Thomas Browne in his Religio Medici (1643), disorder would befall the entire Chain, and thus the universe as a whole. “It is a riddle to me…” he announced,
how so many learned heads should so farre forget their Metaphysicks, and destroy the Ladder and scale of creatures, as to question the existence of Spirits: for my part, I have ever beleeved, and doe now know, that there are Witches … they that doubt of these, doe not onely deny them, but Spirits; and are obliquely and upon consequence a sort, not of Infidels, but Atheists (Section 30, 254).

Incidentally, Thomas Browne also held that one’s natural rank was expressed through the physical body: “there is surely a physiognomy, which those experienced and master Mindicants observe …” he had earlier affirmed in the Religio Medici “[f]or there are mystically in our faces certain characters that carry in them the motto of our Souls, wherein he that cannot read A.B.C. may read our natures” (Section 2, 136). Some decades later, a posthumous publication of Joseph Glanvill’s great work of demonology, the Sadducismus Triumphatus (1688), echoed the declaration that a denial of witchcraft was tantamount to a denial of God, since by questioning the validity of one step on the Chain of Being, it undermined the entire construct, including the creator. The Devil has ever been so devious, warns Glanvill, that:

Men have arrived thus far to think there are no diabolical contracts or apparitions … so that he that believes there is no witch, believes a devil gratis … and when Men are arrived to this degree of diffidence and infidelity, we are beholden to them if they believe [in] either angel or spirit … these things hang together in a chain of connexion … and *tis but an happy chance if he, that hath lost one link, holds another (3).

In their respective use of the Chain philosophy to defend society as they knew it, both Browne and Glanvill showcase a crucial facet of the Chain of Being tradition: its function as a tool of social conservatism, justifying the maintenance of a certain type of social order by linking it with the will of God. Furthermore, and somewhat paradoxically, this defensive declaration of the unchanging Chain is, in fact, a prime example of quite how malleable the Chain of Being idea could be. For, despite Browne’s and Glanvill’s
portentous misgivings, English witchcraft legislation was repealed in 1736, and not only did Chain of Being survive unscathed, it went on to reach unprecedented levels of popularity in social and scientific discourse (see the following sub-chapter) (Kreuger 26). After all, the repeal of the witchcraft laws was also an act of authority – which, like the ‘witches’ themselves, was also based on a hierarchy, and which, like the ‘witches’ themselves, could also be justified by the divine Chain. Just as the Chain could be invoked to defend the retention of witchcraft legislation, it implicitly underlay the authority of those who decided to remove it.

For, of course, at the very same time as the Chain motif was being invoked to justify the penalisation of witches – a ‘group’ of people who were held responsible for a ‘crime’ that many considered little more than provincial superstition – it was also being used to underpin the vast political claims of the British peerage, a group whose very real political powers had just recently overcome abolition during the Civil War (as has been explained in chapter 1.2.1). While the ideas of nobility and witches as human ‘types’ could hardly have been more differently based, the value and measure of both could be correlated on this abstract scale of existence. Both, indeed, depended on the concept of the Chain of Being in order to ensure their conceptual existence. Moreover, their respective subordination and ascendancy at the beginning of the eighteenth century demonstrates how the Chain of Being mentality was instrumental in the categorical delineation of different degrees of humanity. British humanity itself, as seen within the Chain model, was largely based on a synergetic relationship between authority and hierarchy – a relationship that disguised the decidedly arbitrary and changeable nature of each. Through the Chain philosophy, established authority could validate a given hierarchy through law and custom (deciding, for instance, whether witches did or did not exist), while the accepted hierarchy thus became the basis on which that authority claimed dominion. Put simply, the Chain
model offered those in power a way in which to promote hierarchies that justified their own power – an action that continually served to reinforce both the hierarchy and the power at its apex. Furthermore, the Chain motif meant that it did not matter what kind of hierarchy was favoured by the powerful, or what kind of claims lay behind their power, since everything, in one way or another, could be related back to the divine pattern of the universe. A noble by blood, a noble by merit, a noble by conquest, or a noble by royal decree, were all equally noble as long as their ‘nobility’ was validated by the dominant authority; concordantly, the mechanisms of their nobility – blood, merit, conquest, or decree – were implicitly reinforced as structural elements of the Chain itself, by virtue of having attended the attainment of noble rank.

By this very same dynamic, indeed, the concept of noble blood – that most-criticised facet of noble privilege – thrived, as it were, in a kind of doublespeak: the edifying qualities of bloodline could be systematically denied by supporters of nobility, who regularly emphasised the role of virtue in its stead, while the tradition was nonetheless tacitly perpetuated by asserting the evident precedence of noble ranks (primarily distinguished, of course, by blood) on the Great Chain. In 1718, Maurice Shelton’s anonymously published\(^{32}\) history of the British nobility *An Historical and Critical Essay on the True Rise of Nobility, Political and Civil*, did not hesitate to have it both ways: when solicitors speak of the “corruption of [noble] blood” he asserted, it is not “because native nobility is naturally and essentially in the humour of blood, more than any other hereditary faculty”, but because it is a corruption of the “right of inheritance, which by the degrees of the communication of blood is directed” (55). Nobility is “in itself honourable and laudable” he states, “but without virtue nothing” (2). Meanwhile, he is quite clear that any threat to this system of bloodline dynasties would also challenge the order of the universe:

\(^{32}\) The authorship of Maurice Shelton, a Suffolk squire, has never been definitively proven, but is regularly assumed from the appearance of his portrait in the 1720 frontispiece of the *True Rise* (Coppinger 227).
Distinction of rank is highly necessary for the œconomy of the world, and was never called in question but by barbarians and enthusiasts. A just consideration for the several orders of men, as the orders of Providence have plac’d them above us, is useful not only to the correcting of our manners, and keeping our common conversation in the bounds of politeness and civility, but has even a better consequence, in disposing our minds to a religious humility; and in observing step by step the several degrees of excellency above us, we arrive insensibly at last to the contemplation of the supreme perfection (emphasis added, v).

This last statement is a remarkable example of socio-political biases being integrated into an eighteenth-century Chain of Being discourse, and indeed of how this discourse could facilitate the assertion of contradictory ideals. The distinction of rank, claims Shelton, is highly necessary for the “œconomy” of society, yet the ranks of nobility, on which his text is focused, are definitively distinguished by bloodline and primogeniture, necessarily justifying blood privilege as a fundamental element of rank preservation. On the other hand, those ‘barbarians’ and ‘enthusiasts’ who question the status quo are definitively ‘rankless’ (the barbarians having never known it, and the enthusiasts, through their heresy or fundamentalism, having essentially rejected it), relegating them to the fringes of the acceptable limits of the Chain – if not suggesting that, in their non-conformity, they exist somewhere outside the normal realms of creation.

Even more interesting is the interplay of Chain rhetoric with the idea of civility and instruction: noble civility here serves as a tacit organisier of human society, “correcting” the manners of the lower ranks, and maintaining “our common conversation in the bounds of politeness and civility”. In this act of ‘performing’ nobility, recalling Castiglione’s sparkling sprezzatura, the nobility are not just reinforcing the structure of the Chain, they are reminding the rest of society of its greater purpose: when the lower ranks look upward along the Chain to the superior civility of nobles, claims Shelton, their gaze is trained upwards still toward the celestial beings and ultimately to God himself. The highest
ranks of society, here, become veritable waymarks to the divine by practising the rituals of high civility.

In fact, Shelton closely links the idea of hereditary nobility with the ‘ranks’ of divinity. In the beginning there was only “celestial nobility”, he contends, which God automatically granted Adam when he was made in his own image. And although Adam renounced this title by succumbing to temptation with Eve, he nonetheless retained a “worldly nobility” – which, Shelton suggests, introduced a noble legacy to his posterity. Why, then, was not everyone a noble? Naturally, explains Shelton, Adam was constrained to pass his title down through primogeniture, only to his eldest son, so as to cultivate a division between the few patriarchal leaders and the many followers, a pattern which “other families afterwards following, constantly observed” (6-7). Shelton was certainly not alone in this conviction: Francis Nichols’s *British Compendium* (both English and Scottish versions, previously discussed in chapter 1.2.3) is even more precise about the divine origin of worldly nobility, identifying the first ‘ennoblement’ as that of Obilion, grandson of Japhet and great-grandson of Noah. Obilion ‘learned’ nobility through a miraculous olive tree that represented the three brothers of Japhet, Shem, and “cursed” Ham, and by this he understood that he was “chief of the blood of the three sons of Noah … and thus began Nobility …” (362). Thus, a celestial form of rank superiority not only underlay the earthly notion of nobility in eighteenth-century tradition, but “worldly” nobles were, symbolically at least, distantly linked to the original celestial noble.

Most interesting of all, however, Shelton’s history of nobility conflates the genesis of noble virtues with one of the eighteenth century’s great origin myths of racialised subordination: the so-called ‘Curse of Ham’. This long-debated passage of *Genesis 9.20-27* recounts the story of Ham, who saw his father Noah drunk and naked, and

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33 ‘So-called’, that is, because as many historians have noted, the curse is actually placed upon Ham’s son, Canaan (Whitford 34).
told as much to his brothers Shem and Japhet. The virtuous brothers looked away and
covered their father’s shame, but when Noah discovered Ham’s ‘crime’, he sentenced his
descendants (the Canaanites) to eternal servitude, while blessing Japhet and Shem with
dominion over him (Gen. 9.27). Ham’s ‘crime’ is, of course, highly ambiguous, and his
punishment even more so, but by the time Shelton wrote his history these seven lines had
become a notorious point of reference for human inequality. Since the early Middle Ages,
Ham had been imagined as “the father of the European serf”, engendering a ‘racialised’
hereditary identity of servitude, placed in opposition to hereditary nobility which was linked
with the descendants of Japhet (Noah’s third son, Shem, was accordingly named the father
of freemen) (Whitford 19). “[God] casts those races [cneordhyse] into three parts” reads
an anonymous Anglo-Saxon folktale, “—one was servile, and [the other] the free race and
[the third] the noble race” (qtd in Whitford 41).34 In the fifteenth century, Dame Juliana
Berners echoed this sentiment (though she assigned different brothers to different estates):
“Noe had iii sonnys…” she wrote in the Boke of Seynt Albans (1486), “Yet in theys iii
sonnys gentilnes and ungentilness was founde. In Cham ungentilnes was founde …” (qtd
in Whitford 39). In this regard, then, Shelton was merely recalling an old tradition of
feudal estates and their origins, when he claimed that

Ham, with all his generation, carried away his father’s curse, servitude, and the
title of obscure, and base persons; whereas contrariwise, Sem and Japhet found all
the names and titles of honest, nobility, and vertue, accompanied with their
father’s blessing (62).

Yet, by the time the True Rise was published in 1718, the ‘Curse of Ham’ was replete with
potent connotations of skin colour and colonial exploitation – having already become “one
of the most persistent ideological and theological defences for African slavery and

34 “He on dreo to wearp þa cneornysse. Bwēs wēlisc. Oncylys cymn. Onge sydcund cynd”. The line is taken
from a miscellaneous collection of stories and sayings dating between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries,
contained in the ‘Cotton Tiberius A.iii Manuscript’ at the British Library.
segregation” (Whitford 4). As early as 1578, George Best’s *True Discourse of the Later Voyages of Discoverie* had contributed to this trend, proclaiming that “all ... posteritie after [Ham’s son] should be so black and loathsome, that it might remaine a spectacle of disobedience to all the worlde” (qtd in Haynes 36). By 1664, the link between Ham and skin colour had become so prevalent that Robert Boyle made a point of dismissing it at the very beginning of one of his studies on human populations. Even “men of note” he claims, and world travellers had subscribed to the Hamite theory of skin colour, though it was clearly fallacious (nor did it make any sense to describe black skin as a ‘curse’ for Africans, he added, if Africans themselves consider it beautiful – and “paint the devil white”) (717). By 1722, four years after the publication of Shelton’s history, Augustin Calmet’s *Dictionaire historique critique, chronologique, géographique et littéral de la Bible* (translated into English in 1732) could confidently state that Ham’s curse not only condemned his posterity to servitude, but also that, “tout à coup la couleur de leur chair devint noire; y car ils tiennent que tous les noirs viennent de Cham...” (3.138).³⁵ In Francis Nichols’s *British Compendium* of 1725, yet again, Olibion recognises that he is noble in the triangular olive tree partly because the point that represents “cursed brother Ham” is facing into the ground (362).

Thus, though Shelton is ostensibly recalling a medieval tradition of noble genesis in the *True Rise*, wherein Ham represents a caste of churlish serfs and Japhet represents hereditary nobility, he is simultaneously evoking a very contemporary reference for racialised humanity. For nobles to be placed in contrast to the *descendants of Ham*, in this context, not only ‘racialises’ their non-noble inferiors (and indeed the nobles themselves), but conflates this racialised rank-precedence with a discourse of white over black/freeman over slave. Furthermore, both possible readings – nobles as opposed to base commoners,

³⁵ “[A]ll of a sudden, the colour of their flesh became black; for it is held that all blacks are descended from Cham” (my trans. 138)
and nobles as opposed to non-whites – nourish the Chain of Being discourse that Shelton develops in his history. In both readings, likewise, the nobles are envisioned as a ‘type’ or ‘echelon’ of human being, in just the same way as non-whites/the vulgar. The idea of Ham’s descendants, after all, was no less based on bloodline and heredity than was the idea of noble dynasty, and the accident of blood and descent that had ostensibly produced the peoples of Africa was no less responsible for their ‘place’ on the Chain of Being than it was for the exalted ranks of Duke or Earl.

In short, in early modern Europe the Chain of Being tradition provided a crucial framework for new hierarchies to be received and considered as if they had always existed, and merely needed to be organised into a scheme of thought, precedence and protocol. The layout of a church was no less part of this framework than were the lists of plants and animals in the catalogues of Royal Society; the ranks of the nobility no less than the disappearing ranks of witches, and the burgeoning ‘ranks’ of human anatomy. This interplay of rank and racialised thought, however, also depended on a significant degree of ambiguity in the idea of rank itself – a certain room for argument, as in Shelton’s text, about what exactly constituted the limits of human order. It was this same ambiguity that would allow the tenets of the Chain of Being, replete with their social connotations of superiority and inferiority, to be projected onto new visions of racialised hierarchy in human populations.
1.3.3: The Great Chain of Being: Pope’s *Essay on Man* and the Discourse of ‘Race’ and Rank.

“It was in the eighteenth century” claims Lovejoy, “that the conception of the universe as a great Chain of Being, and the principles which underlay its conception – plenitude, continuity, gradation – attained their widest diffusion and acceptance” (183). This fact, he notes, is somewhat peculiar considering the intellectual trends of the age: Aristotle had relatively fallen out of favour, Scholasticism was regularly mocked in learned circles, and the methods of empirical inquiry had gained enormous popularity. Despite all this, an extraordinary number of theorists and philosophers, including “Addison, King, Bolingbroke, Pope, Haller, Thomson, Akenside, Buffon, Bonnet, Goldsmith, Diderot, Kant, Lambert, Herder, [and] Schiller”, maintained and developed the concept of the universal Chain during the eighteenth century (183-4). Of all the above, however, the most influential champion of the Chain of Being motif in eighteenth-century Britain was not a philosopher, but a poet.

Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man* (1734) succeeded in redacting the high-minded, convoluted and often bewildering prose of the seventeenth-century philosophers into a format that was not only remarkably lucid, but lyrically masterful in its own right (Woodard 5). The immensely popular poem ruthlessly reduced the dense Chain discourses of Plato, Locke, Leibniz, Spinoza and William King to a single, fluid text, which was at once digestible and entertaining for the reading public of eighteenth-century Europe. In fact, Pope’s heroic couplets have provided some of the most succinct and often-cited descriptions of the Chain in the entire history of the tradition. Its first epistle, famously, justifies the ways of God to Man with the concise assertion that: “Whatever IS, is RIGHT” (1.10, line 294). Such an appropriation, nonetheless, required a certain degree of poetic and editorial licence. Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, for instance, is
laconically paraphrased in the first epistle in order to demonstrate the mechanics of continuous gradation – but while Pope succeeds in transforming Locke’s steady, methodical prose into vibrant verse, he is inevitably obliged to sacrifice a considerable degree of its content. Consider this passage from Locke’s Essay:

[I]f by the help of such microscopic eyes (if I may so call them) a man could penetrate further than ordinary into the secret composition and radical texture of bodies, he would not make any great advantage by the change, if such an acute sight would not serve to conduct him to the market and exchange (2.23.12).

Compare, then, with its corresponding interpretation in Pope’s Essay:

    Why has not Man a microscopic eye?  
    For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly. 
    Say what the use, were finer optics giv’n, 
    T’inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav’n? (Epistle 1.6, lines 193-6).

The principle of plenitude too, in Pope’s verse, is sometimes confounded with poetic hyperbole. The first epistle recalls Leibniz’s tenets of a ‘full’ and ‘coherent’ universe, earthly and heavenly – yet, while the poetic language renders these philosophical principles infinitely more alive in the reader’s imagination than they had been in their original prose form, the lines’ heightened aesthetics also run the risk of obscuring the principle itself. The superlative of Leibniz’s full universe is, after all, anything but hyperbole – something that might well be momentarily forgotten in lines such as this:

    As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart; 
    As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns, 
    As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns; (Epistle 1.9, lines 276-8).

Perhaps most contentiously, certain readers such as the Swiss Logician Jean-Pierre de Crousaz in his Examen de l'essai de M. Pope (1737), denounced the poem as vehicle for
heretical Spinozan ‘pantheism’ – which ostensibly surfaced in certain lines such as “All are but parts of one stupendous whole, / Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;” (Crousaz 95; epistle 1.9, lines 268-9).\(^{36}\)

Of course, the irony that Pope’s vastly popular rendition of the Chain philosophy largely owed its success to the fact that it simplified the philosophical tenets at hand was not lost on his critics. In fact, for decades after its initial publication the Essay was regularly impugned for having misunderstood the principles of its own philosophy, inspiring remarks “ranging from the patronisingly supercilious to the completely contemptuous” (Priestley 213). Samuel Johnson, for instance, was not voicing an uncommon concern when he recorded in his Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets (1779-80) that:

> the poet was not sufficiently master of his subject; metaphysical morality was to him a new study … supposing himself the master of great secrets, [he] was in haste to teach us what he had not learned … Never were penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised (Johnson 1810, 114-15).

Even Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke, to whom the poem had been dedicated, was said to have privately mocked the work for its relative simplicity. According to the contemporary critic and churchman William Warburton in A View of Lord Bolingbroke’s Philosophy (1754), the poem’s dedicatee:

> could not forbear making the poet, then alive and at his devotion, the frequent topic of his ridicule amongst their common acquaintance, as a man who understood nothing of his own principles, nor saw to what they naturally tended (327).

For all this, Pope’s ‘misunderstanding’ of plenitude, continuity and gradation nonetheless succeeded in disseminating a fresh and intelligible rendition of the Chain of Being

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\(^{36}\) Cecil A. Moore, notably, questions whether Pope was directly influenced by Leibniz (as was claimed by some contemporary critics, notably Jean-Pierre de Crousaz), or whether he absorbed his teachings through the writings of Bolingbroke (84-102).
philosophy across the breadth of eighteenth-century Europe (Laird 286). During the hundred years following its publication, notes Ian Campbell Ross, the Essay was translated into all the major languages of Europe, with no fewer than twenty-four in German alone, eighteen in Italian, sixteen in French, six in Dutch, five each in Polish and Latin, four in Swedish, as well as various others in “Czech, Danish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Welsh” (77). For eighteenth-century Europe, claims Harry M. Solomon, *The Essay on Man* was quite simply the “Mount Everest” of poetry – becoming an international touchstone text for the Chain of Being philosophy (1). In France, Voltaire became one of the Essay’s greatest admirers, possibly collaborating in some its translations (1). In the 1756 edition of his *Lettres philosophiques*, he praised the poem and its author, with particular admiration for how he had translated opaque philosophical prose into sparkling verse:

*L’Essai sur l’homme de Pope, me paraît le plus beau Poème didactique, le plus utile, le plus sublime qu’on ait jamais fait dans aucune langue … ce système tient beaucoup de celui de Leibniz … Il ressemble encore à cette idée de Platon, que dans la chaîne infinie des êtres, notre terre, notre corps, notre âme, sont au nombre des chaînons nécessaires … Platon parlait en Poëte dans sa prose peu intelligible ; et Pope parle en Philosophe dans ses admirables vers. … Quand un Français et un Anglais pensent de même, il faut bien qu’ils aient raison (257).*

When Voltaire criticised the proponents of Leibnizian optimism in works such as the *Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne* (1756) and *Candide* (1759) he immediately received a reprimand from Rousseau, who wrote him that “le poème de Pope adoucit mes maux et me porte à la patience. Le vôtre … me réduit au désespoir” (36). And yet, notes Solomon, even in his criticism of the optimists, Voltaire was ever careful not to denounce Pope

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37 Pope’s *Essay on Man* seems to me the most useful, didactic, and sublime poem to have been written in any language … this system owes much to that of Leibniz … it also resembles Plato’s idea that, in the infinite chain of beings, our land, our bodies, and our souls are all accounted as necessary links. Plato speaks as a poet in abstruse prose; Pope speaks as a philosopher in admirable verse … when a Frenchman and an Englishman think alike, they must be right” (my trans.).
38 “Pope’s poem eases my ills and brings me patience … yours … reduces me to despair” (my trans.). *Lettre à Voltaire, 18 août 1756.*
himself (whom, claims Solomon, he regarded as “a fellow deist”), nor the Essay – rather criticising those who had misread the poem to their own ends (71). In Germany, by the 1780s, Immanuel Kant was passionately reading sections of the Essay aloud to his students in the lecture halls of Königsberg, claiming that Pope was a greater philosopher than even Leibniz, and citing the poem extensively in some of his major works (Solomon 1993, 1; v. Kant’s *Universal Natural History* Watkins ed. 182-309). “Pope chooses a path”, he wrote in his *Reflexionen zur Metaphysik* (1780-83), “which, when it comes to rendering the beautiful proof of God’s existence accessible to everyone, is the best suited of all possible paths” (Walford ed. 80).

One of the most interesting aspects of Pope’s Chain of Being, however, is its particular emphasis on universal order as expressed within the realm of Mankind – how the socio-spiritual hierarchies of Man can (and should) be read in the greater context of natural rank. No individual can be happy in isolation, asserts Pope, and none can achieve happiness by taking the place of his superior, because true satisfaction depends on fulfilling one’s unique role in the cosmic system. Trying to ‘improve’ this role, therefore, is inherently contradictory, since every entity is already a reflection of perfection in its particular time and space – an ostensible ‘improvement’ can only lead to cosmic degeneration. Accepting the social order as God has made it, then, is not only necessary in order to honour the work of creation, but is also required in order to find spiritual fulfilment:

> Order is Heav’n’s first law; and this confest,  
Some are, and must be, greater than the rest,  
More rich, more wise; but who infers from hence  
That such are happier, shocks all common sense.  
…

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39 This confusion, claims Solomon, stems from a common misreading of Pope’s metaphors, which still runs through modern criticism of the Essay today (Ginsberg ed. 122-34).
Condition, circumstance is not the thing;  
Bliss is the same in subject or in king (Epistle 4, lines 49-53, 57-8).

According to the *Essay*, the transgression of one’s social station will not only lead to unhappiness, it will inspire discord in the order as a whole. To imagine that certain people might be better suited to different social roles from their own, notes Pope in the fourth epistle, is simply to approach the whole concept of divine order from the wrong perspective. Yes, bad people are sometimes born into high positions while the virtuous are often born into subordination, he concedes, but this does not mean that they have been erroneously chosen for their social role – indeed, such a suggestion would necessarily entail a criticism of God’s creation. Rather, claims Pope, if it appears that “virtue starves while vice is fed” it is because people have failed to truly embrace the role that they have been assigned (Epistle 4, line 149). Likewise, the talented, virtuous citizen born into a low station, but who believes himself better suited to a higher rank, is missing the point of divine creation – virtue does not necessarily mean aspiration, rather it comes from embodying one’s God-given place in the world: “Act well your part,” the *Essay* implores, “there all the honour lies” (Epistle 4, line 194). Wealth and privilege may create material differences between the ranks, but the underlying order they represent is what really matters:

 Fortune in Men has some small diff’rence made,  
One flaunts in rags, one flutters in brocade,  
The cobler apron’d, and the parson gown’d,  
The friar hooded, and the monarch crown’d,  
“What differ more (you cry) than crown and cowl?”  
I’ll tell you, friend! a Wise man and a Fool.  
You’ll find, if once the monarch acts the monk,  
Or, cobler-like, the parson will be drunk,  
Worth makes the man, and want of it, the fellow;  
The rest is all but leather or prunella  
(Epistle 4, 195-204).

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40 A plum-coloured silken fabric worn by the clergy, graduates, and barristers. The *OED* cites the more frequent variation of ‘prunello’, suggesting a rhyme-play on the corresponding ‘fellow’ (‘prunella n.3 and adj.’).
Interestingly, Pope integrates the old argument against noble titles into the same defence. Titles and bloodlines, agrees Pope, are worthless unless they are invested with the virtue and honour that they claim to represent. Yet, in a roundabout way, his line of reasoning also defends nobility as a blood-born caste in the Chain of precedence; consider, for instance, this ostensible criticism:

Stuck o’er with titles and hung round with strings,
That thou may’st be by kings, or whores of kings.
Boast the pure blood of an illustrious race,
In quiet flow from Lucrece to Lucrece;
But by your father’s worth if yours you rate,
Count me those only who were good and great.
Go! if your ancient, but ignoble blood
Has crept thro’ scoundrels ever since the flood,
Go! and pretend your family is young;
Nor own, your fathers have been fools so long.
What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?
Alas! not all the blood of all the Howards (Epistle 4, lines 205-216).

Here, then, Pope at once undermines the importance of blood tradition in nobility and reinforces the idea that blood-born nobles occupy the correct place in the social order. The problem with nobles, he contends, is that they fall back on their bloodlines (which are nonetheless necessary for their existence as a rank in God’s creation) as proof of their privilege, while neglecting to fulfil the ordered destiny that those bloodlines represent. It follows that the appropriate response to an idle nobility is not to overthrow them, but to coerce them into acting out the part that God has clearly designed for them.

Pope’s accessible exposition of universal order did not only give fresh impetus to the idea of hierarchy in eighteenth-century Britain, it helped to bridge a growing conceptual gap between the old spiritual hierarchies of Western tradition and the decidedly non-traditional realities that were being increasingly revealed through the discourses of science and geographical exploration. The relatively simplified principles of plenitude,
continuity and gradation he expounded could conveniently integrate vastly different cultures and peoples into a Western worldview, while ensuring that the place and function of traditional Western ranks remained conceptually undisturbed. Indeed, in this regard, suggests Helena Woodard, Pope’s construction of a “universal, unbiased ranking of humanity” somewhat unwittingly “advocates a concept that has far reaching racial implications” (xv). In the same way as noble blood does not automatically confer nobility, yet simultaneously signals that one has been chosen by God as a noble and should thus act the part with according dignity, the physical condition of racialised human varieties has a special, if contradictory, significance according to Pope’s system. Following the logic of the Essay, a darker-skinned human is not inferior because of his darker skin, but his evident physical condition nonetheless signifies that he has been born into a particularly inferior social category – which, if he is ever to attain true virtue, he must embrace with wholehearted humility. This ‘spiritual’ racialisation, indeed, certainly underlies the poem’s description, in its first epistle, of the “poor Indian!” – whose ignorance of Christian religion and civilisation has, ironically, led him to embrace his place in the Christian universe more happily than the cynical and aspirational men of Europe.

Lo the poor Indian! Whose untutor’d mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul proud science never taught to stray,
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple nature to his hope has giv’n,
Behind the cloud-topt hill, an humbler heav’n

... He asks no Angel’s wings, no Seraph’s fire;
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company (Epistle 1.3, lines 99-104, 110-12).

Here, the ignorance of the ‘poor Indian’ is identified as part of his natural state – and his resignation to a condition of relative inferiority is the key to his spiritual integrity. The last lines suggest that he will, for his humility, be admitted to Heaven, but even then only in the
context of his child-like naiveté, assuming his dog will accompany him. In this way, suggests Woodard, while the Essay does not “directly approve of racial subordination, the pernicious manner in which his doctrine can serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the dispossessed is keenly apparent” (8). In other words, Pope had created an accessible Chain model, which, among other things, lent itself remarkably well to racialised hierarchies. To conceive of a human ‘type’ in terms of God-given rank on the social scale was, in effect, to impose a certain level of inferiority on that variety. And, asserts Woodard, “when a hierarcichal theory of humanity accompanies the identification of a specific indigenous racial group (deemed repugnant), it requires only a small nudge to shift discussion from an abstract idea to specific theories about racial hierarchies” (15).

In fact, Pope’s doctrine considerably facilitated the development of a socio-racialised discourse, providing a language in which any perceived inferiority could be justified as a product of divine hierarchy, and, furthermore, thought of in fluid relation to any other form of inferiority for this very reason. Both Woodard and Lovejoy note a striking instance of this confluence in Samuel Richardson’s best-selling novel Pamela (1740), wherein the eponymous heroine recalls the verses of Pope by reciting an anonymous poem in heroic couplets on the subject of the Chain of Being:

The meanest slaves, or those who hedge and ditch,
Are useful by their sweat to feed the rich.
The rich, in due return, impart their store;
Which comfortably feeds the lab’ring poor.
Nor let the rich the lowest slave disdain:
He’s equally a link in nature’s chain;
Labours to the same end, joins in one view;
And both alike the will divine pursue:
And at last, are levell’d, king and slave,
Without distinction in the silent grave (Richardson 239; Woodard 7; Lovejoy 207).
Here, Pamela is dutifully rehearsing the tenets of Pope’s fourth epistle – there is a place for the rich and a place for the poor; they function together within the greater construct of society, and this, as God has intended, is good. There is no place, however, for the rich thus to think themselves better than the poor; on the contrary, in their very act of despising their inferiors they are debasing themselves below the rank of the virtuous poor – who have at least recognised the cosmic importance of their humble position. Performing one’s moral role, be it that of a servant or a nobleman, is, in the words of Pope, where “honour lies” – and this, notoriously, is Pamela’s forte (4.194). Richardson’s heroine is more than capable of expressing her moral convictions without the help of borrowed poetry, identifying her ‘pure’ peasant’s blood as proof of her spiritual purity, and as a consolidator of the social role she is working so hard to embody:

[M]any of these gentlefolks, that brag of their ancient blood, would be glad to have it as wholesome, and as really untainted, as ours! … [A]nd this proud letter, of the lowly Lady Davers, against the high-minded Pamela. Lowly, I say, because she could stoop to such vain pride; and high-minded I, because I hope I am too proud ever to do the like! … [P]ray I, to be kept from the sinful pride of a high estate (238-9).

Pamela’s assertion of her pure, ‘untainted’ peasant blood deliberately and provocatively inverts the traditional language of noble birth, while casting aspersions of ‘mongrel’ ancestry on the upper orders because of their historical rises and falls. And yet, in its spiritual dimensions, it also constitutes a very real criticism: Pamela’s physical condition, that is to say, her ‘pure’ peasant lineage which expresses itself in her ‘natural’ good looks, rustic naiveté, and impossibly quaint manner, bespeaks generations of ancestors who have embraced their natural, cosmic role (rather than usurping and aspiring like the upper orders) – and who are infinitely more virtuous for it. This aspect of Pamela’s body and blood are themselves constituent parts of her idealised rank performance – they identify the validity of her peasant rank in the very same way as noble blood identifies the upper
orders, while she, unlike the degenerate Lady Davers, has the virtue to follow through with an appropriate social display of this rank. We might consider, for instance, Pamela’s instinctive dismay at the beginning of the novel when she is presented with her late mistress’s clothes that are slightly too fine for her status – she subsequently cuts them up and remakes them to be “fitter for my condition”; or her sudden transformation into a paragon of ‘quality’ on the day of her marriage into the gentry: “All that I value myself upon,” she remarks in relation to her new finery, “is, that God has raised me to a condition to be useful in my generation” (456). Her marriage, indeed, overtakes her blood at the end of the novel as primary evidence of her spiritual rank, while it introduces a new family line of genteel ‘blood’ which itself will form part of the rank performance of her children.

As such, claims Woodard, it is particularly notable that Pamela’s poem related the relationship of inferior and superior ranks to “[t]he meanest slaves, or those who hedge and ditch, [who] are useful by their sweat to feed the rich”. Pamela is speaking as a white female servant, notes Woodard, for whom this moral role within the universal order applies to her rank – and yet the poem that she uses to illustrate her point “hearkens to a brutal chattel slavocracy that is more consistent with Euro-African trade than with Pamela’s indentured servant status” (7). Indeed, the mere mention of slavery in the context of Pamela’s Chain of Being polemic necessarily introduces a racialised aspect to her argument of natural order. Slaves too, following her (and Pope’s) reasoning, have a moral role in the universal order which, in its perceived interdependence with the higher orders of society, is comparable to the lower social orders of white freemen. And, it must be inferred, the bodies and blood of non-white slaves can be taken as a premise for their rank on the Chain, just as Pamela’s undisputed peasant blood has unambiguously identified the rank she has been born to excel within. Skin-colour and physical features, then, are here
implicitly linked with more traditional notions of rank and, furthermore, rank as understood in a context of anatomical constitution.

Indeed, the idea that the physical body presupposed a certain spiritual rank in the Chain of Being was a notable element of geographic and naturalist discourses during the eighteenth century, even being invoked, at times, to intimate a certain inhumanity in non-whites. The Oxford geographer Richard Turner, for instance, footnoted his description of the population of Africa in his *View of the Earth: Being a Short System of Modern Geography* (1771) with this remark:

> Some writers have supposed these people to be descendants of Cain; who for his cruelty to his brother, has that mark set upon him. – Others have esteemed them to be a different species of being, and therefore ranked them a link lower than us in the Chain of Existence: – whilst many have attributed that dusky hue to the nature of their diet, and intense heat of the country (17).

Here, the Chain of Being acts as a syntactical and conceptual link between two opposing notions of racialised humanity: allowing the author unproblematically to assert both the traditional conceit of biblical curse, and the modern geographical discourse of climate theory, by relating both to the natural scheme of divine order. Meanwhile, the Chain is invoked to identify a group of people defined by their physical features as an inferior species, using the very same ideas of natural rank that had been evoked in *Pamela* to assert a ‘polygenist’ view of racialised population difference (for a full discussion of climate theory and polygenism see chapter 2.2.3).

Similarly, an anonymous article in the monthly periodical *The London Magazine* in 1750 demonstrates how the Chain motif could offer a mainstay for arguments of racialised inequality while bypassing the more problematic elements of the argument (318). Responding to Buffon’s *Variétés dans l’espèce humaine* (1749), the author concedes that human varieties may be affected by their climate, but argues that Buffon has neglected
the role of religion in their formation. It might be supposed, he asserts, that God originally created a different sort of human being for each climate, and “that there is a gradation from the most perfect and rational of the human, to the most perfect, and … most sensible of the brute creation” (Kimber ed. 318). *Genesis* had spoken of “the sons of God” marrying the “daughters of men”, he notes, which must refer to these ‘most perfect’ humans, the sons of Adam, marrying into the families of their less than perfect counterparts (*Gen.* 6:1-4; 318). Thus, for this author, the Chain motif acts as a framework by which he can dissect the words of Genesis in terms of racialised hierarchy, and directly relate them to a discourse of climate theory and empirical inquiry. Furthermore, by relating both ideas of human hierarchy to a single Chain construct, he can seamlessly identify the inferred gradations between perfect humans and perfect animals with Buffon’s gradations of skin tone and the racialised body (again, see chapter 2.2.3). Since the Chain motif allows him to maintain his society’s hegemonic biases as an expression of natural order, it also allows him to claim disparate and contradictory evidence to support these biases.

In fact, in his *Considerations on the Negro Cause* of 1772, the English parliamentarian Samuel Estwick directly quoted Pope’s defence of social ranks in the *Essay* in order to suggest that Africans were a lesser species of humanity. No amount of instruction or time will amend the immorality, cruelty, and violence of the tribes of Africa, he proclaims, “for the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots” (81). Yet, were it otherwise, he suggests, it would perhaps be unnatural – since the barbarity of the African is much an element of the Great of Chain of Being as is the civility of the European:

I infer that the measure of these beings may be as compleat, as that of any other race of mortals; filling up that space of life beyond the bounds of which they are not capable of passing; differing from other men, not in *kind*, but in *species*, and verifying that unerring truth of Mr. Pope, that
“Order is Heaven’s first law; and this confest,
Some are and must be greater than the rest ["] (82).

Thus, Estwick uses the Chain motif in order to directly project the socio-political hierarchies of rank in England upon a racialised discourse of slavery and the physical body. Furthermore, he even manages to interpret the tenet of plenitude as evidence of racialised determinism: the ‘space’ on the chain that Africans occupy, their unique facet of universal being, is here expressed in terms of their corporeal limitations – the “bounds” beyond which they “are not capable of passing”. Indeed, he goes on to cite these “corporeal and intellectual differences of Negroes from other people” as well as “the irreclaimable savageness of their manners” as evidence not only that they are an inferior “race of people”, but also that “they should be considered and distinguished (as they are) as articles of [legal] trade and commerce only” (82).

Besides the fact that this conception of the universe underpinned the entire discourse of ‘order’ and ‘hierarchy’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the idea of the Great Chain of Being is crucial to this study for one main reason: it underlines the fact that Western universal hierarchies, prior to and during the scientific developments of the eighteenth century, did not make any particular distinction between gradations of ‘natural’ hierarchies and societal ones. The model of a great spiritual chain meant that all hierarchies, living or dead, earthly or divine, even those that overlapped or contradicted each other, could be thought of in relation to a vast, overarching spiritual hierarchy. The universality of the Great Chain meant that it could run from barren soil, through sea-life, through various breeds of animals, through different social ranks of mankind, through different ‘national types’, through to angels, demons, witches, and astrological bodies. It not only united each ‘being’ with its ostensible inferior and superior, it intimately bound
together different modes of hierarchy – no matter how diverse – by inescapably relating each one back to the greater divine plan. Thus, the duke and the earl, as portrayed by Nichols, with their slightly differing ermines and crowns, occupied different ranks of the Great Chain in just the same way as did a frog and a cat; a father and a daughter occupied different places, as did a king and a beggar, a butcher and a baker, a fly and a moth, a leopard and a tiger – and all these differences in scale and importance, from all these different perspectives, were ultimately part of an essential divine hierarchy. “[The Great Chain] is not merely a doctrine of a great chain, not merely a scala naturae …” writes F.E.I. Priestley, “It is an ontological hierarchy … derived a priori, from axioms about the nature of Being.” (214-215). It is with this in mind, then, that we can turn to the idea of blood and noble ‘breeding’ as both a spiritual phenomenon and a medical one; something that can be measured in terms of natural precedence and empirical observation. Something, indeed, that will fundamentally link the ideas of noble difference to the idea of human difference, encapsulated in a term and concept that was vital to both: ‘race’.
Section 2: From Race Thinking to Human Variety

It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl the earth … I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

- Letter from the Duchess of Buckingham to Lady Huntingdon, c. 1740.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{41} The letter refers to Lady Huntingdon’s involvement with Methodist leaders. Its approximate date can be estimated at sometime between the Duchess’s second marriage in the late 1730s and her death in 1742 (Kirkman Foster 1:27, 443).
2.1: Hereditary Privilege and the Culture of Race

2.1.1: Approaching ‘Race’ in the Eighteenth Century: A ‘Genealogical Discourse’

Heredity has thus far been at the very heart of this study of noble tradition. Whether it is expressed in terms of eugeneia, nobilitas, ancestry, breeding, blood or lineage, hereditary nobility essentially relies on the idea of lineal descent – the transfer of authority from one family member to another, or the induction of power into a family through marriage. It is a tradition which is inescapably bound up with the body – a product of sex and childbirth, of carefully matched human beings, chosen from specific, documented families, coming together literally to create another human being of a desired ilk. Even the figurative dimensions of noble blood and noble breeding, as we will see, revolve around the physical body as something distinct and superior, at the very least a vehicle for virtue, at the very most an embodiment of virtue itself. For all this, however, the basic concept of a parent transferring certain characteristics to his or her offspring was not as straightforward during the eighteenth century as it might at first seem. Indeed, the English word ‘heredity’ was not used to describe the transmission of qualities or characteristics from parent to child until the mid-nineteenth century, when naturalists began to borrow it from its original, legal context (essentially meaning ‘inheritance’). 42 This is not to say that those living in eighteenth-century Britain were not acutely aware that certain couplings produced certain patterns of descending physical traits – on the contrary, this very awareness had been an

42 The term ‘heredity’ primarily referred to inherited possessions, rather than inherent traits (a sense, incidentally, which it quietly maintained until the twentieth century). Müller-Wille and Rheinberger attribute the fully ‘biological’ concept of heredity to the works of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton in the 1860s (‘heredity’ n. OED; Müller-Wille and Rheinberger 2007, 17; 2012, 2).
essential basis of agricultural practice in the Western world for millennia (Jacob 1). Yet, it was only towards the very end of the century, notes the molecular biologist François Jacob, that this transmission of traits began to be conceived in terms of reproduction. Rather, new individuals were created through the process of generation: “[avant la fin du XVIIIe siècle] les êtres ne se reproduisent pas. Ils sont engendrés. La génération est toujours le résultat d’une création qui, à une étape ou une autre, exige l’intervention directe des forces divines” (28). Throughout the eighteenth century, note Staffan Müller-Wille and Hans Jörg Rheinberger, and in some respects right up until the advent of Mendelism in 1900, hereditary transmission was “not separated from the contingencies of conception, pregnancy, embryonic development, parturition, and lactation” (2007, 3). While parental traits were recognised as contributing factors to the traits of the offspring, so too was divine Providence, which invoked a range of external forces such as upbringing, diet, climate, morality, religion, nationality, and even the mother’s imagination during pregnancy.44

Indeed, for all the visible evidence to support it, heredity could not exist as a ‘biological’ phenomenon during the eighteenth century, because neither the concept of ‘biology’, nor indeed life as a collective entity of ‘vital’ essences, had been thoroughly delineated.45 ‘Vitalism’ – the notion that living organisms contain a certain “non-physical element” which makes them different from inanimate objects – had been proposed in opposition to Cartesian mechanistic philosophy since the seventeenth century (and indeed had roots in antiquity), yet it was only in the work of anatomists like Xavier Bichat and François Magendie in the late eighteenth century that it was substantially developed in the

43 Before [the end of the eighteenth century] beings did not reproduce, they were begotten. Generation was always the result of an act of creation, which, at one stage or another, involved the direct intervention of divine forces (my trans.).
44 So-called ‘maternal impression’ theories, though definitively disproved in the 1800s, were, remarkably, still being cited in British and American medical journals as late as 1920 (Bondeson, 157-8).
45 The English term ‘biology’ was tentatively used for the first time in 1799, while its modern sense was established in French by Lamarck in 1802 (‘biology’ n. 2, OED).
context of experimental physiology (Craig ed. 639-40). Indeed, the conception of ‘life’ in naturalist discourse, notes Michel Foucault in Les Mots et Les Choses (1966), could not exist without the establishment of an extensive and coherent system of classification: that is to say, only when a great mass of creation had been commonly defined according to observable characteristics (such as their being a ‘living’ creature or not), could one section of creation be identified as manifesting the same characteristic of ‘life’ (174). It was only through the language of natural philosophy, therefore, that life could be constructed as a scientific reality. As Foucault explains, “[l’histoire naturelle] est, en réalité, entrecroisée avec une théorie des mots ... la vie prend son autonomie par rapport aux concepts de la classification” (174-5). And thus, suggests François Jacob, the concept of ‘biological’ heredity, as we know it today, would have made little sense for most of the eighteenth century. The Great Chain of Being worldview, he notes, made no particular distinction, nor drew any great dividing line, between things that were living and things that were not, between ‘beings’ and ‘objects’: “[au XVIIIe siècle] c’est sans faille que le vivant se prolonge dans l’inanimé ... Ni au XVIIe, ni pendant presque tout le XVIIIe siècle, on ne reconnaît cette qualité particulière d’organisation qu’appellera vie le XIXe siècle” (42).

Crucially, however, there was a different way to understand hereditary transmission in the eighteenth century – which existed independently of, even in opposition to, naturalist understandings of the body: race. The eighteenth-century notion of ‘race’ was at once very different from and very influential over our modern understanding of the word – which, as mentioned at the beginning of this study, did not fully acquire its sense as “one of the major groupings of mankind, having in common distinct physical

46 Collective ‘life’ remains a somewhat ambiguous concept: the seven signs of life traditionally asserted in modern biology (response to stimuli, homeostasis, adaptation, reproduction, metabolism, organisation, and growth) can only approximately identify ‘living’ things – viruses, for instance, do not display all seven.
47 “[Natural history] resides in its entirety in the nature of language ... life assumes its autonomy in relation to the concepts of classification” (Foucault, trans. Sheridan 1970, 177).
48 “[In the eighteenth century] the realm of living things blended seamlessly into the realm of the inanimate ... neither in the seventeenth century nor for most of the eighteenth did people recognise this particular organisational quality which, in the nineteenth century, would come to be known as ‘life’” (my trans.).
features or having a similar ethnic background” until the very last years of the eighteenth century (‘race, n.6’ \textit{OED}). Though naturalists and explorers had used the term in relation to human varieties since the late seventeenth century,\footnote{Bernasconi justifiably asserts that Kant ultimately had far more influence over modern racism (especially in his insistence on genealogical race) than Blumenbach, even though he is far less often cited as a formulator of the modern concept (for further discussion of Kant see chapters 2.2.3 and 3.1.1). It is mostly owing to Blumenbach’s introduction of modern race terminology (including terms such as ‘Caucasian’) that he has become such a benchmark figure of modern ‘race’ ideology (88).} it was only in the 1795 edition of the German physician Johann Blumenbach’s \textit{De generis humani varietate nativa} (‘On the Natural Variety of Mankind’) that the modern ‘race’ model was clearly delineated. Considerably influenced by Kant’s system of human varieties defined by skin colour, Blumenbach’s \textit{De generis} is especially notable for having asserted five \textit{gens} (invariably translated as ‘races’) in Mankind, namely “Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malay” (Bernasconi 87-9, Hudson 255; Blumenbach 264).\footnote{Both Robert Bernasconi and Michael Banton note that François Bernier had used the French term \textit{race} to describe “Europeans, Africans, Orientals, and Laplanders” in 1684, but these types were not developed as a complete system (further possible ‘species’ or ‘races’ were suggested), nor were all of them even named (\textit{Nouvelle division de la Terre}, qtd in Bernasconi 2000, 84; Banton 1967, 16).}

The relative newness of “race claiming scientific validity” is reflected in the fact that, less than two hundred years after its initial conception, it has already been abandoned by a significant proportion of the scientific community (Banton 1967, 12). For, as a \textit{scientific} reality, the modern concept of race is subject to one glaring and indeed insurmountable problem: it is based, almost entirely, on \textit{cultural} premises. The German political philosopher Eric Voegelin perhaps best summed up the paradox of ‘scientific race’ in his \textit{Race and State} of 1933: “Anyone perusing the main works in the literature of race will be astonished by the self-satisfied, complacent tone prevailing on all sides” he remarked, and by the smug, self-satisfied pride in so-called significant achievements, which contrast oddly with the undemanding nature of these studies. The need for a critical foundation does not make itself felt because prevailing race theory works with a system of dogmas that, as we can see, is neither transcendentally shaken by philosophical anthropology nor deeply affected inherently by the course of
biology … it is a system of dogmas that arose in the second half of the nineteenth century and that, in short, I will call the system of scientific superstition … when anthropologists claiming to be adherents of the scientific method establish mental or psychological racial types, the makeup of the subject under investigation compels them to use methods that have no relation whatsoever to those of biology or any other natural science; they must work with what is today conventionally identified as the methods of the humanities, namely with the formation of types [Typenbildung] based on historical material (12).

From the late 1960s on, widespread dissatisfaction with the race model and its scientific capacities increased exponentially in Western scientific communities, and, by the end of the twentieth century, the idea of ‘race as a scientific fact’ had been almost entirely rejected by physical anthropologists in the English-speaking world (Lieberman et al. 907). Eventually, on the 17th of May 1998, the American Anthropological Association released the following statement:

[B]oth scholars and the general [American] public have been conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences … [however] genetics (e.g. DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups … These facts render any attempt to establish lines of division among biological populations both arbitrary and subjective. From its inception, this modern concept of "race" was modeled after an ancient theorem of the Great Chain of Being, which posited natural categories on a hierarchy established by God or nature … Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized into "racial" categories. The myths fused behavior and physical features together in the public mind, impeding our comprehension of both biological variations and cultural behavior, implying that both are genetically determined. Racial myths bear no relationship to the reality of human capabilities or behavior. Scientists today find that reliance on such folk beliefs about human differences in research has led to countless errors (‘American Anthropological Association Statement on Race,’ 569-570).

The inherent problem for ‘race’ as a scientific reality, then, is the sheer weight of its cultural premises, accelerated and particularly exacerbated during the nineteenth century through the discourse of slavery justification (569). A twenty-first-century understanding

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51 In 2004 Lieberman et al. found that the rejection of race among physical anthropologists was highest in the Americas, “moderate” in Europe (with considerable differences between east and west), and lowest in Russia and China (907-912).
of complex genetics underlines the extent to which these cultural premises have influenced interpretations of empirical science until extremely recently. Every population, for instance, displays a vast range of body-shapes, mental capacities and emotional characters, but to study such characteristics in terms of ‘racial’ variation is to disproportionately privilege a set of genetic traits which are now understood to be “scientifically, mathematically trivial” – in short, our scientific understanding of human variation has been fundamentally flawed by our excessive focus on a handful of differences arbitrarily earmarked as culturally divisive (Marks 82). “[R]acial clusters are not inherent in genetic comparisons of humans, but must be imposed by the investigator …” notes Jonathan Marks (830. The peoples of Africa, for instance, are far more genetically diverse among themselves than are Africans as opposed to Europeans or Asians, Marks asserts, and therefore “comparing Europeans, Asians, and Africans is thus something like comparing dogs, cows, and mammals. Such a comparison is meaningless, because the third category incorporates the first two” (83-4). Paradoxically, the current implosion of race as a scientific reality offers us an unprecedentedly clear insight into the concept’s non-scientific dimensions. For ‘race’ is once again beginning to exist as it did at the beginning of the eighteenth century – no longer as a ‘biological’, but as a cultural entity; an expression of Western values of good and bad, superior and inferior, incorporating multiple discourses of rank, cultivation, inheritance and the human body.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, in fact, the concept of race was an exclusively cultural entity (Doron 78). Derived from the medieval Italian razza (root), its primary function was to distinguish groupings in term of lineal family. Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary provided five telling definitions for the term in 1755: the first, “A family ascending”; the second, “a family descending”; the third “a generation; collective family”; the fourth, “a particular breed”; while the fifth and last is “a race [i.e. root] of ginger” (vol.
2, n.p. entry ‘race’). Ideas of skin-colour, anatomy, and human variety, it will be noticed, are entirely absent from Johnson’s understanding of race; in its place however, is a fascinating associative relationship between “family ascending” – a pattern of lineal descent definitively represented by noble tradition – and a “particular breed”, referring to the art of animal husbandry. Eighteenth-century race, claims Claude-Olivier Doron, essentially designated a “genealogical style of reasoning”, an entire mode of thought based on “lineages and kinships”, which were primarily related to “nobiliary discourses”, “breeding practices”, and “spiritual status” (78-9). The discourse of ‘race’ essentially recognised that these three distinct concepts were ultimately interdependent: nobility literally functioned in the same manner as animal breeding (after all, a noble needed to ‘breed’ with another noble in order to produce noble offspring), while this process also channelled the lineal descent of spiritual status, furthering divinely ordained generation (consider, for instance, the traditions of Japhet and Ham, discussed in chapter 1.3.3); in turn, the transmission of spiritual status, expressed through a “nobiliary discourse” of lineal descent, was fundamentally dependent on both animal (sexual) generation and inheritance tradition. This “genealogical style of reasoning”, Doron asserts, meant that not only did ‘race’ and racialised thought exist outside the sphere of natural philosophy, it was largely opposed to it (75-79). Empirical naturalism, he notes, was definitively ungenealogical in its means of classifying groups; instead it employed a “logico-classificatory style of reasoning” – that is, it asserted ‘logical’, observable characteristics such as size, colour, and composition instead of lineage or kinship (82). Consider, for instance, Carolus Linnaeus’s binomial naming system in the *Systema naturae* (1735), still used in modern biology, which identified groups by reducing them to two or more observable features, and becoming more specific through *classes, ordines, genera, and species*. In this system, a ‘dog’ became the *Canis lupus familiaris* first by being grouped
with other ‘dog-like’ entities; subsequently by being compared with the size and shape of a wolf; and finally by being distinguished for its domesticity (see chapter 2.2.1 for a more detailed examination of Linnaean taxonomy) – at no point, however, does the dog’s genealogical relationship to other animals serve as a defining feature of its species (82).

Though the word ‘race’ was regularly used in naturalist discourse, for most of the century it was generally employed as a synonym for *varietas* – a highly ambiguous descriptive term which covered the grey area between individuals and species (78). It was only when this naturalist notion of ‘race as *varietas*’ became imbued with genealogical reasoning of ‘race as family’, suggests Doron, that those *varietates* could begin to be conceived as modern ‘races’ (see chapter 2.2.3).

As a cultural entity, then, the early modern concept of race was primarily concerned with issues of lineage. The *OED* records it denoting a breed of horses in 1533, and cites its earliest use in relation to human family lines in the Earl of Surrey’s 1547 translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (‘race’ n. 6a, n.5). Michael Banton has suggested an even earlier example, in the 1508 poem *The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sins*, which reads: “And flatteris in the menis facis, / and backbyttaris of sundry racis” (qtd in Banton 1967, 16).

The emergence of a ‘race’ discourse to understand bloodline tradition at this time, suggests Ivan Hannaford, was partly due to contemporary historical developments which offered an alternative model of personal identity from that of the *polis* and the *ecclesia* (that is, the Platonic ‘political’ identity derived from one’s place in the order of things, and the Augustinian ecclesiastical identity derived from sharing in “the mystical body of Christ”) (148). Among these developments, he notes, the advent of organised, global exploration might be considered predominantly influential, but so too might certain cultural revolutions such as the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain, the Protestant Reformation, and the rising importance of ‘civility’ – in short, any disruption of traditional
social order which led people to look to the physical human body for “alternative accounts of generation and the right ordering of mankind” (148). In any event, by the early seventeenth century, race had become a standard concept by which to understand lineal family (Feerick 6-7). In his 1611 Italian-English dictionary Queen Anna’s坎坷 New World of Words, the English-born linguist John (a.k.a. Giovanni) Florio offered a definition of ‘race’ which more or less approximated that of Samuel Johnson’s in 1755, though with slightly more emphasis on rank distinction: the Italian word *razza*, he explained, signified a “race, kind, breed, lineage, [or] pedigree” (Florio 424, Hannaford 172). The French theologian Pierre Charron had used the French term *race* in his *De la Sagesse* (1601) to express the idea that noble action was nobler still when performed through successive generations – and, when the English genealogist and herald Samson Lennard translated the work in 1612, the English word ‘race’ maintained the very same sense. The “title of valour” he transcribes, is derived from:

> a long continuance of [militarie] qualitie by many degrees and races, and time out of mind, whereby they are called in our language Gentlemen, that is to say of a race, house, family carrying of long time the same name and the same profession. For he is truly and entirely noble, who maketh a single profession of publrick virtue, serving his prince and country, and being descended of parents and ancestors that have done the same (Of Wisdom. London, 1612. 59.197-8. qtd in Hannaford 175).

The early modern concept of race, then, had developed the body itself as a discourse of identity and distinction; race could be conceptualised as a visible, outward identity – that

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52 Robert Bernasconi asserts that the fifteenth-century “purity of blood statutes” in Spain constituted a fundamental development in the history of race, since the persecution of Jewish converts (coverseros) was based on their ‘blood’ despite their having assumed the Christian faith (2000, 81).

53 That is, Anne of Denmark, wife to King James I.

54 “Le titre honorable de vaillance ... [vient de la] continuation longue de cette qualité par plusieurs degrés et races, maisons, famille, portant de long temps mesme nom, et faisant mesme profession. Pourquoi celuy est vrayement et entiérement noble, lequel fait profession singuliére de vertu publique, servant bien son prince et sa patrie, estant sorty de parents et ancestors qui ont fait le mesme” (Charron, 59.357-8). The above is taken from the posthumous 1604 edition (the edition from which Lennard takes his translation).
is, an obvious ‘type’ – or an *invisible*, almost figurative sense of difference, manifested through the mysterious, hidden qualities of blood.

This, notes Jean Feerick, was precisely why race was so intimately linked to the hereditary elite – it was a “a way of ‘speaking the body’ quite distinct from modern paradigms first and foremost because it defined the body primarily through the qualities of its *blood*. That is, it propounded distinctions of rank above all else” (9). A distinction of blood, she suggests, offered a sort of “metaphysical separation from one’s social inferiors”, while reinforcing groups along the lines of family and kindred (9). From the seventeenth century on, to even participate in the discourse of race already signified a certain social pre-eminence since race itself expressed the lineal blood traditions of the upper orders – “to be of a ‘base race’” asserts Feerick, “was an oxymoron” (9). Blood, in this sense, also acted as a unifying agent for Britain’s dispersed loci of socio-economic power – the genealogical model of a ‘family tree’ linked certain families with their heroic ancestors, but also connected them with other elite families as brethren in blood: “each seemingly separate tree was but a branch of a unitary tree,” notes Feerick, “sharing one origin and one sap-blood across time … if there is a crucial border that race-as-blood insists on, it is that between the elite body – unified across space and time – and the mass body – dispersed and disordered …” (14). Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein suggest that this idea of the hereditary nobility as a *race supérieure* was just as influential in construction of modern race binaries as was the idea of slave populations as *races inférieures* (277). The opposition between noble (super-humanity) and slave (sub-humanity) represented the attributes of pure blood and skin colour respectively, not only underpinning racialised thought, but functioning as a vehicle for European national identity. Taking the example of the Spanish inquisition, Balibar and Wallerstein explain:
In many ways, the tradition of hereditary privilege bears more in common with modern concepts of race in this process of arbitrary formation of opposing groups than it does in its image of ‘pure’ bloodlines. Using the body as a physical signifier of superiority, both old race (family ascending) and the various pre-emptors of new race (anatomical type) depend on their capacity to liberally pluck evidence from different domains in order to support a pre-existing prejudice. “Race is the ultimate trope of difference,” claims Henry Louis Gates Jr., “because it is so very arbitrary in its application” (qtd in Hunt 340). Both race and nobility are essentially imaginary subdivisions of humanity that can only become real through a vast discourse of overlapping and often contradictory assertions. Like nobility, indeed, race can only function “within particular belief systems … it is used metonymically to stand for and magnify the difference between slave and owner, the colonised and the colonisor, indigenous peoples and invaders, serfs and lords, poor and rich” (Hunt 340).

When eighteenth-century naturalists and explorers used the term ‘race’ to describe human varietas, then, they were making use of a language that was profoundly associated with noble patterns of lineal family. Yet, ‘race’ – just as with the modern English word ‘family’ – also held broad potential for figurative application. The term was often used, for example, to describe jobs or activities that might be associated with particular social groups, familial or otherwise: in 1712 the Spectator wrote of a “race of coxcombs”, and in

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55 The hereditary definition of raza … at once serves to isolate an interior aristocracy and to confer a fictional nobility upon the ‘Spanish people’, making them a ‘nation of masters’ … Aristocratic racism [is] the prototype of what today’s analysts call ‘self-referential’ racism, which begins by establishing those in control of the discourse as a race themselves (my trans.).
1720 the *Independent Whig* referred to a “race of bishops … popes … and priests”, while as late as 1791 C.H. Elliot’s *Republican Refuted* featured a “race or generation of … legislators” (‘race, n.6’. *OED*). Concurrently, the ‘genealogical reasoning’ inherent in race could convey the generation of spiritual identity in terms that sometimes ran directly contrary to modern understandings of racism. The *Journal of a Voyage up the Gambia* recorded by Bartholomew Stibbs in 1738, as Roxann Wheeler has noted, offers a prime example of how malleable racialised identity could be at this time. The *Journal*’s English narrator describes the preparation for a canoe voyage up the river:”

> On the 11th we met in council”, and settled the number of whites and blacks that were to go on the expedition; viz 19 white men, including our linguister, who is as black as coal; though here, thro’ custom, (being Christians) they account themselves white men … (Stibbs 243, Wheeler 2000, 4).

In this passage, it is Christianity and not skin colour which functions as the primary ‘racialised’ identity; furthermore, the English narrator seems unperturbed by the suggestion that a black African has, through his religion, become white in every way barring the incidental colour of his skin. Christian identity, of course, here enacts the genealogical reasoning of eighteenth-century race: the African ‘linguisters’ (translators) have, as Christians, adopted a spiritual status that they will presumably pass down to coming generations, entering into a lineal system of ‘generation’ by descent. At the same time, Christian identity is fundamentally identified with white skin – the Africans have become ‘white men’ by virtue of being Christian, and this identity, along with its transmission, retains at its core an implicit image of European physical ‘type’.

The links between racialised human identity and skin colour were remarkably fluid throughout most of the eighteenth century, and skin colour did not begin to commonly figure as a “primary signifier of human difference” until the 1770s (Wheeler 7; Wahrman 86-8). For, far from delineating the fixed ‘frontiers’ of humanity, skin colour
variation more commonly evoked notions of varietal ‘adaptation’, typically in reaction to climate, nutrition or level of cultivation. Indeed, as will be further explored in the next chapter, when European naturalists did address skin colour they overwhelmingly did so in the context of changeability over generations; that is, they were concerned with skin colour not as a ‘signifier of human difference’, but as an indication of human physiological potential (see chapters 2.2 and 2.3).\textsuperscript{56} Paradoxically, these assumptions forged an intimate link between skin colour and the concept of race for entirely different (even contrary) reasons to modern racism: both ‘race’ and ‘skin colour’ could be modified and controlled by a combination of sexual generation and environmental cultivation. As has been examined in the previous section (and can be seen in Lennard’s translation of Pierre Charron, above), noble tradition had long posited the notion that deeds or experiences could eventually become inherent and inheritable, engendering a noble ‘constitution’ that had to be upheld or borne out by the continuance of noble lifestyle. In successive incarnations of nobility, it is a relentless trope that to be born into noble family is not enough; one had to enact one’s nobility – to perform a sort of nobilitas – in order to validate it as an inherent aspect of one’s identity.

Social distinction in early modern England, notes Micahel McKeon, as expressed in terms such as ‘degree’, ‘estate’, ‘order’ and ‘rank’, relied on a notion of ‘honour’ – an inward essence signified by its extrinsic qualities, namely wealth, power, and lineage. This sense of honour as “a unity of outward circumstance and inward essence” was essential to the hierarchical stratification of rank, asserting that “social order is not circumstantial and arbitrary, but corresponds to and expresses an analogous, intrinsic moral order” (131). Both purity of blood and a refined, decorous manner, then, were extrinsic expressions of intrinsic noble essence – validating one’s noble rank in the greater natural order. It

\textsuperscript{56} A notable exception to this, of course, was the minority theory of polygenism, which will be addressed in the next section.
followed that to generate a ‘true noble’ required a combination of controlled sexual generation and precise environmental cultivation, a process which even boasted its very own ‘racialised’ discourse: ‘breeding’. The eighteenth-century idea of ‘breeding’, claims Jenny Davidson, provided a common language for two conflicting accounts of human nature: a “hereditarian model in which birth determines one’s character and one’s place in the world”, and “a model that emphasizes the power of education and other environmental influences to shape essentially malleable human beings into whatever form is deemed best” (1). In many ways ‘breeding’, worked on the very same ‘genealogical’ style of reasoning as ‘race’, being passed down from parents to offspring, and subsequently according with spiritual and worldly status. Yet, within this already-racialised discourse, ‘breeding’ emphasised the notion of improvement, or even perfection of inherent characteristics – allowing it to claim nature or nurture to varying extents to explain ‘racial’ constitutions. Since the sixteenth century, the term had been synonymous with education and refinement among the upper orders, while also implying the literal generation of genteel or noble human beings in the confines of lineal family (OED ‘breeding’ n. 3).

Breeding, therefore, could be used to justify all the exclusive attributes of noble or genteel family that blood could not; blood, conversely, could be used to signify nobility or gentility when breeding was lacking. Concurrently, the discourse of breeding was entirely compatible with a racialised sense of human anatomy. In 1709, notes Davidson, Richard Steele and Joseph Addison’s literary journal the Tatler blamed lack of ‘breeding’ in genteel families not only for uncouthness in some of their children, but also for those children’s undesirable physical characteristics: “One might wear any passion out of a family by culture” pronounced the journal’s editorial persona, Isaac Bickerstaff,57 “as skillful gardiners blot a colour out of a tulip … it is for want of care in the disposing of our

57 ‘Isaac Bickerstaff’ was originally a pseudonym of Jonathan Swift, who also contributed to the Tatler, but is here used by Steele.
children, with regard to their bodies and minds, that we go into an house and see such
different complexions and humours in the same race and family” (Vol. 75, 1 Oct. 1709. qtd
in Davidson 4).

_The Lady’s Drawing Room_, an anonymous\(^5^8\) collection of stories first published in
1744, is a remarkable example of how the concepts of noble bloodline and physiological
variety essentially relied on the _same discourse_ of ‘race’ – that is, a narrative of human
adaptation based on both lineal generation and environmental cultivation.\(^5^9\) The narrative,
which comprises a series of interconnected stories, unfurls in the drawing room of the
lovely Ethelinda, who leads her wellborn guests in a discussion of virtue that is plainly
redolent of Castiglionian tradition. Indeed, the guests themselves represent a spectrum of
elite ‘types’, each displaying varying levels of breeding and civility. There is, for instance,
Dorinthus, a gentleman who is “infinitely more distinguished for the excellency of his
morals, and fine breeding, than for his rank”; Melanthe the merry dowager who has been
so seduced by the “opera, plays, balls, and going to court” that she has long abandoned the
admirable sense of decorum she once possessed; and Lamara, a gentlewoman of small
fortune who succeeded in marrying a noble suitor, only to push him to vie for a peerage
title he did not deserve and thus lose him the respect of his equals (5,45,46). There are also
Flavia and Lamara, whose once beautiful faces and bodies have been so transfigured by
fashionable contraptions that they are now hideous to behold, and finally an unnamed
‘titled coxcomb’, who prattles inanely without having the good grace to allow others to
respond (11, 46). All these visions of ‘lacking’ nobility are silenced by the entrance of a
mysterious figure who strikes everyone with his vivacity of spirit and “most graceful
appearance”, and eventually proves to be “not only possest of one of the greatest estates of

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\(^{58}\) Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, incidentally, attributed this text to the novelist Sarah Fielding. Fielding, Sabor ed. 10.
\(^{59}\) See Wheeler 2000 (153-175) for an interesting exploration of this text in relation to ‘intermarriage’ plots in
the mid-century British novel.
the kingdom, but also of a disposition to make use of it” (12). It is this unnamed figure, indeed, who recounts the first of the text’s stories: ‘The History of Rodomond and the Beautiful Indian’.

Rodomond is the younger son of a powerful lord, obliged by financial difficulties to forgo the military and university careers undertaken by his siblings, and instead take charge of a trading enterprise in East India, becoming a junior merchant by the age of twenty-one. Yet, pronounces the narrator, despite having spent some of his most formative years at a remove from polite society, Rodomond developed a noble manner all the same. In his description of the young man’s return to London, the narrator presents a fascinating image of noble identity as a tangle of contradictory truisms, all bound up with ideas of superior blood and breeding:

[He] receiv’d the embraces I gave him with a politeness which one might rather have expected from a young man bred up in court than in a factory of merchants: but indeed we, who happen to be born to estates, and have nothing to do but improve our minds, are apt to be a little too tenacious on that advantage, and imagine that commerce and good manners are things incompatible; whereas nothing can be more unjust – most merchants are the younger sons of good families, often have relations in the highest rank, and I see no reason why … [they should] derogate from that genteel turn of behaviour inculcated in their childhood … Those gentlemen, indeed, who like Rodomond, are sent young into the our colonies abroad, cannot be said to have many opportunities of improving themselves in the politer studies; therefore that he is so well qualified for conversation, is the more to be applauded in him, as he owes it merely to nature … (16).

Even the narrator’s ostensible defence of trade here is not entirely detached from the discourse of land-based breeding: trade, the gentleman asserts, is not beneath the rank of nobility, primarily because it is sometimes undertaken by the nobly born. There seems to be little if anything admirable to learn from trade, other than to succeed in manifesting the manner of a landed gentleman in spite of it. Rodomond is first praised for having clung, like others, to the germ of noble civility that was “inculcated” in him during his childhood,
and which can so influence the nature of an individual that he will mature in the manner of a noble regardless of his environment. Almost immediately, however, Rodomond is further praised for having gone through this process without even that benefit of early education – his courtly constitution “is the more to be applauded in him, as he owes it merely to nature”. In fact, Rodomond’s noble birth is remarkably confounded with his noble upbringing – the very fact of being born into nobility is praised partly as a dimension of ‘acquired’ cultivation. Indeed, the line between the two concepts of birth and breeding remains decidedly fluid in the text; it is the deeds, comportment, and cultivation of his forbears, after all, that have rendered Rodomond’s noble blood ‘different’ in the first instance. The cultivation of his family is veritably present in his ‘blood’, and in turn his blood becomes the source of an outward cultivation that serves to maintain this lineal process of generation.

Degeneration, then, figures as a prime method with which to explore noble identity in the Lady’s Drawing Room, since the denial of cultivation can now act as a ‘test’ of inherent noble blood. The ‘results’ of this test, even more interestingly, are manifested through a discourse of physiological variety. The “Beautiful Indian” of the story’s title is Zoa, whose physical appearance becomes a primary locus of racialised identity in the narrative. Zoa’s own body is a battleground between noble blood and anatomical inferiority: her mother (unbeknownst to her) was a French noblewoman “descended from two very antient and honourable families”, yet she has inherited the non-European (“tawny”) physical appearance of her father, a duplicitous and scheming Indian Banyan, who had forced her mother into marriage. The ‘test’ of Zoa’s noble blood, then, pivots on her inborn virtue overcoming her ‘inferior’ anatomy – which is inescapably entwined with her foreign, heathen, and decidedly unvirtuous upbringing at the hands of her Banyan father. Zoa passes the test, of course, with flying colours: she instinctively frees Rodomond
from the Banyan’s captivity when he is captured, and accompanies him back to England without hesitation, where she promptly converts to Christianity. That is to say, despite the fact that Zoa shares her father’s skin colour, she is essentially of a different race to him; just as Rodomond’s noble blood outshone his lack of education, her true nobility outshines her ostensibly ‘superficial’ Indian appearance. More than this, Zoa’s inherent genealogical identity expresses itself through corporeal beauty, which somehow seems to overcome, or ‘neutralise’ her racial otherness. Indeed, her assumption of a ‘true’ European identity is represented, in the text, through a fascinating scene of anatomical metamorphosis. To rescue Rodomond, Zoa had disguised herself as a “crook’d and deform’d negro”, but once safely aboard the ship back to Europe, she wipes her face clean and adorns an “English habit” – two actions which render everyone around her speechless before her beauty. “Indeed sir,” explains Rodomond, “her mother, it seems, was an European; and she retains only so much of her father’s colour as to render her what may be call’d a brown woman – her eyes are sparkling and full of fire. – all her features regular” (31).

The sheer integrity of Zoa’s noble blood has, quite simply, radiated through her once-inferior physical body, with successive layers of racialised identity (black African, ‘tawny’ Indian, and non-Christian) falling away one by one to reveal her true nature as a perfect specimen of white, civilised and naturally virtuous humanity. Zoa’s skin colour subsequently becomes not a mark of her anatomical otherness, but of how her nobility has overcome this otherness – she has only retained the “tawny colour” of her Indian father, while the rest of her physical features, along with her manner, her religious instinct, and eventually even her accent come together in perfect, natural harmony with her English garb. Ethelinda’s company are, in fact, privileged enough to witness this famous beauty for themselves, since the real Rodomond and Zoa subsequently appear to join the company in the drawing room. Zoa “had everything except complexion, that cou’d form a perfect
beauty” Ethelinda explains, “and even that was less swarthy than I have seen in some that are born in Europe, and not esteem’d unlovely” (102). Crucially, Rodomond, who enters the room beside his wife, is re-introduced at this same moment in his full, ‘natural’, and corporeal nobility: “Rodomond was tall, well proportion’d, and had more the appearance of a man bred up in court than in a factory of merchants, which shews that true dignity, both of mind and deportment, is more natural than acquired” (emphasis added 102). Rodomond thus provides physiological and moral evidence of his ‘natural’ nobility in the very same way as Zoa has shown the corporeal beauty of European civility to outshine ostensibly inferior anatomy. Concurrently, the superiority of noble blood acts as a direct foil for the inferiority of physically ‘deformed’ human varieties. That is, the corporeal ideal of nobility, here, functions as a signifier of racialised superiority in the very same way as exotic otherness represents racialised inferiority.

Race, in the early modern period, constituted a formative discourse of genealogical group distinction at which the blood traditions of nobility were at the very heart. It was a way of understanding the social and political privileges of the wellborn through the body itself, while looking to the generation of these bodies as an expression of permanence and natural order in noble hierarchy. The genealogical reasoning of noble and spiritual ‘race’, which used the anatomical human form to express certain dimensions of social authority, was thus of growing interest in human anatomy and taxonomy at this time, not least in so much as this interest centred on a certain hierarchisation of mankind. The next sub-chapter, then considers the assumptions of noble race in terms of anatomical investigation, looking a little further at how nobility could be considered as a bodily characteristic, residing literally in the flesh and ‘blood’ of illustrious families in eighteenth-century Britain.
2.1.2: Nobility and Medical Discourse: Nerve Fibres, Autopsies, and Hereditary Illness

The feeble births acquired diseases chase,
Till death extinguish the degenerate race.


During the early modern period the mechanics of blood itself – as a physical liquid – were at the forefront of an anatomical revolution in British science. Since the early seventeenth century, the writings of René Descartes and his contemporaries had permeated European philosophy with the idea of man as a machine. As Descartes declared in *L’Homme* (1630-3):

*Je suppose que le corps n’est autre chose qu’une statue ou machine de terre*\(^60\) ...

*[Dieu] met au dedans toutes les pièces qui sont requises pour faire qu’elle marche, qu’elle mange, qu’elle respire, et enfin qu’elle imite toutes celles de nos fonctions qui peuvent être imaginées procéder de la matière ...* (119).\(^61\)

If one followed the Cartesian theory of corporeal mechanism, explains François Jacob, it had to be applied to all aspects of physiology – not simply the processes of digestion or respiration, but also the imagination, the memory, and the passions (44). Blood then, having been for so long a semi-metaphorical vector of social and familial group distinctions, was now at the centre of physiological studies of the body and mind. William Harvey, one-time physician to James I, had undermined centuries of Galenic and Hippocratic humour theory when he published his famous study of blood circulation *Exercitatio anatomica de motu cordis et sanguinis in animalibus* [*An Anatomical Exercise on the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Living Beings’*] in 1628. Blood, he

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\(^60\) By *terre*, here note John Cottingham *et al.*., Descartes means the third terrestrial element he had described in *Le Monde* (1629-33), the other two being fire and air (89, 99).

\(^61\) “I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth … [God] places inside it all the parts required to make it walk, eat, breathe, and indeed to imitate all those of our functions which can be imagined to proceed from matter (Cottingham *et al.* trans. 99)
asserted therein, was the hydraulic power behind all bodily movement, the generator of organ function; its ‘circulation’ was the engine of mechanical life itself. In Harvey’s wake, a new generation of human anatomists descended on the ‘human machine’, utilising their fresh understanding of its vessels and tubes to investigate dilemmas that had puzzled anatomists since antiquity. Thomas Willis, for instance, a founding member of the Royal Society in the 1660s, forged new links between the passions and the physical body through key discoveries about the structure of the brain in his *Cerebri anatome cui accesit nervorum descripto et usus studio* ['The Anatomy of the Brain to Which is Added the Descriptions and Workings of the Nerves'] (1664), with which he went on to lead pioneering research into neurology and psychiatry. Richard Lower, too, who had studied at Westminster School with John Locke, identified the role of the heart in transforming venous blood into arterial blood in his *Tractus de corde item de motu, colore sanguinis* [*Treatise on the Heart, and the Movement and Colour of Blood*] of 1669 (Porter and Rousseau 37). By the early eighteenth century, medical science had not only established an entirely new set of fundamental precepts, it had become a prime locus of empirical experimentation on the human body.

It is little surprise, then, that traditional notions of ‘blood’ were of particular interest to eighteenth-century physicians. Indeed, the precisely documented genealogies of noble families offered a unique insight into one of the most intriguing and mysterious aspects of inheritance tradition: the phenomenon of hereditary disease. While hereditary disease had been openly recognised since antiquity, the Hippocratic-Galenic tradition had usually explained it by the theory of pangenesis: that is to say, the bad humours or ‘taints’ which caused the disease could travel via sperm, and thus formed a primary element in the construction of the foetus (López-Beltrán 108). “In the process of generation, both males

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62 Humourism nonetheless maintained its authority throughout the eighteenth century, as is evidenced in the continued practices of blood letting, purging, and mineral baths – all of which entered into the discourse of nervous disorders and sensibility (Wheeler 2000, 27).
and females produce seed,” notes David Warren Sabean, “sperma was essentially blood, so intercourse was conceived of as a mingling of blood” (41). Empirical medical practice, however, inspired eighteenth-century physicians to embark “on a conceptual quest to make sense of the idea of a hereditary disease, and restrict its boundaries as clearly as possible” (109), leading many to turn their attention to British society’s most assiduously documented, and ostensibly unadulterated, family lines: the nobility. As has been pointed out in chapter 2.1.1, ‘heredity’ in the eighteenth century was not strictly linked to corporeal traits; to talk of a child ‘inheriting’ certain characteristics from a parent was, for most of the century, to employ the concept of ‘heredity’ as a metaphor – using the idea of ‘passing along’ material assets to express what we now understand as genetics. To talk of a hereditary ‘disease’, therefore, was to understand this disease not only in terms of passing down an inherent defect, but in the full eighteenth-century sense of inheritance; it took into account hereditary traditions, hereditary professions, hereditary eating habits, and hereditary morals. “As land, craft, wealth, and title were inherited,” notes Carlos López-Baltrán, “so too could body and mind” (105). As it follows, hereditary diseases of the upper orders were largely blamed on the ‘hereditary’ nature of their lifestyle, on their bringing up their children to the same habits as themselves. What is interesting about empirical investigations into hereditary influence is that they had the effect of channelling all these disparate elements of familial inheritance into a corporeal, mechanical discourse – thus introducing the template of property transfer and socio-economic value-systems into the body itself. And so, as López-Baltrán notes, the ‘biological’ notion of heredity actually began with the projection of human inheritance traditions onto the ‘organic’ body (105).

Fascinatingly, the hereditary transmission of unhealthy characteristics within families of quality was often identified as a source of their superior sense of governance: so-called ‘diseases of civilisation’ invariably made the sufferer more physically delicate,
more anxious, and traditionally, more prone to splenetic depressions, but also cultivated finer sensibilities, a keener sense of empathy, and more nuanced emotions than in other people (Cheyne, Porter ed. ix). In this way, the ‘hereditary’ nature of certain diseases surpassed strictly hereditary relationships, and could also become a mechanism with which physically to define the rich and civilised against the poor and unsophisticated. “Given the eighteenth-century connotations of ‘degree’,” remarks G.J. Barker-Benfield, “the quality of sensibility could be seen as a badge of rank. Applied socially, Newtonian science could rationalise hierarchy as Darwinian science would in the next century” (8). A range of nervous disorders, for example, popularly diagnosed in the first half of the century, could instantly associate the patient with wealth, luxury, civility, morality, and even political responsibility. In George Cheyne’s *English Malady* (1733), one of the most popular medical treatises in Britain of the 1730s, this “archetypal malady of the elite,” considerably consolidated a new discursive dynamic between rank and the physical body (Cheyne, Porter ed. xi). The disorder, explained Cheyne, stemmed from the possession of particularly fine ‘nerve fibres’, those “least and smallest threads in the composition” (Cheyne 60). Weak nerve fibres, he proclaimed, were a hallmark of fair, blond, intelligent and emotionally profound individuals. They also happened to be widespread in high society (32, 100-1). While they troubled the sufferer with “vapours and lowness of spirits” they also indicated “a greater degree of sensibility; [sufferers] are quick thinkers, feel pleasure and pain the most readily, and are of most lively imagination” (105).

One [with weak nerve fibres] shall suffer more from the prick of a pin, or needle, from their extreme sensibility, than others from being run through the body … none have it in their option to choose for themselves their own particular frame of mind nor constitution of body; so none can choose his own degree of sensibility. That is given him by the author of his nature, and is already determined (366).
At the other end of the spectrum, however, “fools, weak or stupid persons, heavy and dull souls” did not seem to suffer from the condition at all; rather their “intellectual faculty, without all manner of doubt, has material and animal organs, by which it immediately works…” (52). Common causes of weak nerves, recorded Cheyne, included fine food and luxurious lifestyles, or, in certain cases, an excess of charity, piety and an over-dedication to parliamentary duties (268, 277).

Concordantly, a catalogue of test cases provided at the end of Cheyne’s volume illustrated the predominance of nervous disorders amongst London’s beau-monde, including: “A young lady of an honourable and opulent family, and of the most distinguished merit, and the finest parts I ever knew in the sex” who had inherited ‘nervous paroxysms’ from her parents; “A gentleman of fortune, and an officer of distinction in the army” who suffered from the recurrent colic which ran in his family; “a knight baronet of an antient family” who battled flatulence on account of “keeping bad hours in attending on the business of parliament”; and “a lady of great fortune in this town, eminent for her charity, piety, and fine breeding”, whose philanthropy upset her ‘tender’ bowels (268, 277, 287, 290). The implicitly scandalous nature of these test cases – perhaps even affecting to surreptitiously identify Cheyne’s celebrity patients – only reinforces the fashionable nature of the disease. To suffer a nervous disorder, it seems, was to join a club of the wealthy and wellborn – to gain access to a kind of conspicuous display that emanated from the body itself. Furthermore, wealth and birth seem to be the defining factor of the ‘disorder’: few of Cheyne’s patients manifest exactly the same symptoms; some have inherited their problems, while others have induced them through artificial means. What is important, rather, is that all the various and unexplained bodily complaints of the upper orders can be traced back, according to the English Malady, to the sufferer’s high social rank, thus
essentially isolating this rank, in this sense at least, as a physiologically homogeneous group.

Cheyne’s claims were certainly not unique; on the contrary they played into a web of existing assumptions that elite anatomy was somehow materially different from that of common people. In the 1720s, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s physician Charles Maitland, who famously imported the practice of smallpox inoculation from Turkey, postponed vaccinating her young daughter until they returned to London so that he could “set the first and great example to England of the perfect safety of this practice, and especially to persons of the first rank and quality” (Arbuthnot 8). Around the same time, one of Maitland’s greatest critics, William Wagesstaffe, warned that the precious elite body was the most at risk from this experimental new procedure: “If we consider either the nature of the climate, or the capacity of the inhabitants [of Turkey] …” he exhorted,

posterity perhaps will scarcely be brought to believe that an experiment practised only by a few ignorant women, amongst an illiterate and unthinking people, shou’d … so far obtain in one of the politest nations in the world, as to be receiv’d into the royal palace (6).

The Turkish peasants who practise inoculation, he claims, “had the advantage of a warm climate, living on a spare diet and in the lowest manner,” but the English patients on whom it is now being tested “live in a more luxurious manner than the slaves in Greece and Asia, and their blood abounds with particles more susceptible of inflammation” (emphasis added 6-7).

By far the most notorious hereditary disease to be linked with nobility, however, was the terrible affliction of gout. A painful form of arthritis that typically affects the feet, gout is caused by the build-up of crystallised uric acid in the joints (hyperuricaemia), which, in severe cases, can lead to sodium urate deposits actually breaking through the skin in the form of chalk-like ‘tophi’ (Lock et al. eds 361, Porter and Rousseau 4). Gout
had been associated with luxury and excess since Ancient Egypt (it is, in fact, one of the oldest recognised diseases in recorded history), and as such had long been observed in the family lines of the ruling orders (Lock et al. eds 361). Even in antiquity, note Stephen Lock et al., Seneca had identified it as a ‘noble disease’, “whose sufferers could trace their ancestry back to Ulysses” (361). From the late seventeenth century, however, empirical methods had implicated a whole new range of corporeal influences as causes of the disease, which were variously incorporated into the received wisdom that it applied principally to the upper orders (1-34). The Dorset physician Thomas Sydenham (dubbed the ‘English Hippocrates’), for example, whose Treatise on the Gout (1683) provided one of the commonly referenced descriptions of gout in early modern England, asserted his empirical observations first and foremost within the existing traditions of how gout was thought to work (361). There is little doubt that gout is hereditary, Sydenham maintains, and can even attack children if they are “such as were begot by gouty parents” (65). It “generally attacks those aged persons who have spent [the] most part of their lives in ease, voluptuousness, high living, and too free a use of wine”. Yet sufferers may take solace in the fact that they are afflicted with an ailment of “kings, princes, generals, admirals, philosophers, and several other great men”, and that indeed this disease might be seen as somewhat a badge of divine favour: “[it] destroys more rich than poor persons, and more wise men than fools, which seems to demonstrate the justice and strict impartiality of Providence” (65).63 To all this he adds that gout is most prevalent in those who have “large heads, and are generally of a plethoric, moist, and lax habit of body”. These same people are usually the bearers of “a strong and vigorous constitution, and possessed of the best stamina vitae” (58). Thus, Sydenham incorporates four very distinct pathological factors

63 Interestingly, the link between gout, wealth, and social rank survived well into the twentieth century (Porter and Rousseau 72). In 1962, E.G.L. Bywaters, a member of the London Rheumatism Research Unit, evidently paraphrased Sydenham (without, it might be added, mentioning his original source) in his discussion of gout’s evolution: “Altogether, throughout history,” he concludes, “many of the prime movers have been gouty: gout affects more rich than poor, more wise men than fools …” (emphasis added, 338).
into his treatise: heredity; the particulars of lifestyle and age; the influence of rank and eminence; and the literal shape and disposition of certain body parts. Nor is it certain which of these elements are causative and which are resultant: does a vigorous constitution contribute to high-ranking social positions or is the inverse true? Does luxury living result in plethoric complexion and lax habit, or does a large head indicate partiality to excess? Does gout, indeed, attack those with the best *stamina vitae*, or does it somehow promote it?

This medical ambiguity was in fact central to the assumption of gout as a marker of high birth. Gout’s association with good breeding often led it to be cherished, in a curious way, by those whose rank it reinforced. 64 E.G.L. Bywaters, a rheumatism researcher in the mid-twentieth century, remarked in 1962 that gout was once “as much a status symbol as a nuclear bomb shelter is now” (Bywaters 325). Lord Chesterfield, whose controversial *Letters to His Son* (mentioned in chapter 1.2.3) became a widely-read reference point for decorum on their publication in 1774, underlined the important nuance of arthritic terminology: “Gout is the distemper of a Gentleman,” he declared, “whereas rheumatism is the distemper of a hackney coachman” (qtd in Porter and Rousseau 72). In the interest of “ancient English families” and their liberties, note Roy Porter and G.S. Rousseau, “gouty inheritance had to be preserved. In short, gout was a ‘noble’ condition, safeguarding the highborn from all manner of hazards …” (74). One of these hazards, in fact, was the actual curing of gout. Some physicians considered the gouty disposition to be so essential to those of higher rank that they feared a successful cure might only encourage even more detrimental complaints (72-8). Indeed, there was a persistent view throughout the century that gout functioned as a sort of preventative condition, absorbing other more

64 Thorstein Veblen, in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), considered diseases of civilisation, and the behaviour that supposedly brought them on, as a central mechanism of conspicuous consumption: “It is only at a relatively early stage of culture that the symptoms of expensive vice are conventionally accepted as marks of a superior status, and so tend to become virtues and command the deference of the community” (50-51).
harmful diseases and expressing them through arthritic pain and gouty tophi. “I have so good an opinion of the gout [...]” wrote Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann in 1785, “that I do not desire to be cured. I believe the gout a remedy and not a disease and being so, no wonder there is no medicine for it” (qtd in Porter and Rousseau 75).

This idea of gout as an essential, and not necessarily harmful, corporeal state was prevalent in its conceptualisation as a hereditary disease. Most physicians contended that one inherited a *gouty constitution*, rather than inheriting the disease itself. Thus, the well bred could be born ‘gouty’ without necessarily manifesting any symptoms of the condition; likewise, if they were to indulge in epicurean excess, as the well bred were wont to do, their gout would arise almost as a matter of form. “Susceptibility only is hereditary,” suggested the medical lecturer John Hunter in 1786, “but the disposition and action require the application of external influence before they will appear, and are therefore accidental” (141). Scottish physician William Grant, whose *Observations on the Origins, Progress, and Method of Treating the Atrabilious Temperament and Gout* (1779) thoroughly enquired into the physical aspects of the disease, was inclined to agree that gout was somehow inborn. The ailment originates, he claimed,

> from some very remote cause, lurking in the constitution long before the disease is developed … [these] may be called constitutional diseases; and this is the reason why so many of them are hereditary … as the constitutional diseases are often hereditary, so the hereditary diseases are always constitutional; and that the whole body, solids as well as fluids, is affected or diseased … (1.1-2).

This identification of a certain social group as *constitutionally* gouty, and this constitutionality being ostensibly maintained through their familial lines, provides yet another interestingly physiological view of the hereditary elite. Indeed, William Grant’s extensive investigation into gout and its causes not only charted the particular corporeal differences between the sophisticated elite and the rude commonality, but also identified
this distinction with certain ethnic groups. “When I was a young man in the Highlands of Scotland,” he recounts, “I hardly ever saw a man able to breed the gout; there is not a word for it in the language of that country”. Though the Highland men regularly “debauched themselves”, he notes, even for years at a time, and though they lived to the same advanced age as might be expected of a southern Englishman, they never once encountered gout, instead being plagued with a different range of ailments (1.4). The same could be said for the “south and high parts of France,” where wine was consumed “in prodigious quantities, from morning to night” (1.4), as well as Turkey, the “mohameden countries”, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Madeira (the last being an island on which apparently only English immigrants were affected with the disease) (1.4-5). Like Cheyne’s ‘English’ malady, gout seems to have been associated with a certain ethnic profile as part and parcel of its associations with the hereditary elite.

The ethnic quality of the disease was, in turn, bound up with the perception that England, and southeast England in particular, was particularly replete with modern luxuries and conveniences. It is perhaps unsurprising that many of the commonly cited causes of gout tended to incorporate recent trends in conspicuous consumption and material rank distinction. In England, Grant maintains, gout is encouraged by developments such as:

- the increase of carriages; the high finishing of roads, rooms, and furniture; the softness of beds; the anxiety, vexation, and frequent disappointment introduced amongst us by the increase of commerce, politics, and gaming … (1.8).

By far the most intriguing element of William Grant’s study, however, is his investigation into how sophisticated living had physically shaped the bodies of those possessed of an elite constitution. In a striking illustration of how ‘empirical’ medicine could be employed to define rank groupings in physiological terms, Grant reinforces a series of traditional
rank signifiers with ostensible evidence from the dissected human body. That is to say, empirical observation here acts as supporting evidence for a series of existing assumptions about rank and the human body. Grant’s descriptions of human beings, moreover, and most especially those of the lower orders, are astonishingly similar to contemporary naturalist descriptions of exotic human varieties (as will be seen in chapter 2.2). A man “brought up in a rude state” he claims, is instantly recognisable:

[T]his man is lean and lank-faced, [with] stout limbs, and no belly; his skin is loose, harsh and hairy; the skin of his head is very movable, so that he has a great deal of motion in his nose, forehead, and ears; he has high cheek-bones, and all his muscles are hard, prominent and unequal; his veins are large and rolling, his bones are short, solid and hard; his joints are small but his limbs are thick in proportion to his bulk and stature (1.11).

Were one to open up the body of such a man, he continues, it would easily be seen that his intestines were become shrivelled and his heart and lungs were abnormally large; he would have a swollen brain and ‘thick’ nerves. These toughened body parts, of course, would also have affected his mind. Labouring men have keener than usual senses, notes Grant, such as sight and smell, but “their feelings are blunt, and their nervous system not easily moved … hence they are often indolent, ignorant, and contented; their mental faculties are rather solid than quick … all their passions are low, equal, and permanent” (1.12-13). When Grant goes on to explain the anatomy of a “man born and brought up in a confined life”, each of these physical characteristics is systematically inverted. His skin and flesh are soft and tender, his stomach and intestines are noticeably large (presumably from excessive eating) and his lungs and heart peculiarly small (presumably from want of breathing); his capacity for feeling, consequently, has developed entirely differently from the labouring specimen:
his feelings are so keen, and his wants so many, that his desires are unbounded, and of course his mind is dissatisfied: hence, he is impatient, discontented, industrious, and ingenious; his apprehensions are quick, his knowledge extensive, he is enterprising, and often very daring (1.16).

Grant’s study of the differences between a ‘rude’ and ‘sophisticated’ woman are even more telling, allowing him to address the different effects of constrictive clothing in the upper orders and the ‘natural’ birthing practices of the labouring ranks. A woman “brought up in a rude state”, he proclaims, is the image of feminine beauty – essentially because her entire body is optimally designed for producing children. She is stocky and plump, of a healthy complexion, and enjoys regular, light, and short periods of menstruation, which cause her no “pain or inconvenience”. Her pregnancies, too, fall easily and often, and she suffers so little from carrying a child, and her body is altered so very slightly during gestation, that no outward signs of pregnancy are visible until after at least six months. Her deliveries are uncomplicated and swift: “she is taken in labour, with smart pains at short intervals … after [the birth] she is quite composed …” (1.42-3). The “woman of fashion”, once again, is framed as the direct opposite of this physical profile, yet just as the sophisticated man’s delicate nerves render him “enterprising”, her artificially shaped body – though not exactly the eighteenth-century feminine ideal – portrays a fragile, fair-skinned nymph, whose diminutive, feeble body and strong passions would not be entirely out of place in a sentimental novel. Her dainty physique, it seems, is a case of over-breeding: she is “born of delicate, not to say unhealthy parents”, yet it is encouraged by a diet of “tea and hot victuals” (as opposed to the hearty fare of her rustic counterpart), and her wearing of high-heeled shoes and stays which render her “fibres ... too soft”. Her stays in particular have such a detrimental effect on her organs and muscles that they alter the proportions of her entire body:
Her limbs are long and small, her waist is long and slender, her neck is long and small, her breasts are flat, and her skin a dead white ... [she] is very susceptible of tender feelings, and those passions that agitate weak nerves. Although her powers are not great, her desires are strong ... (1.47).

Her pregnancies, too, are not the regular, even casual experiences that they seemed to be among the lower orders. It is indeed very evident when such a lady is pregnant, laments Grant, and her delicate posture is so poor, that she may even have to support the small of her back with the weight of her arms. When she gives birth, the complications are so frequent and so severe that they often lead to fatalities in both the mother and infant. What is perhaps most striking about Grant’s observations, of course, is his apparent lack of real contact with the labouring people he documents. Universal human experiences, such as the tendency towards bad posture and the ‘misfortune’ of visible pregnancies, are assumed to be particularly characteristic of people of quality, presumably because these are the kind of people with whom Grant has spent most of his time. The poor, on the other hand, exist in a quasi-fictional mindscape, which ostensibly relies as much on traditional caricature as it does on any real sense of observation. In this respect, the parallels with contemporary discourses of human variety, as will be shown in the forthcoming chapters, are remarkable.

Empirical investigations into hereditary diseases, however, could also be used as a powerful critique of those elite family lines the diseases ostensibly identified. While the delicate nature of nerves and passions in the upper orders could be framed as a positive ‘side effect’ of their physical constitutions, the continued refinement of these strangely sensitive strains of humanity was an easy target of reproach. When the Edinburgh physician William Buchan published his immensely popular catalogue of home remedies, *Domestic Medicine* (1769), he rather scorned than simpered to the elite nature of gout and other hereditary maladies. The “delicate female”, he declares, “who lives on tea and other slops”, will be lucky if she can bear a child at all, and if she does, “it will hardly be fit to
live”. The irregular lives of the children’s fathers, moreover, could not but hurt their constitution (441). Engendering family lines with gouty constitutions, he warned, was certainly not something to be admired:

[W]hat a dreadful inheritance is the gout, the scurvy, or the king’s evil [scrofula], to transmit to our offspring! How happy had it been for the heir of many a great estate had he been born a beggar, rather than to inherit his father’s fortune at the expense of inheriting his diseases! A person labouring under any incurable malady ought not to marry … (441-2).

This last sentence brutally identifies a crucial element of noble criticism that had been freshly elucidated by empirical medicine: nobility, and ‘good race’ in general, was essentially a matter of selective breeding. The eighteenth-century isolation of hereditary disease and its physical causes had significantly isolated heredity itself as a corporeal process – the literal bestowing of a certain body type upon one’s children, which could be artificially engineered by choosing parents from corresponding family lines. Disease, indeed, had provided an avenue of discourse with which to discuss the phenomenon of hereditary characteristics in terms of the body alone. This, of course, did not yet mean that external influences were to be discounted. If nobles intended to continue this closed form of familial generation, warns Buchan, they would have to reform their excessive way of life: “Family constitutions are as capable of improvement as family estates,” he claims, “and the libertine who impairs the one does greater injury to his posterity than the prodigal who squanders the other” (442).

The more naturalists began to understand the physical functions of heredity, the more it could be used as a critique of hereditary power. Erasmus Darwin, one of the most significant proto-evolutionary thinkers of the eighteenth century (and grandfather to Charles), well understood the implications that these new views on heredity held for traditional family dynasties. The consistent recurrence of certain diseases in noble families
was, for Darwin, not a validation of their blood purity, but an indication of steady physical
degeneration with each successive heir. In his *Temple of Nature*, probably composed in the
mid-to-late 1790s and published posthumously in 1804, he posits that all living things,
plants and animals, are in a perpetual state of “improvement or degeneracy”, and that, if
the latter be true, “it becomes a subject of importance to detect the causes of these
mutations” (50). On the one hand, this allows Darwin to argue for the upper orders to
denounce their lives of excess for the greater good of their successive generations. When
those born of a certain constitution partake of even small quantities of “ale, cyder, wine or
spirit”, he laments, they will much more easily fall victim to gout and dropsy, having been
born to parents who “have been intemperate in the use of those liquors” (52). It was the
elite themselves who had the power to identify this ‘mutation’ and interrupt it: “if one or
two sober generations succeed” Darwin had advised in his *Zoonomia; or the Laws of
Organic Life* (1794-96), successive generations will begin to improve again; if excess
continues, however, “the family becomes extinct” (qtd in P. K. Wilson 1.414). On the
other hand, Darwin’s claims could be used to argue against the entire notion of pure
bloodlines. It was quite certain, he proclaimed in the *Temple of Nature*, that the consistent
‘marrying’ of animals (or humans) into the same family line is sure to increase the
likelihood of hereditary disease. Indeed, he notes, as “has long been supposed to be true,
by those who breed animals for sale”, the general health of livestock depended on their
being consistently bred into *different* bloodlines (51). The most advantageous mode of
selective breeding, he notes, as every farmer knew, was in fact the *exact opposite* of noble
bloodline tradition: rather than maintaining one particular family line, “the art to improve
the sexual progeny of either vegetables or animals must consist in choosing the most
perfect of both sexes … ” (52). And thus, from Darwin’s point of view, the ‘noble’
character of diseases like gout provided a perfect physiological argument against noble
tradition. “By reinforcing that gout most typically owed its origin to noble ancestral lineage,” notes Phillip K. Wilson, “[Darwin] was critiquing the customary acceptance of the social structure of aristocracy … the inheritance of gout could be overcome by breaking the lines of familial inheritance and marrying outside of the ancestral lineage” (emphasis added, 144). Furthermore, Wilson notes that it was views like this on the hereditary nobility – the prime template of heredity itself in the eighteenth century – which would become “foundational to what, a century later, became incorporated into programs of both positive eugenics (i.e. promoting the marriage and proliferation of ‘good stock’) and negative eugenics (i.e. the prohibition of marriage and breeding between ‘defective stock’)” (144). The idea of heredity, having developed from a corporeal metaphor of noble property transfer into an autonomous theory of physical transmission, now questioned the very basis of the hereditary tradition on which nobility was based. Darwin could indeed, through the discourse of hereditary disease, argue that pureblood families were irreparably degenerate, and should rather be avoided than aspired to by the successful and wealthy. “As many families become gradually extinct by hereditary disease,” he warns his readers, “as by scrofula, consumption, epilepsy, and mania, it is often hazardous to marry an heiress, as she is not unfrequently the last of a diseased family” (52).

The interpretation of nobility and its lineal, controlled patterns of heredity in the discourse of medicine and anatomy, thus added yet another racialised dimension to noble tradition in eighteenth-century Britain. The causes, the effects, and the very substance of noble superiority – be it ‘pretentious’ or ‘authentic’ – were being sought and indeed identified in the physiological form of the human body. Furthermore, the identification of such nobility was now being increasingly framed within a discourse that posited noble bodies, as prime exemplars of selective breeding and luxury lifestyle as identifiably different from other
human bodies. There was, however, still a discernable gap between the pure-blood traditions of nobility and the idea of collective human types – for the anatomical variation of exotic peoples, unlike nobility, also represented the spectre of a foreign other, a cultural alien. Yet, when one looks closer at portrayals of nobility in the eighteenth century, it might be found that this gap is rather less wide than it might at first seem.

2.1.3: Nobility and the Racialised Nation: ‘Unchangeable Blood’ in the work of Boulainvilliers and Bolingbroke

In her 1975 thesis, ‘L’idée de race en France au XVIe et au début du XVIIe siècle: 1498-1614’, Arlette Jouanna suggests that the concept of race can be analysed according to four basic tenets:

1—Les hommes naissent naturellement inégaux.
2—Cette inégalité innée est définitive, quel que soit l’effort humain ou collectif pour l’effacer, et bien qu’une mauvaise nature puisse être partiellement améliorée par l’éducation et l’exercice.
3—cette inégalité innée est héréditaire.
4—l’ordre social est le reflet de la hiérarchie naturelle des hommes définie par les trois points précédents (24). 65

This perspective on race thinking provides two important insights into the concept: firstly, in racialised discourse, heredity functions as a representation of the unchangeability of natural order – natural states can be temporarily improved but not transformed, precisely because their original state is constantly revived through blood; secondly, this structure of unchangeable heredity, as long as it can be maintained, functions irrespective of the subjects to which it is applied, the intensity of its application, or indeed the coherence of its

65 1. Men are naturally born unequal. 2. This innate inequality is unchangeable, and even though an ill nature [mauvaise nature] may be partially improved through education and exercise, no individual or collective effort can alter this fact. 3. This innate inequality is hereditary. 4. The social order is a reflection of the natural hierarchy of mankind, defined by the three previous points (my trans. 23).
deployment (24). Jewish culture and religion, to take a classic example, has been racialised and re-racialised in Europe for centuries to suit different socio-political contexts: once the religion has been passed down from one generation to another, it can be considered hereditary, and once it is considered hereditary, it can be conceived, through racialised discourse, as an unchangeable element of natural order; it is now ‘improvable’ but not effaceable by human efforts – no longer Jewish faith but Jewish blood.66 Linda Alcoff finds another pertinent example of the arbitrariness of race thinking in her study of ‘Latino’ or ‘Hispanic’ groupings in the United States, wherein the structure of race (unchangeable and unequal heredity) is often employed to characterise a linguistic group (hispanophones) composed of an immensely diverse set of populations – that is, anyone who lives in the United States and speaks Spanish as a first language, be they, say, of Cuban, Peruvian, or Spanish backgrounds (277). Thus, here the ‘hereditary’ nature of Spanish language and culture can become racialised according to what Spanish language denotes in an American cultural context, becoming ‘Latino blood’ rather than ‘Spanish language’; if the same individuals were transported to Spain, on the other hand, they might well be racialised according to a European cultural context as ‘white Europeans’.67 The structure of race, in short, permits (even encourages) open arbitrariness in its application, while simultaneously insinuating a natural order in its particular cultural context. This is the very same dynamic which allowed race – a genealogical discourse of nobility, spiritual status, and selective breeding – to enter so seamlessly into the scientific sphere of human variety in the eighteenth century. The influence of nobility over the discourse of human variety was not a case of one field of thought invading another; on the contrary, it was the distinction of an already-existing hierarchical dimension within a greater tradition of order

– a re-appropriation of established noble tradition with a special emphasis on heredity and the physical body. This is particularly striking when we consider one of the very earliest expressions of race as a blood-based, nationally rooted ‘type’ of human – which was, as a matter of fact, simply a historicised vindication of nobility.

The French nobleman and historian Henri Bernard, Comte de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), is said to have been France’s first ‘anglomaniac’ (Ellis 166). Certainly, he enjoyed enormous popularity in British high society for decades after his death: when the first (and posthumous) edition of his État de la France was printed in London in 1727, its subscribers’ list included forty-four of the most illustrious peers in Britain, the entire royal family, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and a host of French and continental nobles. Charles Forman, who translated the third tome of État de la France in 1739 as An Historical Account of the Ancient Parliaments of France, dedicated it to the Prince of Wales in Boulainvilliers’s name: “The subject [Boulainvilliers] treats of is so interesting to a free people” Forman explains, “and so demonstrably shews the superiority of your royal British progenitors over the generality of French kings … he cannot possibly fail of meeting with a gracious reception from a Prince, sprung from the loins of the protectors of liberty…” (v). Though Forman somewhat exaggerates Boulainvilliers’s supplication, the French historian had indeed contrasted the liberties of English monarchy and peerage over his native nobility. Unlike the French nobility, he claimed, who had been degraded and emasculated by the Louis XIV’s absolute rule, English peers had demanded ‘precise titles’ from their monarch, thus consolidating real and incontrovertible claims to political power:

> Et n’oseroit-on dire après cela que les Anglois sont moins condamnables que nous les estimons, pour avoir peut-être forcé leurs Princes de leur donner des titres exacts & précis, & dont la notoriété fût incontestable, lorsqu’il s’est agi, dans leur gouvernement, d’assurer la liberté des hommes, & la jouissance tranquille de leurs biens ...(129-30).

68 “And let us dare to say, after all this, that the English are less to blame than we consider them, for having perhaps forced their Princes to give them exact and precise titles, in which [noble] renown is incontestable, as
More than this, however, Boulainvilliers identified the English and French nobilities as representative of a single *ethnic* group, distinct from the commonalities of both countries by their pure ‘Germanic’ bloodlines. The nobilities of eighteenth-century France and England, he claimed in his *Essais sur la noblesse de France* (1732), were descended from Frankish invaders who had ruled France since the sixth century – forming a ‘race’ apart from the Romano-Gauls who subsequently became a conquered ‘nation’ of commonality. Remarkable as they are, Boulainvilliers’s historical claims must first and foremost be understood in the context of his contemporary political criticism. By identifying French nobility as a distinct ethnicity within France, Boulainvilliers not only aimed to undermine the “new national idea” expounded by the French monarchy, but also refuted the notion that nobility was born solely of monarchical authority (and could thus be limited by it, as in Louis XIV’s *recherches des faux nobles*[^69]) (Arendt 163; Ellis 25-6, 108; Buranelli 477). Furthermore, Vincent Buranelli notes that the “Germanist theory” of noble origin had been used as far back as the sixteenth century as a means to undercut the political authority of the Third Estate – a line of rhetoric which, as will be examined presently, might indeed be compared to the Norman Yoke rhetoric of mid-seventeenth-century England (483). Nevertheless, and as André Devyver has pertinently asserted, it is not as much the historical coherence of Boulainvilliers’s claims that make him an important figure in the history of race, but the *methodology* he employs in the process (376). The *Essais*’ attempt to vindicate pure-blood nobles on account of their historical ethnicity not only provides one of the earliest and most complete conceptions of ethno-racial superiority in the eighteenth century, it is a prime example of the ease with which noble discourses of blood-

[^69]: Or, *Grande enquête sur la noblesse* 1666-1727, whereby claimants to French nobility had to verify their heraldry and genealogy in order to claim exemption from the direct land tax known as the *taille.*
purity and hereditary virtue could be used to assert the superiority of certain ethnic groups, and thereby identify social dominance with the ‘unchangeable’ blood legacy of those groups.

Originally, Boulainvilliers explains in the opening pages of his *Essais*, it was violence which distinguished liberty from slavery and nobility from commonality, “*mais quoique cette origine soit vicieuse, il y a si long-temps que l’usage en est établi dans le monde, qu’elle a acquis la force d’une loi naturelle*” (1).\(^7\) Natural differences between rulers and the ruled, he suggests, can thus be understood in terms of virtue: if all Men are born equal in their possession of reason and humanity, then the only way they can be judged is through their individual virtue – and virtue, quite simply, is more often to be found in noble races than in the ignoble:

\[
[\text{La vertu}] \text{ est plus ordinaire dans les bonnes races que dans les autres. On doit aussi convenir que la vertu a besoin de l’éclat de la fortune pour se signaler, } \& \text{ cette fortune, c’est la naissance qui la donne ordinairement, ou certaine fatalité qui n’est pas toujours attachée au vrai mérite. Une naissance noble est donc la moyen le plus commun de faire valoir et de faire honorer la vertu} \text{ (8).}^71
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This was particularly evident in the case of Romano-Gallic France, he claims, as by the sixth century the old Roman nobility had been so diluted by ambitious foreigners and barbarians that its noble institutions had become all but devoid of virtuous statesmen (16-17). The invading Franks, on the other hand, were of naturally virtuous stock. They were one of many tribes that Boulainvilliers calls *les Germain*\(s\), which also included the *Allemans*, the *Saxons*, and the *Lombards* (334-5). The ancient *Germain*\(s\), he explains, were a people hardy and skilled in war; their women were modest, and their men were faithful to

\(^{70}\) “But though its origins might be ridden with vice, its [nobility’s] usage has been established in the world for such a long time that it has acquired the force of a natural law” (my trans.).

\(^{71}\) [Virtue] is more common in good races than in others. We must also acknowledge that virtue requires the sparkle of fortune to make itself known, and normally it is birth which confers this fortune, or some other work of destiny which is not always attached to true merit. Noble birth is thus the most common means to value and honour virtue (my trans.).
their wives, which meant that they bore numerous and robust children (336). They were also highly talented in the art of government: they dutifully recognised nobility where it was due, (either from military excellence or from honour of birth) and nobles were accorded a place at one of three demi-rond councils according to their degree of nobility. It was possibly from this system, suggests Boulainvilliers, that the three orders of ancient nobility – barons, chevaliers, and écuyers (squires) – had been originally established (334-5). Perhaps most interestingly, the blood of the ancient Ger mains, supposedly untainted by foreign admixture, had rendered them strikingly physically distinct:

> Les Germains étoient tous à peu près de meme taille, & habitude de corps, preuve que leur sang n’étoit point alteré par le mélange d’aucun sang étranger. Tous étoient d’une grande et vaste corpulence, la charnure blanche, les cheveux droits & blonds ou roux, les yeux verds et étincelans, le regard fier, terrible, la voix étonnante (337).72

With their wealth of social, moral and indeed physical virtues, the conquering Franks effortlessly took control of the noble institutions established by the corrupt Roman elite, and returned them to their rightful function. In French history ever since, they had defended their position as France’s ruling elite from ambitious commoners and power-hungry monarchs, who tirelessly attempted to requisition the offices of nobility for their own gain. For Boulainvilliers, the race that Germanic nobles represented would ever be the only true nobility: “Il est facile de faire voir qu’après la conquête des Gaules, les Francois originaires furent les seuls reconnus pour nobles ; c’est-à-dire pour maîtres et seigneurs, tandis que toute la fortune des Gaulois étoit bornée selon la volonté du vainqueur” (40).73

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72 “The Germans were all of about the same size and habitus, since their blood had never been tainted by any foreign admixture. All of them were of great, vast corpulence, with white flesh, straight hair that was blond or red, green twinkling eyes, a proud, terrifying expression, and a frightening voice” (my trans.).

73 “It is easy to see that, after the conquest of the Gauls, only those of Frankish origin were considered noble; that is to say, they were masters and lords, while the destiny of the Gauls was decided according to the will of the conqueror…” (my trans.).
Boulainvilliers’s admiration for the English peerage, too, was largely based on his perception of this rank as representative of the Germanic spirit; unlike their repressed cousins in France, they had ardently maintained their noble privileges in the face of king and commoner. A powerful and influential House of Lords, he held, was the rightful legacy of Germanic national assemblies – a system where ancient nobles had essentially functioned as leaders of autonomous provinces; its very presence was a safeguard for liberty and order (Ellis 194; Boulainvilliers *Essais* 44-7). The peers of England, he declares in the *Essais*, know enough to look to the blood of the Normans and Saxons for the origins of liberty, and they likewise justify the antiquity of their houses by tracing their names to Germanic ancestors.74 They, like the *Allemans* and the Franks, consider themselves *aborigines*, and their titles are only added confirmation of the immemorial antiquity of their ancient blood (47). “Les nations voisines de la nôtre,” he remarks, “plus attachées que nous ne le sommes à la distinction des rangs, ont conservé à leur noblesse l’idée de la supériorité, comme dépendante de la naissance prise dans le sang des conquérans ...” (44).75

Boulainvilliers’s idea of the ‘blood of the conquerors’ is, in itself, a crucial component of his racial discourse. He posited that the Franks, in their original act of dominance over the Gauls, had claimed a special kind of authority reserved for military victors. To conquer a nation, he asserts, is to assert an indefeasible superiority through ‘right of conquest’ (*le droit de seigneurie et de domination*) (38). In her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Hannah Arendt noted how this particular concept demonstrates the extent to which Boulainvilliers was influenced by the philosophy of Spinoza, of whose work the French historian had made several extensive analyses and translations (163). The

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74 Devyver notes that Boulainvilliers was careful to relate all the cultures who had at one time held power in France back to his catch-all group of *Germain*, meaning that the Norman, Saxon and Frankish invasions could all be considered as representatives of enduring Germanic dominance (376-7).

75 “Our neighbouring nations, more attached than we are to the distinction of rank, have maintained the idea of superiority in their nobility as dependent on birth into the bloodline of the conquerors ...” (my trans.).
‘right of conquest’ she suggests, is essentially an interpretation of Spinoza’s ‘right of nature’, an idea which was put forth some decades previously in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670). According to Spinoza’s *Treatise*, the act of surrender automatically transfers authority from a conquered people to their conqueror, which is to be respected as long that conqueror remains in power (Israel 282):

> [A]nyone who has transferred their power of defending themselves to another … has clearly surrendered his natural right and has consequently decided to obey the other absolutely … they are wholly obligated to do so as long as the king, nobility, or people preserves the supreme power they received … (Spinoza 16.12, 202).

According to Boulainvilliers’s interpretation, however, the conqueror was not one person, one army, or even one ‘set’ of nobility, it was the *idea* of an ethnic group. Moreover, the ‘right of conquest’ does not simply endure as long as the conqueror holds power, it exists in the *blood* of the conqueror – an essentially genealogical conception of authority and right. Boulainvilliers “invents two different peoples in France …”, claims Arendt, “[h]e is representative of many of the nobles who did not regard themselves as representative of the nation, but as a separate ruling caste which might have much more in common with a foreign people of ‘the same society and condition’ than its compatriots” (163).

This is perhaps the single most remarkable element of Boulainvilliers’s claims – he openly justifies the superiority of the Franks on the basis of on an historical deed, but uses the bloodline traditions of noble race in order to link this historical deed, and indeed the superior virtues of the Germanic peoples, with present-day nobles. Here, the virtues of the past and the conquests of the Franks exist as a spiritual and corporeal *essence* in the blood of the nobility – that is, it bypasses linguistic, cultural and historical identities by identifying superiority and ethnicity on a purely genealogical basis. It becomes, in short, an unchangeable inheritance, which may be altered and may be suppressed, but is ultimately
ineffaceable. Crucially, the lineal blood traditions of the nobility have provided him with a *vehicular* discourse of ‘pure blood’ with which to construct this notion – all nobles are ostensibly traceable to certain families, and these same ‘pure’ bloodlines can thus be interpreted as a direct conduit for the illustrious deeds (or historical ‘right’) of those ancient families. Boulainvilliers’s vision of the English and French nobility, claims Devyver, is distinctly racialised not only because of its identification of certain social groups with certain ethnicities, but because of its conviction that, to preserve these social groups in positions of inferiority and superiority, one must *forbid the mixing of blood between master and servant* (372). This was, indeed, one of Boulainvilliers’s main laments for the contemporary French nobility – decadence and ambition had ‘diluted’ their noble blood with that of meritless aspirants (État 181). In fact, Devyver notes, when Boulainvillier compiled a catalogue of the main noble families in France, titled the *Mémoire sur la Noblesse* (1719), he arranged his findings not according to political or ceremonial importance, but “d’après l’ancienneté et la quantité de sang germain qui coulait dans leurs veines” (376-7).  

76 “But according to the quantity of German blood that ran through their veins” (my trans.).

A slightly different kind of ‘Germanism’ had, of course, long been an important element of ethnic self-identity in Britain. The most significant example of such was, the rhetoric of the ‘Norman Yoke’, primarily expounded by English Levellers such as John Lilburne during the 1640s, which has already been discussed in chapter 1.2.3. In fact, as far back as 1605, English political agitators had been promoting the idea of the Germanic superiority of English blood as an alternative vision of socio-spiritual hierarchy. In his *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities Concerning the Most Noble and Renowned English Nation* (1605) for instance, the Anglo-Dutch antiquary Richard Verstegan (a.k.a. Richard

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76 “But according to the quantity of German blood that ran through their veins” (my trans.).
Rowlands) had asserted that “Englishmen were descended of a German race and were heretofore generally called Saxons” (1). Interestingly, Verstegan utilised the Germanist discourse for the very same reasons as Boulainvilliers would a century later: to undermine the authority of an absolute monarch – though in his case the monarch in question was James I rather than Louis XIV. This element of his work is made clear from the royal dedication of the Restituiton, which praises James for his being “descended of the chiefest blood-royall of our ancient English-Saxon kings” – thereby not only privileging the role of ethnicised blood above divine ordination, but provocatively attributing the King’s excellence to his Saxon blood (when, as the Cambridge historian Verstegan must have known only too well, the Stuarts were descended from the Norman-Breton Fitz Flaad and Fitz Alan dynasties) (Dedication, n.p.). The Restitution’s opening words also provide an insight into the nature of Verstegan’s Germanism: the “cheifest blood-royall of our ancient English-Saxon kings”, that is, the purest bloodline of this one particular ethnic group, is here portrayed almost as an intensification of English identity; the purest, most elite bloodline of the English people becomes, in a way, the most English of them all – its attributes of lineality, royalty, and Saxon ethnicity are all fundamentally interlinked.

It was not until the 1790s that the Norman Yoke theory once again became a significant line of political criticism, most notably revived in Thomas Paine’s Rights of Man (1791), wherein the author inculpates William the Conqueror and his subsequent “race of conquerors” as the original instigators of oppressive hereditary institutions in Britain (see section 3.1.2; 121). Throughout the intervening eighteenth century, however, notes Michael Banton, Germanism remained a consistent feature of English identity, providing a useful distinction for English race in opposition to English state and nation (1987, 13). Indeed, notes Banton, the significance of a genealogically based English race became particularly evident during the American Revolution, when an entire facet of
English identity was violently wrenched from the authority of the English state. For the Revolutionaries, the idea that they were part of an English race – an ‘unchangeable-but-modifiable’ inheritance of English history, culture, and social status – allowed them to assert the legacy of natural English liberty in opposition to England and the English. By 1776, remarks Banton, many American Revolutionaries had aligned themselves with English radicals who identified political oppression as a legacy of the Norman Conquest, and justified their own position as an attempt to reinstitute an Anglo-Saxon form of government (13).

Theories of the Norman Yoke, of course, differed from the Germanism of Boulainvilliers in two important ways: firstly, they matched Saxon blood against Norman blood – with the latter usually representing the vices of the French rather than the virtues of the Franks; secondly, they vindicated the ‘pure’ blood of the commonality rather than the nobility, while ‘illegitimate usurpation’ took the place of ‘right of conquest’. Yet, not all manifestations of Germanism in England followed a strict Norman/Saxon binary; on the contrary, the idea of Saxon blood could often vindicate traditional hereditary privilege as a feature of liberty-loving ‘English spirit’, an essential element of a purely ‘Saxon’ society. Henry St. John, first Viscount Bolingbroke – who, it will be remembered, was the dedicatee of Pope’s Essay on Man – was an avid reader and personal acquaintance of Boulainvilliers, and shared many of his convictions about the natural virtues of the Germanic peoples. For Bolingbroke, the Norman/Saxon division of England was simply resolved; the Normans, after all, were ultimately descended from Germanic stock, and despite having become accustomed to the tyrannical ways of the French, had nonetheless retained an important seed of liberty in their Germanic blood. This dormant, Saxon germ

77 Thomas Jefferson was probably the most prolific proponent of Germanism in the fledgling United States, even composing a simplified grammar of Anglo-Saxon in order to make it more accessible to his compatriots. See Stanley R. Hauer, ‘Thomas Jefferson and the Anglo-Saxon Language’. PMLA 98.5 (Oct. 1983).
of liberty was naturally re-awakened, he suggests in his *Remarks upon the History of England* (1730-1), when the Norman invaders acclimatised to Saxon society:

Neither he [William the Conqueror] nor they [the Normans] could destroy the old [Saxon] constitution, because neither he nor they could extinguish the old spirit of liberty. On the contrary, the Normans and other strangers who settled here were soon seized with it themselves, instead of inspiring a spirit of slavery into the Saxons … they were originally of … Gothic extraction … as well as the people they subdued. They came out of the same northern hive; and therefore they naturally resumed the spirit of their ancestors when they came into a country where it prevailed (2.48-9).

Bolingbroke may have stopped short of Boulainvilliers’s assertion that the Germanic nobility formed a nation unto themselves, but he nevertheless agreed that nobles were a distinctly superior and fundamentally inimitable element of society. It is interesting to compare his historical notions of a Saxon spirit in the *History of England*, to his ideas of the natural elite in his *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism* (1736), wherein he identifies a natural ‘spirit’ of rulership, which rises irrepressibly in those born for greatness. In many ways, notes Isaac Kramnick, the *Letters* constituted “a plea from Bolingbroke to the younger generation of the landed and noble classes to recapture the leadership of English political society from the new men around Walpole” (103). In this text, Bolingbroke explains to the young recipient, Lord Cornbury, that, above and beyond the political designation of titles which were mistakenly granted to many a vulgar man, there existed an immeasurable chasm between the *many* and the *few* – something he had described in an earlier work as a “general division [which] runs through the whole race of mankind, of the multitudes designed to obey, and of the few designed to govern” (‘A Dissertation upon Parties’, *Works* 3.159). Though Bolingbroke does not directly equate his *few* with the earthly system of titles and honours, he nonetheless assures the reader that these superior beings – who are “distinguished by nature so essentially from the herd of mankind, that
they seem to be of another species” – will most likely be found at the summit of society (Works 4.175). Their greatness, quite simply, was irrespressible – they may be tyrants or guardians, but even if they attempt to retire from public life, “their splendour accompanies them” (4.176). If such figures should give up their natural position of high rank to a lesser being, he warns Cornbury, it would thus be “a sacrilegious breach of trust; they … pervert the designs of Providence” (4.174). Cornbury himself, it seems, was proof of what made a natural nobleman: “look into your own breast”, implores Bolingbroke, “and you will find there are superior spirits, men who shew even from their infancy … that they were born for something more, and better” (4.174). God has designated the few, he writes, “to instruct, to guide, and to preserve; … to be the tutors and the guardians of human kind” (4.173).

It is even more interesting to compare Bolingbroke’s notions of Saxon blood and his ideas of natural nobility with some of his other writings, wherein he asserts that God chooses only a certain type of person, from a certain geographical location, and born into a certain rank, to be counted as one of his lucky few. In On the Folly and Presumption of Philosophers (1754) he expresses what would become a familiar sentiment in the field of human science – that “wild and uncivilised” peoples could not possibly be capable of governing, since their minds have been warped from a lifetime of base activity:

Their whole time is employed, the whole attention of their minds is bent, to provide from day to day, and from season to season, for their sustenance: and the exercise of reason appears as little in them as in the beasts they sometimes hunt … arts lie uninvented or unimproved, and science they have not (Philosophical Works 2.293).

Furthermore, the path to becoming capable of reasonable government would take several generations, he claimed, as could be seen in the gradual progress of European history from a society of barbarian polytheists to civilised monotheists. Reason required an atmosphere of “slow and calm” influences to thrive, while the uncivilised were exposed only to
“passions sudden and violent” (2.310). And in this respect, it seems, the exotic peoples of the world shared much in common with the domestic underclass. Bolingbroke uses the very same language of reason and passion in a letter to Jonathan Swift of 1721, wherein he reprimands his friend for attempting to improve the lives of the Dublin “rabble”. “Is it possible”, he asks, that Swift:

should be ignorant that this monstrous beast has passions to be moved, but no reason to be appealed to; and that plain truth will influence half a score [of] men at most in a nation, or any age, while mystery will lead millions by the nose? (Swift 182).

Comparing Bolingbroke’s theories of Saxon blood, natural nobility, and degenerative incivility, demonstrates the vast and disparate dimensions of human worth that could be drawn upon to justify social hierarchies in the eighteenth century, but also showcases how easily these various dimensions can be reconciled and correlated through a racialised-discourse. Each of Bolingbroke’s theories, indeed, is built around a reliant socio-political context: Saxon blood must be vaunted as superior in order to vindicate the English culture and populations; certain people must be identified as natural nobles in order to justify the institution of nobility itself; and the exotic other must be demonised for its cultural differences from England in order to justify its subordination. All, likewise, assume the core structure of an unchangeable-but-modifiable essence, an inbuilt system of natural order which accords with the desired cultural context, and which is transmitted (conceptually, spiritually, or physically) via blood.

The association of all these and other dimensions of human evaluation with the body and its physiological heredity can, in many ways, be seen as a discourse of power in itself. “Race thinking”, claimed Arendt, “entered the scene of active politics the moment the European peoples had prepared, and to a certain extent realised, the new body politic of the nation” (161). It was, she suggested, a fundamental tool of European war; it asserted
‘race’ across political and geographical boundaries, and denied the very principles of Mankind as a unit by asserting a superior sort of human (161). In Boulainvilliers’s France, this was thus exemplified in the idea that nobles could, through their genealogy, re-discover themselves as an international caste who had more in common with the elite of neighbouring countries than the commonality of their own land (164). In England however, a more ‘nationalist’ form of race thinking could be conceived through the idea of *inherited inequalities* forming the basis of liberty itself – that is, that an Englishman’s acceptance of his rightful inheritance, be it great or small, was essential for the freedom of the English race as a whole. This not only meant that the “caste arrogance” so characteristic of the eighteenth-century French nobility was less evident in England, but that the lower classes were more socially invested in the maintenance of social hierarchies and hereditary privilege. “[T]he concept of inheritance was accepted almost unchanged and applied to the entire British ‘stock’”, Arendt remarks; “[t]he consequence of this assimilation of noble standards was that the English brand of race thinking was almost obsessed with inheritance theories and their modern equivalent, eugenics” (176). The ‘rights of man’ which ultimately developed in France was, in a word, replaced in England with the ‘rights of Englishmen’, which held unequal status via inheritance at its very core (for more on this idea, see chapter 3.1.2; 175-6).

In his 1975-6 lectures at the Collège de France, later recorded as *Il faut défendre la société* (1975-6), Michel Foucault identified this same racialisation of rank and nation as a fundamental feature of ‘bio-power’ – a new discourse of authority based essentially in the physiological dimensions of the human body, which emerged in Britain and France in the eighteenth century. As he surmised:

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78 ‘Genealogy’, like ‘eugenics’, is derived from the Greek *geneia* (*γενεια*, meaning generation or genesis). It has been used in English to refer to ‘pedigrees’ or family trees since at least 1382 (*genealogy, n.* *OED*)
Au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle, il s’est produit un phénomène important : l’apparition – il faudrait dire l’invention – d’une nouvelle mécanique de pouvoir ... [qui] porte d’abord sur les corps et sur ce qu’ils font, plus que sur la terre et sur son produit ... C’est un type de pouvoir qui suppose un quadrillage serré de coercitions matérielles plutôt que l’existence physique d’un souverain, et définit une nouvelle économie de pouvoir dont le principe est que l’on doit à la fois faire croître les forces assujetties et la force et l’efficacité de ce qui les assujettit (32).79

Bio-power, as Foucault expanded upon in his subsequent Histoire de la Sexualité (1976-84), appropriated every dimension of the physiological human body – from sex and childbirth, to illness and old age – into a system of power-relations; the body itself and its capacity of production became the fundamental framework for Western systems of dominance and submission.80 To portray rank and nation in terms of blood or ‘race’, then, was to assert this corporeal discourse as a tool of socio-political authority. Foucault recognises the emergence of this body-thinking as much in the Norman Yoke rhetoric of John Lilburne as in the Germanism of Boulainvilliers – both were instances wherein the oppositions of people united by blood was being used to undermine the spiritual, customary, and legal authority of the monarch (Défendre la société 43). And in the very same way, suggests Foucault, the oppositional discourse between human bodies in the eighteenth century became a muted discourse of war, between the rich and the poor, the sick and the healthy, the superior and the inferior – which itself informed the power dynamics of real war. From the eighteenth century onwards, he claims, all war in Europe can essentially be understood as wars between ‘races’ – because a racialised, corporeal, hereditary discourse was increasingly what defined one group or nation from one another

79 “An important phenomenon occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the appearance – one should say the invention – of a new mechanism of power ... [which] applies primarily to bodies and what they do rather than to the land and what it produces. It was a mechanism of power that presupposed a closely meshed grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign, and it therefore defined a new economy of power based upon the principle that there had to be an increase both in the subjugated force and in the force and efficacy of that which subjugated them” (Macey trans. 36).

80 “C’est comme gestionnaire de la vie et de la survie, des corps et de la race que tant de régimes ont pu mener tant de guerres, en faisant tuer tant d’hommes ... l’existence en question n’est plus celle, juridique, de la souveraineté, c’est celle, biologique, d’une population”. Michel Foucault, Histoire de la Sexualité 1. La Volonté de Savoir (180).
Binary splits in society, Foucault explains, essentially exist in this discourse as distinctions between a super-race and a sub-race, the former of which assumes authority by asserting itself as the one ‘true’ race, thus eternally struggling to uphold its own hereditary legacy.

To recall Devyver’s assertion that Boulainvilliers’s nobility depended on a pure blood that had to be protected from inferior admixture, here we can see the noble discourse of pure blood providing one of the fundamental concepts of Western racism – the identification of a ‘super-race’ (i.e. a ‘virtuous’ lineal bloodline) which needs to be protected at all costs against blood-contamination in order to ensure the perpetual purity of the line. It is a trope, claims Foucault, which underpins the passion and violence of national and historical group identities in the West, and consequently the imperial ‘state-racisms’ of twentieth-century Europe. Social norms, in a biologised historical discourse, will always represent the one true ‘race’, he notes, whose heritage must thus be protected from racial degeneracy – which essentially represents social deviancy. The human body becomes a vehicle for social norms, and thus the preservation of social norms is enacted through the reproduction of human bodies, which in turn become a racial, temporal, *hereditary expression* of those social norms, to be protected from biological infiltration. Through this process of biologisation, Foucault explains, the discourse of history abandons the formula of “*nous avons à nous défendre contre la société*” and instead takes up the formula of “*nous avons à défendre la société contre tous les périls biologiques de cette autre race, de cette sous-race, de cette contre-race que nous sommes en train, malgré tous, de constituer*” (53). Ultimately notes Ann Laura Stoler, this Foucauldian history of race posits that, contrary to the explanation of race given at the beginning of this chapter, the concept of race *does not actually change meaning* between the eighteenth and the

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81 “It is no longer ‘We have to defend ourselves against society’, but ‘We have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence’” (Macey trans. 61-62).
nineteenth centuries – rather it is the discourses of power in which the concept is understood that shift around it. “The biologising of race is not a nineteenth-century invention …” she explains, “but part of an emergent biopower two centuries earlier … the struggle of races” (68).

This chapter began by establishing ‘race’ in the eighteenth century as a concept entirely distinct from modern understandings of human type defined by physical features and geographic background. It has examined the idea of race as a way of expressing natural order through a genealogical style of reasoning, resting somewhere between the notions of isolated, lineal bloodlines, providentially ordained spiritual status, and the controlled regulation of sexual generation. It has identified racialised thought as, above all, a cultural phenomenon, which precedes and has informed our modern understanding of genetics and biological inheritance. It has seen how the genealogical discourse which bolstered the foundations of noble blood tradition could be understood in terms of the dissected human body, in terms of ethnicised, ‘national’ groups, and indeed in terms of that combination of generation and cultivation known as ‘breeding’. For all that, the very origins of race as a genealogical interpretation of the Great Chain of Being are also at the root of what would steadily develop into modern racism throughout the eighteenth century. As will be explored in the next chapter, the multifarious notion of race permeated the very cultural framework in which human variety would develop as a field of empirical science – a cultural sense of hierarchical humanity that would profoundly influence scientific understandings of human nature for the next two hundred years.
2.2: Race, Blood, and Human Variety

2.2.1: Human Variety and Taxonomy: From Homo to Homo Sapiens

“It is not ‘race’ that gives rise to inequality; it is inequality that gives rise to ‘race’”

The previous chapter introduced the important distinction between modern notions of race as human type and eighteenth-century understandings of race as lineal bloodline, and identified how ‘race thinking’ can essentially be understood as the interpretation of natural order and spiritual status in terms of genealogical discourse. This distinction between ‘biological race’ and ‘genealogical race’ is of even greater importance in the examination of emerging human taxonomies during this time. Empirical naturalism, it will be remembered, worked on a premise that ran almost contrary to the assumptions that underlay race thinking: rather than grouping entities according to lineage, it considered them in terms of observable characteristics; in place of families of blood, it posited ‘families’ of similarities, of comparabilities, and of interactions. Paradoxically, however, the very framework onto which these observation-based classification systems were built was, itself, saturated with the culture of race thinking – a fact that becomes abundantly clear when examining the development of human taxonomy in eighteenth-century Europe. After all, both race-based and observation-based understandings of mankind ultimately looked to the organising principle of a Great Chain of Being; that is, both ranged creation in terms of lineal hierarchy, with a top and a bottom, a superior and an inferior – a dynamic of precedence which, in the context of human social groups (from which the Chain of Being was ultimately derived), was fundamentally based on bloodline and inheritance.
Indeed, within the empirical schema of human taxonomies, race thinking functioned as a kind of ‘bridge’ of genealogical reasoning, to be crossed when observation failed to account for anomalies such as generational variation or interspecies diversity. Neither was this ‘bridging’ function particularly problematic – to use race as a ‘support’ for logical classification was simply to fall back on received wisdom, to turn to intuition and cultural precedent to fill in the causative gaps of empirical observation. In fact, regular recourse to race thinking was an essential element of classificatory systems which, to a large extent, were extraordinarily inconsistent, contradictory and incomplete. Race thinking permitted notions of lineage, ‘acquired inheritance’ and the all-important idea of degeneration to account for the inevitable contrarieties that came with taxonomical theory. It was, in short, an indispensable tool in the ‘empiricisation’ of human nature – the delineation of ‘natural’ boundaries that not only concerned physical appearance, but also morality, religion, language, taboo, virtue, and sexuality. To understand modern race theory, then, we must not only look to empirical understandings of humanity, but also to the racialised ‘common sense’ which underpinned this understanding, and which saturated the hierarchical structures of the society in which these understandings were being formed.

As established in the previous chapter, anatomical differences in different human populations were, up until (and in many ways right through) the eighteenth century, largely understood as a spiritual phenomenon, with traditions like the ‘Curse of Ham’ rationalising human diversity through the received ideas of Christian spiritual order. Global populations were ‘racialised’ in that they were considered in terms of ‘family’ and lineage, which in tandem with Scripture, aligned them with certain providential positions in the universal order. Even by the time Johann Blumenbach had published the first edition of his De generis humani varietate nativa (1775) – a work which (as briefly mentioned in chapter
2.1.1) is frequently identified as one of the earliest examples of modern race theory – human variety theory was still dominated by Scriptural accounts of population diversity, on the one hand, and traditional Galenic humour theory on the other. Blumenbach, indeed, is careful to recognise as much in the introduction to his work: “some think [skin colour variation] to be a sign of the curse of Cain or Cham [Ham] …” he declares, “others have [claimed] bile played the most prominent part …” (106). Certainly, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, human variety theorists using empirical methodology were largely expected to interpret their findings to somehow confirm or enrich Biblical accounts of human history. In one of the earliest and most notable empirical analyses of human migration patterns in the New World, the Dissertation on the Origin of the Native Races of America (1642), for instance, the Dutch theologian Hugo Grotius had asserted serious problems in his contemporaries’ correlations between Scripture and the origins of New World civilisations, but his only reasonable line of argument rested on his finding an alternative historical thesis that would somehow accord with Biblical chronology. The people of the Yukutan were probably not the ten lost tribes of Israel, he suggests, despite the fact that they seemed to practice circumcision – rather, it was more likely that they were descended from the Chinese, who were “a race of equal intelligence and equal imperial ability” (18). The original Amerindians cannot have walked to the New World via a land bridge, he also claims, since they would surely have brought their horses with them – they might, however, be descended from Germanic seafarers, as suggested by the place-name suffix ‘lan’ in cities such as Cinacatlan, Quaxutatlan, and Zerotlan, which sounded like the Germanic ‘land’ (11).

Western Christianity exercised an even more powerful influence over the development of ‘empirical’ variety theories through the medium of the Great Chain of Being, which meant that physical diversity was overwhelmingly framed in the context of
spiritual status and natural order. From the outset of early modern exploration, notes Winthrop Jordan, the otherness of the exotic body was inseparable from what Jordan calls the “negro’s defective religious condition” (20). Indeed, to recall the previously examined passage from Stibbs’s *Voyage Up the Gambia* (see chapter 2.1.3), Christianity was both a unifying and divisive factor in the early formulation of human variety discourse: the Africans in that passage became ‘white men’ by adopting Christianity, yet Christianity nonetheless remained a white European identity – the Africans’ black skin symbolised first and foremost their exclusion from this sense of what it was to be Christian. The Biblical basis for understanding population difference, notes Jordan, played out a similar dynamic: on the one hand, Christian doctrine assumed, by way of *Genesis*, a single humanity born of a single act of creation, regardless of how physically different individual populations might be (there were, of course, notable rejections of this monogenetic assumption, as will be examined in chapter 2.2.3); on the other hand, the very absence of Christianity among exotic peoples figured as an intrinsic feature of their savagery. “Being a Christian was not merely a matter of subscribing to certain doctrines;” claims Jordan, “it was a quality inherent in oneself and in one’s society … in an important sense, then, heathenism was for Englishmen one inherent characteristic of savage men” (24). To a certain degree, therefore, the idea of skin colour and the body expressed a certain cultural exclusion in their representation of Christian goodness and badness: Africans were above all ‘black’, notes Jordan, not brown, and Europeans were ‘white’, not pink – because black and white were ultimately symbolic rather than descriptive colours; the spiritual idea of “blackness became so generally associated with Africa that every African”, even those of North Africa, “seemed a black man … Moor and Negro were used almost interchangeably” (5, 7-8).

Another crucial point to take into account is that empirical human variety theory grew out of a discourse of dubious travel narratives, exploration accounts, and colonial
expeditions – what Nicolas Hudson has called “the scattered misconceptions and antagonisms of traders and travellers” (252). Right up until the last decades of the eighteenth century it is difficult to fully separate accounts of human varieties from the Western tradition of monstrous races, which heavily informed the contemporary discourse of medical curiosity and a ‘scientific’ voyeurism of the exotic body. Very real contact with the pygmy peoples\textsuperscript{82} of central Africa, for instance, was regularly represented on early modern maps with images of Homer’s *pygmaioi* (πυγμαίοι) fighting the cranes – demonstrating the extent to which ‘new’ encounters were primarily understood in terms of old traditions (Van Duzer 425-6). From about 1735, naturalists were routinely sent along on exploration expeditions to amass empirical data, but this did little to counter the “continuing run of tantalising, if intellectually disturbing, reports of what seemed to be outlandish humanoid creatures” which flowed from the seaports of Europe. The Jesuit Joseph François Lafitau claimed in his *Moeurs des sauvages amérindiens; comparées aux moeurs des premiers temps* (1723) to have found Pliny’s race of headless ‘Blemmyes’ in North Africa, apparently validating the existence of those already reported in America (qtd Fischer, Delon ed. 721.), while, hydras, unicorns, dwarves, ‘wild men’ and Patagonian giants were being catalogued in naturalist taxonomies as late as the 1790s – with Blumenbach entertaining the idea that there might somewhere exist one-legged, tailed, and single-eyed civilisations in the 1795 edition of his *De generis* (see chapter 2.2.2 below; Blumenbach 258-9).

In fact, the idea of a *classificatory list* of ‘monstrous races’ had been put forth in the early seventeenth century, in the landmark text *De Monstrorum causis, natura et differentiis libri duo* (1616) compiled by the Italian philosopher Fortunio Liceti – which was reprinted in a French edition in 1708 (Fox 7). Liceti’s monsters, notes A.W. Bates,\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{82} Today, usually identified with the Aka, Efé, and Mbuti tribes.
were divided “into two principal groups: ‘uniform’, of a single species and gender, and ‘non-uniform’, possessing elements of different species or sexes” (82). These two groups were subsequently ranged under various classificatory terms such as ‘double’; ‘two-natured’; ‘deficient’; ‘unformed’; or ‘extraordinary’, in order to understand them in terms of their collective abnormalities (82). Such a ‘list’, indeed, provides an interesting example of the partly scientific, partly mythological discourse which initially informed empirical investigation into the human body: a number of Liceti’s monstrous specimens, for instance, appear to manifest recognisable birth defects, with unsettling sketches of pituitary dwarves, conjoined twins and babies born without limbs printed side by side with images of grape vines with human hair, and men with eyes on their shoulder blades (25, 132). This curious juxtaposition of the very real and the entirely fabricated is an important reminder of the extent to which ‘empirical’ investigations into the human body relied on second-hand reports – a primary reason, indeed, for the remarkable perseverance of monster myths in eighteenth-century taxonomy. Even more importantly, however, the popularity of Liceti’s monsters demonstrates a certain fascination with liminal human anatomy in Western science: the very idea of the ‘monstrous’ not only unifies this vast range of aberrant anatomies in terms of ‘sub-humanity’, but serves to reinforce the idea of humanity itself with a certain template of the human body. In this sense, the exotic human body, with its unfamiliar colours and shapes was easily assimilated into a monster discourse by virtue of deviating from this ideal ‘European’ anatomical subject. The public and the academy alike flocked to see John Coan – the so-called Norfolk Pygmy – who was weighed and measured by William Arderon of the Royal Society in 1750; they marvelled at Charles Byrne, known as the ‘Irish Giant’, who was exhibited in London for an entry-price of half a crown in 1782. Concordantly, this same public was paying to gape at the tattooed bodies of Pacific Islanders brought to England by William Dampier in 1692, or Cherokee chiefs
imported to London in 1762, or perhaps most famously of all, Saartjie Baartman the ‘Hottentot Venus’ who was eventually put on display in London in 1810, and whose dissected genitalia were exhibited in Paris’s Musée de l’Homme until the late twentieth century (Fox 8-9, Schiebinger 27-9).83

In many ways, in fact, the emerging discourse of empirical human variety was constructing its own ‘monsters’. The beleaguered figure of the ‘Hottentot’, although loosely based on the South African Khoikhoi people, was so invested with Western anxieties about morality, sexuality, bestiality and civility that it could well be considered an imaginary entity. The hateful descriptions of the Hottentots that invariably accompanied eighteenth-century descriptions of African populations frequently bordered on the fantastical, suggesting that their rhetorical dehumanisation by way of contrast to Western norms was more important to the observers than their actual description. “They are the very reverse of Human kind …” declared the English curate John Ovington in his Voyage to Suratt (1689),

if there’s any medium between a rational animal and a beast, the Hotantot lays the fairest claim to that species … [they] are as squalid in their bodies as they are mean and degenerate in their understandings … they are satisfied with the same wrought garments that nature has clad the sheep with … stinking grease is their sweet oil, and the dust of the streets the powder of their hair. They anoint their bodies to render their nerves supple and active … for they are both nimble and swift of foot, and of courage to outface and worst a lion … they dispatch the supernumeraries [unwanted children] to the Other World without remorse for the horrid crime, or consciousness of the e[xe]crable sin of murther … (489-496).

This tribe, he explains, ornament their legs by twisting them in sheep guts, which, once “made more savoury by the dirt”, they later use as food (490). They remove one testicle from their men, and one little finger from their women, and above all are incurably lazy – with only a few souls capable of such toil that they might make slaves for the Dutch

83 For more on this tradition, see Richard D. Altick, The Shows of London (1978) and Barbara Maria Stafford, Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine (1991).
The sexual characteristics of Hottentot women were of particular interest to observers, as they seemed to link the reportedly rapacious sexuality of the females with physical degeneration. Ovington was just one of many explorers who manifested a fascination with the ‘Hottentot apron’ (also referred to as the *sinus pudoris*), a form of female genital mutilation wherein the labia are elongated using small weights (*sinus pudoris* was the reason that Saartjie Baartman’s dissected genitals were put on public exhibition). These elongated labia, Ovington pondered, might be considered proof of hermaphroditism in Hottentots – though two of his ‘gentlemen’ acquaintances assured him that this was not the case (498). Robert Gordon, the Dutch-born son of a Scottish general, mentioned gynaecological examinations of Hottentot women four times in his travel journals, while Captain James Cook referred to the ‘Hottentot apron’ as “the great question among natural historians” (qtd in Huigen 8). The breasts of the Hottentot women, too, were rumoured to be so distended that they could be used as pillows for the women at night, while in the 1780s the New England theologian Samuel Stanhope Smith recounted that Hottentot breasts were regularly recycled as tobacco pouches, and sold to other tribes (qtd in Schiebinger 26). This particularly persistent fantasy of the grotesque Hottentot breast was actually quite an ancient ‘monster’ trope – the Scottish travel writer William Lithgow had mentioned it in his *Rare Adventures and Painefull Pereginations* (1632), not in relation to the Hottentots, but in reference to the Irish:

> I saw in Ireland’s north parts women … laying the dugges over their shoulders, would give sucke to the babes behind their backs … such kind of breasts, me thinketh, were very fit, to be made money bags for East or West Indian Merchants, being more than half a yard long (qtd in Blumenbach 243).

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84 Buffon notes that ‘Hottentot aprons’ have also been reported among Egyptian women, but that, reportedly, in that country they burn them off with hot irons (*Histoire Naturelle* 3.515).
Likewise, the custom of carrying one’s child on the back, claimed Buffon in 1749, was responsible for artificially ‘flattening’ the noses of the Hottentots, whose faces had been much pressed against their mothers’ backs in infancy (3.516). Most notorious trope of all, however, was the conviction that Hottentots – who were not considered to be especially dark-skinned by nature – blackened their skin deliberately with grease and soot, thus independently harnessing the ‘degeneration’ of their skin-colour and steering it in a direction opposite to ideal Western beauty. “Their children …” wrote William Funnel in his *Voyage Round the World* (1707) “are sometimes inclining to be white” and, were it “not for their nasty way of greazing them” they would apparently stay that way (qtd in Wahrman 98). Daniel Beekmen, in his *Voyage To and From the Island of Borneo* (1718), quite agreed: “[Hottentots are not] naturally so black, but make themselves so by daubing themselves with soot and stinking grease” (98). By 1775, John Hunter had come to the conclusion in his *Inaugural Disputation on the Varieties of Man* (1775) that the continued use of black body paints had become inherent in Hottentot anatomy, and could now be passed down to offspring whether they came into contact with the dreaded ‘grease’ or not (98).

A steady tradition of skin colour and the degenerate human body, then, can be seen to have influenced notions of empirically assessed human type from the very beginning to the very end of the eighteenth century – whereby the physical and cultural realities of exotic populations were, through a Judæo-Christian tradition of the monstrous body, reimagined according to relative biases and ethnocentric contrasts. Running parallel to this understanding of foreign peoples, however, was the emergence of standardised human taxonomy – the idea of *classifying* different types of human beings in relation to
one another and other animals. In his *Nouvelle Division de la Terre* (1684), the French physician François Bernier compiled one of the first empirical lists of humanity’s ‘races’. Though he did not go so far as to identify distinct and immutable human types, he posited that the global population could be divided into a relatively small number of groups, defined primarily by their physical features: “J’ay néanmoins remarqué qu’il y a sur tout quatre ou cinq espèces ou races d’hommes dont la différence est notable”, he remarked, “qu’elle peut servir de juste fondement à une nouvelle division de la terre” (148). Bernier thus groups together the peoples he considers to be physiologically comparable: the populations of Western Europe, the Middle East, India and North Africa form one type; Sub-Saharan Africans form another; East Asians form a third; and the Sami people – described as “vilains animaux” – are assigned a ‘type’ all to themselves (149-50). Interestingly, Bernier denies that Amerindians sufficiently differ from Europeans to warrant a ‘race’ of their own, while Hottentots – because of their reputed physical peculiarities – should probably be considered separately from other Africans: “ils sont petits, maigres, secs, laids de visage, vites à la course … ils beuvent l’eau de la mer … & parlent un langage tout à fait étrange & presque inimitable aux Européens” (152).

Indeed, it is perhaps these last two quasi-types that best underline the significance of Bernier’s proposed division of the earth – for, his human types are distinguished almost entirely on account of their bodily description (as well as the cultural traits closely associated with their bodies, a phenomenon that will be further examined in the next sub-

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85 Interestingly, notes Nicolas Hudson, the tradition of classifying Africans into fixed groups harked back to the sixteenth century, with the German ethnographer Johann Boemus identifying ‘types’ of Africans by their principal diets as early as 1520 (roots, fish etc.) (249).

86 As previously touched upon in chapter 2.1.1, Bernasconi notes that Bernier is also credited with being the first theorist to use the term ‘race’ in relation to physiological human varieties, while reaffirming that, in the absence of a modern concept of biological race, both *race* and *espèce* are here simply synonymous with ‘kind’ or ‘type’ (Bernasconi ed. 2001, vii).

87 “I have nevertheless remarked that there exists over all four or five species or races of Man in which the differences are notable, which could serve as a just basis for a new division of the earth” (my trans.).

88 “[T]hey are short, skinny, scrawny, ugly of face, and quick of foot … they drink sea water … and speak a language that is entirely strange, and almost inimitable for Europeans” (my trans.).
chapter), rather than their strict geographical location. This, in itself, is a remarkable departure from earlier empirical investigations into population diversity, such as that of Grotius, which was primarily concerned with descent and origin rather than exact physiology. In Bernier’s *Nouvelle Division*, classification (if not necessarily hierarchy) is determined by a people’s having reached a certain ‘state’ of corporeality, which can be compared with similar physical states without depending on a familial, cultural or geographical connection. It follows that, if Amerindians *look* sufficiently similar to Europeans, then they can be theoretically ranked in the same human category, despite the cultural and religious chasm that separates the two peoples; likewise, if Hottentots *look* sufficiently different from other Africans, then they must be considered apart from them, despite their cultural and geographic intimacy with the rest of the continent.

In 1735, however, one particular innovation in empirical categorisation would change the very basis of human taxonomy for the next two hundred years. The Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus’s *Systema naturae sive regna tria naturae* (1735) proposed a revolutionary new formula of taxonomical classification, which not only united plants, animals and minerals “in one plan”, but also laid the foundations for a new concept of human ‘species’: the *Homo sapiens* (Sloan 1995, 121). At first glance, Linnaeus’s genus *Homo* occupies an unprepossessing place in the top left corner of the *Systema’s* twelve-page taxonomic table – ranged vertically alongside tigers, horses, and camels in class of *Quadrupedia* (a pre-emptor of *Mammalia*), and horizontally beside *Simia* and *Bradypus* (sloths and anteaters) in the order of *Anthropomorpha*. Yet, this humble presentation actually plays out an act of incredible scientific audacity: herein, humanity is represented in a language of pure empirical naturalism; *Homo* is not justified by God or Scripture, by moral duty or by celestial Providence, but is instead exclusively delineated by the

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89 Notably, John Ray, one of the most important forerunners of taxonomic classification in the Royal Society, had used the term *Anthropomorpha* to describe flat-nailed simians in his *Synopsis methodica animalium quadrupedum et serpentini generis* of 1693 (Sloan 118).
observational gaze of other human beings – an earthly entity as understood by the senses of other earthly entities. Its name, quite simply, is its description, and its description is its definition; as Eric Voegelin has put it, “in a few lucid sentences the fixity of living type is exhaustively formulated” (29). This fact is reflected in the cursory by-line to the genus Homo, which reads only Nosce te ipsum, “know thyself” – the task of distinguishing Man from animal, remarked the nineteenth-century anthropological historian Thomas Bendyshe, is “cast wittily on the reader” (Linnaeus 1735, n.p. [10]; Bendyshe History 422). This is not, however, to say that Linnaeus was setting out to refute the spiritual dimensions of Mankind; quite the contrary – for him, the pure and empirical description of the natural world, including the human species, was essential in order for Man better to understand the wonders of creation through science. In his introduction to the Systema’s seminal tenth edition in 1758, he explained:

Man, the last and best of created works, formed after the image of his maker … is by wisdom alone, able to form just conclusions from such things as present themselves to his senses, which can only consist of bodies merely natural. Hence the first step of wisdom is to know these bodies; and be able, by those marks imprinted on them by nature, to distinguish them from each other, and to affix to every object its proper name. These are the elements of all sciences; this is the great alphabet of nature: for if the name is lost … the student will seek in vain for the means to investigate the hidden treasures of nature (Turton trans.90 1.3).

Within twenty years, the new Linnaean taxonomy had gained him international recognition. In 1750, the English literary magazine The Monthly Review called him “the greatest botanist that the world ever did, or probably ever will know” (III: 205, qtd in Koerner 26). Nor did Linnaeus underestimate his own importance; a self-proclaimed member of the Calvinist elect, long before his international recognition he had already dubbed himself ‘The Reformer’ (Koerner 26). Albrecht von Haller, a Swiss-born naturalist at Göttingen, declared in 1746 that his contemporary Linnaeus seemed to think himself a

90 William Turton’s seminal translation of Linnaeus’s Systema (1802-6) was actually made from the posthumous thirteenth edition (1788-1793); this introduction, however, remained mostly the same.
“second Adam” – and this, remarkably, was exactly how he was depicted on the frontispiece of one German edition of the *Systema* in 1760, portrayed in the role of Adam naming the animals of Paradise (qtd in Koerner 24). Linnaeus truly realised the ordering power of *naming* in the *Systema’s* 1758 edition, wherein he fully developed his binomial system (briefly mentioned in chapter 2.1.1), which proposed a highly efficient method of organising nature into neat classifications, while simultaneously ordering these classifications into a structured hierarchy. Indeed, the full title of this edition essentially set out the basis of modern taxonomical nomenclature: *Systema naturæ per regna tria naturæ, secundum classes, ordines, genera, species, cum characteribus, differentiis, synonymis, locis* (The System of Nature through the Three Kingdoms of Nature, According to Classes, Orders, Genera and Species, with Characters, Differences, Synonyms, Places). The new edition identified a grand new class that Linnaeus named *Mammalia*, wherein, under the new order of *Primates*, he identified two species of Human: *Homo sapiens* (knowing man), and *Homo troglodytes* (cave-dwelling man). The latter, it must be mentioned, which seems to have been pieced together from reports of so-called *Orang-outangs* (see chapter 3.2.2) made by the Dutch physician Jacobus Bontius (noted in the description of *h. troglodytes*) and the much discussed phenomenon of albino negroes (mentioned in Linnaeus’s own notes to the species), did not as much represent a dehumanisation of exotic peoples as it did the humanisation of man-like animals (Linnaeus 1758, 24; Sloan 123; T. Oldfield 124). As Linnaeus explains in his notes, the inclusion of this intriguing ‘second species’ in the genus *Homo* aimed to address the reportedly anthropoid aspects of the *Orang-outang* creatures on which *Homo troglodytes* was based – it did not, however, by any means suggest that *Homo troglodytes* could ever be considered as a *Homo sapiens*, nor could it be compared the *Homo sapiens*’s internal *varietates*: “Let those who chance to be eyewitnesses, find out in what way … this genus may be separated from Man” he declares.
in his second note to the genus *Homo*, “the troglodyte is certainly not the same species as Man, nor of common descent or blood with us, so that no one must suppose it is a mere variety” (qtd and trans. in Bendyshe 429). The very notion that a humanoid ape could exist in such close environs to the God’s own image by virtue of its anatomy, however, is a telling indication of the empirical audacity of Linnaeus’s corporeal taxonomy (for a further discussion about the *Orang-outang*, see chapter 3.2.2).

Unsurprisingly, along with much admiration, the *Systema Naturae* inspired a volley of criticism. Linnaeus was impelled to publicly defend his decision to include human beings in the same list as apes and other animals in the *Fauna Suecica* of 1746. Responding in kind, he sardonically suggested that if his critics had reason enough to assert their own humanity, they could probably rest assured that they were indeed human. No evidence was required to distinguish Man as special among the animals, he declared, since “there is something in us, which cannot be seen, whence our knowledge of ourselves depends – that is, *reason*, the most noble thing of all, in which Man excels to a most surprising extent [over] all other animals” (qtd in Sloan 1995, 123). Nevertheless, in the sixth edition of the *Systema* (1748), he replaced his cursory description of the *Homo sapiens* – “*Nosce te ipsum*” – with a substantial paragraph on the human/animal divide, though still maintaining a slightly facetious tone:

> Know thyself, theologically; that you were created with an immortal soul, after the image of God … Physiologically; that you are a most perfect and wonderful machine … Pathologically; what a fragile bubble [pair of lungs] you are, and

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91 This is an important point that is all too often missed. Peter Sloan, for instance, in his otherwise excellent essay ‘The Gaze of Natural History’, identifies Linnaeus’s inclusion of *Homo troglodytes* as a full ‘species’ as evidence of a “slide into polygenism” in the history of natural philosophy – yet, in many ways, it is the very opposite. *Homo troglodytes* is almost always portrayed as a ‘human-like ape’ rather than an ‘ape-like human’ – its inclusion as a species of Homo is an *elevation* of the greatest apes into a (remarkably) humanised sphere, rather than a demotion of the lowest human beings into an animal sphere (see chapter 3.2.2). The most ‘animalised’ of Linnaeus’s human varieties, the Hottentots and the Sami, remain firmly represented in *Homo sapiens monstrosus*. Linnaeus himself denies that *Homo troglodytes* makes overtures to polygenetic theory: “Nor do I say that the troglodytes of Pliny are pre-Adamites”, he declares, “although we are the final handiwork of the Creator” (123)
exposed to a thousand calamities; If you understand these things, you are Man and a genus very distinct from all others (qtd and trans. in Bendyshe 423-4).

An even more detailed defence of *Nosce te ipsum* was mapped out in the extensive notes to the species *Homo sapiens* in the 1758 edition.

For some other critics, however, it was not Linnaeus’s human ‘species’ that provoked conflict, but the idea of ‘taxonomy’ itself as a method of documenting the natural world. Looming above all such critics, of course, was Linnaeus’s great contemporary – the eminent French naturalist George-Louis Leclerc, better known as the Comte de Buffon. The idea of ordering the natural world according to orders and genera was inherently absurd, claimed Buffon, since it privileged Man’s logical, rational classifications over the concrete truths of nature, which rarely if ever conformed to these classificatory systems. One must always think in terms of many, instead of few, he implores in the *premier discours* of his monumental *Histoire naturelle* (1749-1789):

parce que si vous avez résolu de ne considérer que dans une certaine vûe, dans un certain ordre, dans un certain système … vous n’arriveriez jamais à la même étendue de connaissances à laquelle vous pourrez prétendre, si vous laissez dans les commencemens votre esprit marcher de lui-même, se reconnaître … & former seul la première chaîne que représente l’ordre de ses idées … l’inconvénient [des méthodes] est de vouloir trop allonger ou trop resserrer la chaîne, de vouloir soumettre à des lois arbitraires les lois de la nature … (Œuvres Philosophiques 8)

Buffon, indeed, preferred the Aristotelian tradition of ‘insensible’ gradation in creation, which he considered closer to the concrete realities of nature. To talk of a ‘species’, he claimed, was essentially to talk of the perfect specimen, the ‘common origin’ of that one life form. If nature was properly *observed*, however, it would appear obvious that each

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92 “[B]ecause, if you have resolved to think only according to a certain view, in a certain order, and in a certain system … you will never arrive at that same expanse of knowledge, to which you might lay claim if you let your mind make its own way from the beginning, to recognise … and form on its own the primary chain which represents the order of its ideas … the drawbacks [of methods] is the desire to elongate or to shorten the chain, to want to submit the law of nature to an arbitrary law …” (my trans.).
individual entity actually represented a slight degeneration from such an ideal, so as to form the infinite building blocks of the Great Chain (Sloan 1995, 139). This degeneration, furthermore, was in constant flux and movement, with each new generation of animals ever dismantling and reconstructing the ultimately unknowable order of nature:

*On peut descendre par des degrés presqu’insensibles, de la créature la plus parfaite jusqu’à la matière la plus informe ... [on] trouvera ces nuances, non seulement dans les grandeurs et dans les formes, mais dans les mouvements, dans les générations, dans les successions de toute espèce* (10).93

Linnaeus’s rational interpretation of the Chain of Being, Buffon held, failed to account for the fundamental relationships between animals, which formed their most immediately ‘observable’ chains of continuity: if we were to imagine ourselves as a man who had never encountered nature, he suggests in the *Histoire Naturelle*, that man would understand the world through the relationships he forged within it; the closest beings to a human, therefore, would surely be the dog, the horse and the ox; and after that would come the animals that shared his habitat, and so forth. “Cet ordre le plus naturel de tous, est celui que nous avons cru devoir suivre ... il nous est plus facile, plus agréable est plus utile de considérer les choses par rapport à nous...” (17).94 Linnaean methodology, then, could only lead naturalists astray by engendering false relationships in naturalist discourse – it was a system wherein animals were compared to plants, and plants to minerals, and all were conceived using the same methods. Domestic cats were placed in the same taxon as lions; bears were ordered with hedgehogs; and squirrels with hares – and all this simply because they had the same number of legs or teeth, while the system disregarded the real, interdependent relationships between them. It was little wonder, Buffon declared, that

93 “Descent is by almost imperceptible degree, from the most perfect creature to the most unformed matter ... [one] will find nuances, not only in size and shape, but also in the movements, the generations, and the successions of every species” (my trans.).

94 “This, the most natural of all orders, is the one we have thought necessary to follow ... it is easier, more agreeable, and more useful for us to consider things in relation to ourselves” (my trans.).
Linnaeus’s vision of Man caused such commotion, when his system demanded that humans share a taxon with simians and sloths – indeed, the whole idea was:

\[ \text{très mal imaginée … il faut bien avoir la manie des classes pour mettre ensemble des êtres aussi différents que l’homme & le paresseux, ou le singe & le lézard écailleux [le fourmilier].} \] ^{95}

Even Linnaeus (not the most humble of men, by any account), could accept the inherent arbitrariness of his taxonomy, though he nevertheless defended his system as a way of naming real, essential entities that had been created by God (Koerner 26). In his 1758 introduction he explains: “the science of nature supposes an exact knowledge of the nomenclature, and a systematic arrangement of all bodies … the classes and orders are arbitrary; the genera and species are natural” (Turton trans. 1.3). Indeed, it is important to recognise that without his naming system, Linnaeus could not have ordered the natural world as he perceived it, and it was this system of ordering which made his taxonomy so incredibly influential. What Linnaeus had done, according to Foucault in his *Les Mots et Les Choses*, was to build the foundations for a standardised system which could become a new ‘language’ of empirical naturalism – a discourse of description which could bring the words of naturalism as close to the reality of nature as possible (170-5). Thus, claims Foucault, Linnaeus and those who followed him ‘created’ life, so to speak, through words. By systematically assessing entities by number, form, proportion and situation, he suggests, the *Systema* allowed for a standard means by which the individual could be understood as representative of a graded collective entity. And this was the ultimate scientific expression of the Great Chain of Being: a naming system which, in itself, reconceptualised every entity as part of a natural order, based purely on observation.

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^95 “[It was] very badly thought up … it would take an obsession with classes to place beings as different as Man and sloths together, or monkeys and scaly lizards [anteaters]” (my trans.).
L’histoire naturelle à l’âge classique ne correspond pas à la pure et simple découverte d’un nouvel objet de curiosité; elle recouvre une série d’opérations complexes, qui introduisent dans un ensemble de représentations la possibilité d’un ordre constant. Elle constitue comme descriptible et ordonnable à la fois tout un domaine d’empiricité (171). 

Buffon may have seen natural history more as a “une large trame ou plutôt un faisceau qui d’intervalle en intervalle jette des branches de côté pour se réunir avec des faisceaux d’un autre ordre” whereas Linnaeus had seen it as a direct lineal scale, Foucault asserts, but the “grammaire générale” of a universal taxonomy which names the natural world in relative systems of time and space – and Man along with it – remains the same (148, 162-3). That is, if Linnaeus had not performed this act of naming – and, in the process, inducted humanity into the observational language of Natural History – Buffon could never have engaged with human varieties in the way that he would (148). Linnaeus’s binomial naming system was to naturalism, so to speak, what binary code is to computing – the key to an entirely new language for understanding reality:

Chez Buffon, qui fut adversaire constant de Linné, la même structure existe, et elle joue la même rôle … [Ils] posent la même grille; leur regard occupe sur les choses la même surface de contact; les mêmes cases noires ménagent l’invisible; les mêmes plages, claires et distinctes, s’offrent aux mots (148).

Linnaeus and Buffon then, showcase two very different naturalist visions of the Great Chain of Being that are nonetheless both based on empirical observation and

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96 “Natural history in the Classical age is not merely the discovery of a new object of curiosity; it covers a series of complex operations that introduce the possibility of a constant order into a totality of representations. It constitutes a whole domain of empiricity as at the same time describable and orderable” (Sheridan trans. 157).
97 “[A] wide woven strip, or rather a bundle which every so often puts out side branches that join it up with the bundles of another order” (Sheridan trans. 148). Foucault is here directly citing Buffon’s Histoire naturelle des oiseaux (1770, 1.393).
98 Buffon was a constant adversary of Linnaeus, yet the same structure exists in his work and plays the same role … [they] employ the same grid; their gaze occupies the same surface of contact upon things; there are the same black squares left to accommodate the invisible; the same open and distinct spaces to accommodate words (Sheridan trans. 135).
description. The main problem that the Linnaean system faced, suggests Winthrop Jordan, was that it had to decide hierarchical precedence on a species by species scale – which, as will be recalled from the previous chapter, was at best a gross simplification of creation’s infinite gradation, and at worst a potential misinterpretation of natural hierarchy. “The concept of the Chain had always been in difficulty the moment Men got down to cases,” Jordan notes, “When natural philosophers tried to decide whether the ape, the parrot, or the elephant was next below Man, for instance, the grand Chain began to look like an unprepossessing pile of ill-assorted links” (222). Jordan, however, goes on to suggest that the Linnaean system thus represents a scientific rejection of the Great Chain of Being, preferring its own alternative version of universal interconnectivity via taxonomy, while Buffonian classification continued the Chain tradition by upholding the Aristotelian doctrine of individual gradation. While it is understandable to see how such a conclusion might be drawn, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Chain of Being worldview: to recall Pope’s dictum, “Whatever IS, is RIGHT”, and Linnaeus and Buffon essentially disagree on what “IS”, not what is “RIGHT”. Linnaeus’s binomial classification system does not contradict the Chain philosophy any more than Buffon’s ostensibly more traditional line of individual gradation; both, crucially, assume a pattern of nature that crescendoes into the human being as the summit of earthly creation. Linnaeus may have been obliged to reconceive the infinite nuance of creation into comparatively inelegant groups of ‘species’, but this does not mean that he considered these species, and the hierarchical relationships he forged between them, as any less implicated in the natural Chain of Being; on the contrary, whereas Buffonian naturalism relied on an implicit framework of gradation, Linnaean taxonomy offered the possibility of uncovering this framework through naming – first identifying its generalities, and then working gradually towards its particularities. The Linnaean system is directly comparable, indeed, with the understanding of naturalist
enquiry expounded by the Royal Society’s Thomas Sprat back in 1669 (previously cited in chapter 1.3.3): “[T]his is the highest pitch of human reason; to follow all the links of this chain, till all their secrets are open to our minds … to rank all the varieties and degrees of things, so orderly one upon another, that standing on the top of them, we may perfectly behold all that are below … (Sprat 110)

From the outset of the *Systema*, Linnaeus consciously constructs his taxonomy according to the tenets of the Chain of Being, gearing its lineal progression toward perfection in Man: the *Systema*, he announces in the first few pages, “is conveniently divided into five branches, each subordinate to the other: *class, order, genus, species* and *variety*” (Turton trans. 1.3). The kingdoms from which these branches spring are also intuitively hierarchical – the animal kingdom, he asserts, ranks the highest, plants rank in the middle of the scale, and minerals come last. Within each taxon, the same implicit hierarchy applies: while in the 1735 edition Man’s superlative importance was represented by his position at the top left corner of the page, by 1758 he was at the head of the order of *Primates*, which was at the head of the class of mammals, which was at the head of the kingdom of animals, which, of course, was at the head of natural creation — crowning *Homo sapiens* as the first species in the first volume of a vast compendium of natural entities on earth. Indeed, it could be said that the language of naturalism lent a dimension of ‘reality’ to the Chain model, just as the Chain model lent a sense of ‘reality’ to empirical classificatory systems.

Crucially, however, this naturalist ‘pastiche’ of the Chain of Being rendered the gradational conception of Mankind brutally and somewhat scandalously corporeal. The same reasoning by which Man’s spiritual status was traditionally understood, was now being employed to communicate his corporeal status in relation to those animals immediately inferior to him – in this case the *Simia*. That is to say, the whole animal
kingdom, intimated a corporeal Chain structure – *Simia* was superior to *Lemur*, and *Homo Sapiens* superior to *Simia*, not because of their degree of divine essence (though, presumably, that too), but because of the nature of their observable characteristics – enshrined here in their bodily traits. And nowhere was this bodily hierarchy more evident, nor more influential, than in the Genus *Homo*. In fact, notes Sloan, the Linnaean framework suggested that the “operating definition of the genus *Homo* was to be primarily morphological, based on differences of constant character”, eventually contributing to “a profound blurring of the human-animal distinction which could be exploited by his contemporaries for philosophical purposes” (126). The idea of human hierarchy, in short, could now be understood in a purely corporeal discourse, assimilating the Chain of Being pattern of precedence by intimating that the lowest human bodies were (necessarily) *physiologically* closer to animals. This ‘biologisation’, or perhaps better, ‘corporealisation’ of the human hierarchy, was to be played out in the context of one of the most fascinating and influential aspects of Linnaeus’s Human animal: the *varietates* of the Genus *Homo*.

### 2.2.2: Human Variety and Polished Societies: Performing Racialised Identities

Linnaeus’s ‘varieties’ of *Homo sapiens* stand at an important crossroads in the history of racialised humanity. On the one hand, they formulated the basic template of modern race theory by dividing humanity into four varieties defined by skin-colour and geographical origin. These were in order of precedence:

*Homo europæanus albescens* (white European man),
*Homo americanus rubescens* (red American man),
Homo asiaticus fuscus (‘sooty’99 Asian man),
and Homo africanus niger (black African man).

On the other hand, the Systema simultaneously provided ‘scientific’ validation for some of the most fantastical creatures of Western monster mythology. The taxon Paradoxa, only one or two columns from Homo sapiens, includes descriptions of hydoras, dragons, phoenixes, the extraordinary borometz (a Chinese vegetable believed to grow sheep instead of fruit), and the manlike ape Satyrus (Linnaeus 1735, n.p. [10]). In fact, the preoccupation with monstrous human beings only intensified in later versions of the Systema: by the 1758 edition, Paradoxa had been abandoned, but the species Homo sapiens had adopted two new varieties in the form of H. sapiens ferus and H. sapiens monstruosus (in tandem, of course, with the aforementioned second ‘species’ of Homo, H. troglodytes).

The first of these, ‘Feral Man’ is described as “four-footed”, “mute”, and “hairy”, and is supplemented with a list of recently documented cases of feral children, including: the Juvenis ursinus lithuanus (Lithuanian ‘bear-boys’ discovered in 1664), the Pueri pyrenaici, (the wild children of the Pyrenees, reported in 1719), and Juvenis Hanoveranus, (best known as Peter the Wild Boy, who probably suffered from Pitt-Hopkins Syndrome) (Linnaeus 1758, 20). The latter, ‘Monstrous Man’ is a fascinating taxon of real, semi-mythological and entirely fictional beings, including: Mountain dwarves, who are “small, agile and timid” (apparently referring to the Sami people); Patagonian giants who are “large and indolent”; Hottentots, who are “less fertile” (seemingly a reference to the ritual of testicle removal); Americans, who are “beardless”; the Chinese Macrocepheli, who have “conical heads”; Canadian Plagiocepheli, who have “flattened heads”; and, interestingly, the Junceae puellae, abdomine attenuato, referring to ‘rush-like’ European girls whose waists are distended (possibly from the use of spiral-laced stays, previously mentioned in

99 To use Turton’s translation; the 1758 edition actually swaps the term fuscus (dark, swarthy) for luridus (sallow).
chapter 1.3.1) (Linnaeus 1758, 22). Both *ferus* and *monstrosus* survived into the posthumous 1788 edition of the *Systema*, though *monstrosus* became a semi-species of its own, rather than a variety (this edition, incidentally, also abandoned all reference the *Junceae puellae*).

Not only do the taxa *monstrosus* and *ferus* bear witness to the on-going importance of the ‘monstrous other’ in eighteenth-century human variety discourse, they also offer a crucial insight into the basis by which Linnaeus had conceived of his *varietates*. In the 1758 edition, it becomes clear that *Homo sapiens* has not simply been divided by geography and skin-colour, but that these variations are the result of a certain agency – either external or internal, deliberate or passive – which had shaped (and was shaping) each of the four varieties distinctively. *Homo sapiens*, proclaims the 1758 edition, varies according to “culture and location”\(^\text{100}\); members of *monstrosus*, likewise, vary either “on their own” (as is the case with Mountain dwarves and Patagonian giants) or by “art” (as is the case with European girls and Hottentots).\(^\text{101}\) Thus, while Linnaeus upholds *Homo sapiens* as a ‘real’, fixed species, his human *varietates* integrate a considerably more fluid – and indeed more traditional – conception of natural hierarchy into his human taxonomy.

In fact, the 1758 edition embellishes this varietal hierarchy with a range of physical and cultural attributes: each *varietas* is now linked with a humoural disposition, while also being aligned with a certain style of clothing, a personal character, and a political inclination. The American variety, Linnaeus explains, has black hair, a harsh face, and a scanty beard; he is choleric, merry, free, is wont to paint himself with fine red lines, and governs himself by ‘customs’. The European has flowing yellow hair and blue eyes; he is sanguine, acute and inventive, wears ‘close vestments’ and is regulated by laws. The Asian has dark eyes, black hair, and sallow skin; he is melancholy, haughty and avaricious,

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\(^{100}\) “*Varians cultura, loca*” (my trans.); Turton translates the same as “by education and situation” (9).

\(^{101}\) “*Solo et arte variat*” (my trans.); Turton translates the original *solo* here as “by climate” (9).
dresses in loose garments and is governed by his opinions. The most detailed description of all is reserved for the African – he has black, “frizzle’d” hair, silky skin, a flat nose, thick lips and a relaxed demeanour; he ‘anoints’ himself with grease, is phlegmatic, indolent and negligent, and is ruled by “caprice” (21). Linnaeus also makes special mention of African women, incorporating two of the most notorious Hottentot tropes: under the label feminis, he includes a reference to the sinus pudoris (Hottentot apron), and under Mammae is recorded the attribute of ‘profuse lactation’. Linnaeus’s variates, then, are profoundly important in the history of racialised thought for three main reasons: firstly, they demonstrate that his empirical conception of humanity did not only concern observation-based categories of the human body, but also observation-based categories of ‘humanity’ itself, including society, habit, morality, sexuality, and of course received notions of cultural hierarchy – all related back to a primarily corporeal discourse; secondly, they introduce (and ostensibly rationalise) a fundamental discordancy in the very notion of ‘species’ – namely species variability and hybridity; thirdly, they introduce the notion of agency in the formation of human variation, which held at its very heart the idea of transference by generation.

Linnaeus’s association of distinct body types with certain levels of perceived sophistication (in clothes, in mental maturity, and political development) pertinently evokes the eighteenth-century conviction that humans, in different parts of the world, were at different ‘stages’ of cultural progress – a parallel path to polished ‘civility’ which ended, inevitably, with the attainment of a Western commercial society. This concept of lineal, temporal cultural progression, often referred to as ‘stadial’ or ‘four-stage’ theory, had been considerably developed in the seventeenth century by the German jurist Samuel Pufendorf, who followed in the tradition of Grotius and Hobbes by charting out humanity’s divinely

102 The above mostly uses terminology from the Turton translation, though there are some differences – in particular Turton omits the details about African women, despite their appearance in the original Latin tenth and thirteenth editions.
ordained path from a brutish state to a state of civilisation (Pufendorf 1.1-4). Pufendorf’s On the Whole Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law (1682), notes Ivan Hont, was an important forerunner to Enlightenment stadial theories in that it “systematically compared human with animal nature in order to underline the contrast between civilisation and barbarism” (253). Over the course of the eighteenth century, different interpretations of the ‘four-stage theory’ were taken up by theorists such as Adam Ferguson in his Essay on the History of Civil Society (1767), Adam Smith in the Wealth of Nations (1776) and Lectures on Jurisprudence (originally delivered between 1762-3), and John Millar in The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks in Society (1771). It was a view, notes Alexander Broadie, which owed much to the Newtonian idea that diverse changes in the natural world could be attributable to a few basic principles: “the point about a principle of change is that it is applicable to many individual changes; the principle that explains why a change of a particular kind occurs can also explain why many others of that kind occur” (Broadie ed. 488-9). Even in the most polished nations, suggested Millar in the Distinction of Ranks, the traces of a state of barbarism are to be found somewhere in the distant past, yet each culture will – through “gradual advances in rendering their situation more comfortable” – eventually, and inevitably, progress toward a state of high civilisation (4). This path leads mankind first through the ‘stages’ of hunting, pasture, and agriculture in order to arrive at the final stage of commerce, all the while gaining natural momentum from Man’s own desire to improve his material comfort (57-66). Such a theory, notes Roxann Wheeler, was particularly useful in that it explained the former barbarity of “an advanced civilisation like Britain”, while forging new relationships of ‘temporal’ superiority in relation to societies which were apparently at a much earlier ‘stage’ of development (2000, 35).

Running parallel to such theories, however, was another major mode of thought which underpinned the very notion of *varietas* in the taxonomy of Linnaeus and his
contemporaries: the idea that ‘climate’ was constantly changing and moulding the colour and shape of the human body. ‘Climate theory’ is perhaps a misleading moniker for this most influential factor in eighteenth-century human science: firstly, it did not only concern the climate, *per se*, but rather the overall influence of the external environment on the human body and mind – as well as the providential design involved in placing people in a ‘natural’ environment. Nor was it a unified ‘theory’ unto itself – there was little doubt that factors such as sunlight or nourishment could alter the human body, but each theorist came to his own conclusions about the extent of these effects, whether they could be held responsible for significant anatomical diversity, and, most importantly, if they might be inheritable. Indeed, Millar’s proposed ‘four-stage’ theory was largely a reaction to the serious inconsistencies inherent in climate theory logic: climate did not account for significant differences between the Irish, Scottish and English, he notes, nor did it account for the fact that Italy’s climate has produced, at different times, the Ancient Romans and the modern Italians, or the Greek climate a people as different as the Ancient Spartans and the modern Greeks (11). Nevertheless, claims Wheeler, in one form or another “climate or humoural theory … provided the most important rubric for thinking about human difference” in the eighteenth century, whether that difference was social, moral, or physiological; it was simply “the common sense of the day, and a magnet for contradictory beliefs. To be sure, it was probed and prodded, partially refuted by a few, but it was also easily adapted to new conditions” (2000, 21, 24).

The notion that climate and geography were responsible for anatomical differences among humans had a long history, spanning back to Hippocrates who, in *On Air, Waters and Places* (compiled 300-200 B.C.), had identified the geographical location of certain cities as contributing factors in the health, temperament, and physique of their inhabitants (Sargeant 49). It followed, he held, that the climate and aspect of larger
landmasses was so influential that they could guide the destiny of entire civilisations. The peoples and animals of (Mediterranean) Europe, Hippocrates suggested, were more “likely to flourish” and be “well nourished” because of the continent’s ‘temperate’ climate: “the cattle reared there … bring forth the sturdiest young, and rear them to be very fine creatures. The men will be … of very fine physique and very tall, differing from one another but little in either physique or stature” (xii.107). In some parts of Asia, conversely, where the seasons changed more dramatically and the land along with it, the peoples’ complexions were more likely to reflect the localised conditions of their habitat:

Some physiques [in Asia Minor] resemble wooded, well-watered mountains, others light dry land, others marshy meadows, others a plain of bare parched earth. For the seasons which modify a physical frame differ; if the differences be great, the more too are the differences in shapes (xiv.109-10).

Though it is one of the earliest texts to address climate and its effects of human nature, Hippocrates’s On Air, Water and Places offers a fully formulated example of one of the most enduring aspects of climate theory: the ethnocentric cultural bias of ‘temperate’ versus ‘extreme’ climates, aligned implicitly or explicitly with ‘temperate’ and ‘extreme’ human varieties. Just as importantly, the Hippocratic tradition of climate theory is inseparable from the conviction that repeated external influences eventually became inherent in the human body – for which he provides the contemporary example of the Macrocepheli, or ‘long-heads’, an unidentified tribe whose practice of binding infant skulls into a conical shape had apparently settled into an inborn characteristic. “Originally custom was chiefly responsible for the length of the head,” he explains, “but now custom is reinforced by nature … [though] long headedness is less common than it was … owing to intercourse with other men …” (xiv.111).

103 Incidentally, the 1923 Loeb edition of this work includes a footnote to this passage, reminding the reader that “modern biologists hold that acquired characteristics are not inherited” – demonstrating quite how recently such ideas continued to maintain significant influence over popular imagination (xix, 111).
Climate theory remained a largely unchallenged assumption among early modern variety theorists, despite the fact that it almost always required the assertion of additional causative factors in order to explain the full breadth of human difference. In 1689, for instance, John Ovington had suspected that there must be “something in nature which seems to thwart this current,” since how else could it be explained that a “tawny” people like the Hottentots could live surrounded by darker-skinned Africans? Climate, however, he ultimately concedes, is the only rational solution he has to hand: “those who are exposed to the sun’s heat should always be the blackest” he reasons, “for blackness and whiteness are not supposed natural to any people whatever” (491). Many theorists over the course of the eighteenth century privileged this ‘rational’ dimension of climate theory above all: “It seems agreeable to reason and experience,” claimed the Scottish physician John Arbuthnot in his Essay Concerning the Effect of Air on Human Bodies (1733), “that the air operates sensibly in forming … the specialities of features, complexion, temper, and … manners of Mankind, which are found to vary much in different countries and climates” (qtd in Wahrman 88). Others, like the French philosopher Montesquieu, relayed the effects of climate to the theory of nerve fibres – claiming that too cold or too hot air could contract or expand the nerves, and thus the human body was at its most efficient and balanced in a temperate zone (15.2, 474-5). Accordingly, this difference in nerve fibres made the people of the far north unnaturally timid, and those of the far south disproportionately courageous. Yet for Montesquieu, climate and its accompanying geography also acted as a catalyst for how humans had developed differently over time. The subtle differences between one European country’s climate and the next, he suggested, had contributed to coherent and steady governance; the harsh contrast of climates found in Asia, on the other hand, had endowed the inhabitants with an ‘extreme’ constitution:
Indeed, much of Montesquieu’s discourse on climate and geography addresses ideas that might now be considered in terms of geopolitics: Asia (by which he means the Middle East) has had a history of enormous empires, he suggests, because its geography lends itself well to large-scale conquest, comprising great expanses of open plains with relatively few natural barriers; Europe, has developed a network of medium-sized states precisely because it is divided into limited parcels of land by expansive mountain ranges and major river systems. This dual influence of climate and geography has thus promoted the establishment of lawful government, discouraging decadence and breeding forth a spirit of liberty. The absence of such a socio-geographical dynamic in Asia, he continues, means that liberty is nowhere to be found there: “il n’est pas possible de trouver un seul trait qui marque une âme libre: on n’y verra jamais que l’héroïsme de la servitude” (17.6, 529).  

One of the most prolific advocates of climate theory during the eighteenth century was, of course, Buffon, who in his essay *Variétés dans l’espèce humaine* (1749) proposed that human populations shaded gradually, at an individual level, from light to dark as they approached the equator, and back to light again as they extended toward the poles (*Histoire Naturelle* 3.486-7). There were three main influences in Buffon’s version of climate theory. The first was the direct influence of heat, cold, sun, wind and air on the body, which generally ensured that a people’s appearance accorded with their latitudinal degree from the equator – an exact figure he provided for each anatomical variety he described. The swarthy features of the Spanish, he notes, began to become more perceptible on

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104 “In Asia, the warrior peoples, brave and active, are located hard by peoples who are effeminate, lazy, and timid; it is necessary, thus, that one conquer and the other be conquered … this is the main reason behind the weakness of Asia and the strength of Europe, the liberty of Europe and the servitude of Asia…” (my trans.).

105 “It is not possible to find a single trait [in Asia] which marks out a free spirit: one never sees anything there but heroism or servitude” (my trans.).
passing south of Bayonne, while the brown hair and eyes of Latin Europe begin to noticeably decline in England, almost disappearing entirely on reaching Scandinavia (3.480-1). Yet even in Spain, he remarks, “les petits enfans naissent fort blancs, & sont fort beaux, mais en grandissant leur teint change d’une manière surprenante, l’air les jaunit, le soleil les brûle, & il est aisé de reconnaître un Espagnol de toutes les autres nations européennes” (3.481). It might take several centuries, but with successive generations the whitest skin could eventually turn black and vice versa; if some lighter skinned populations lived further north than others, it was due to migratory movements – the climate had yet to take its full effect (3.525). The same dynamic, however, could be witnessed in those who lived on particularly high or low terrains. In countries of higher elevation, Buffon notes, the people are “agiles, dispos, bien faits, spirituels, & … les femmes y sont communément jolies” (3.572). While highlighting the difference of multiple mini-climates within a single climatic zone, this aspect of Buffon’s theory also underlines an important trope of his colour gradations: skin-colour deviation, owing to climatic extremities, here goes hand in hand with increased stupidity, barbarity, ugliness, bodily deformation, and a dearth of sexual attractiveness. These parallel aspects of climate deviation are intensified by what Buffon identifies as the second great influence of population diversity, again to be seen in French villages: nutrition. It was clear to see, he proclaims, that people who lived in the towns and cities were better formed and more beautiful than those of the countryside:

106 “[T]he infants are born very white, and are very beautiful, but in growing up their colour changes in a surprising manner, they are yellowed by the air, they are burnished by the sun, and it is easy to recognise the Spanish among all the other nations of Europe” (my trans.).

107 “Agile, fit, well-formed, witty, and … the women there are universally fair” (my trans.).

108 “The peasants are crude, cumbersome, ill-formed, stupid, and their women are almost all ugly” (my trans.).
Des nourritures grossières, mal saines ou mal préparées peuvent faire dégénérer l’espèce humaine, tous les peuples qui vivent misérablement sont laids et mal faits; chez nous-mêmes les gens de la campagne sont plus laids que ceux des villes, & j’ai souvent remarqué que dans les villages où la pauvreté est moins grande que dans les autres villages voisins, les hommes y sont aussi mieux faits & les visages moins laids (3.572).^{109}

Buffon’s third major influence, indeed, is somewhat inseparable from the first two – re-introducing an old and familiar trope of human physiological difference: the bodily effect of civility:

Un peuple policé qui vit dans une certaine aisance ... sera, par cette seule raison, composé d’hommes plus forts, plus beaux, et mieux faits qu’une nation sauvage ... En supposant ces deux différents peuples sous un même climat, on peut croire que les hommes de la nation sauvage seraient plus basanés, plus laids, plus petits, plus ridés que ceux de la nation policée (3.486).^{110}

Indeed, ‘civility’ seems to assume the prior influences of temperate climate, regular terrain, and abundant, varied nutrition. Only when the degrees of climate, nutrition and ‘civility’ have reached a certain coalescence, Buffon claims, can the most beautiful variety of human be achieved – which for him is obviously and unquestionably the white European. Moreover, if we are to accept this variety as the most beautiful, he suggests, it follows that we should consider it the ‘true’ human form, against which all other forms should be judged as degenerative. This particular consideration bears a marked significance for the upper echelons of Buffon’s climatic hierarchy, which are not necessarily defined by their nationality or religion, but by the shape of their bodies. Consider this concluding paragraph in the Variétès:

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^{109} “Crude, unhealthy, or badly prepared foods can cause the human species to degenerate, all the peoples who live in destitution are ugly and ill-formed; in our country even people from the countryside are uglier than those in the cities, and I have often remarked that in villages where poverty is less prevalent than in another neighbouring village, the Men there are likewise better-formed and their faces are less ugly” (my trans.).

^{110} “A polished people who live with ease … will be, for this reason alone, composed of stronger, more beautiful, and better-formed Men than a savage nation … Supposing these two different peoples living in the same climate, it could be believed that the Men of the savage nation would be swarther, uglier, shorter, and more wrinkled than those of the polished nation” (my trans.).
Here, the dictates of climate sweepingly contradict traditional models of national character by cutting entire countries in two, and instead dividing populations by their degrees of latitude. In terms of Buffonian human variety, then, the people of Northern Spain are closer to the people of Georgia than they are to those of Southern Spain. Concordantly, the consistency of this system of human variety depends on Buffon having identified the polished (policés) countries within his climatic zone; those who are not sufficiently polished, or, as we have seen above, those who had the misfortune to be born in more ‘extreme’ terrains, will ostensibly fail to attain the ‘true’ and ‘natural’ physical appearance of their zone.

Now, to recall this study’s previous analysis of social rank in medical discourse (discussed in chapter 2.1.2), it will be remembered that the idea that culture could shape the physical body was certainly not new. Yet, what is most interesting about Buffon’s statement here is that the adverse corporeal effects of incivility are the same as the adverse effects of extreme climate: the poor seem to be darkened, wrinkled, shortened, intellectually dimmed, and desexualised by incivility – developing the same ‘monstrous’ physiological features that were associated with inferior varieties of mankind. To put it

111 “The most temperate climate is between 40 and 50 degrees, this is also the zone where the most beautiful and well-formed men are found, it is from this climate that we must take our idea of the true natural colour of Man, it is from here that we must take the model or unit with which all other nuances of colour and beauty are related … the polished countries situated in this zone are Georgia, Circassia, Ukraine, the European part of Turkey, Hungary, central Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, and the northern part of Spain, all these peoples are also the most beautiful and best-formed on earth” (my trans.).
another way, the exotic body has here become a touchstone for the degenerate body – an inevitable descent from white to black, from European to non-European, which is being assimilated into the greater discourse of inferior ‘race’. Just as interesting, Buffon seems to touch upon a familiar discourse of luxury and social degeneracy among the superior varieties of mankind, leaving the unpolished/physiologically savage humans in a more ‘natural’ state of brutal survival. If there was one aspect by which savage peoples could consider themselves physiologically superior to the civilised world, he claims, it would be that they had fewer disabled or deformed individuals, since such defects could not possibly be supported in their harsh, brutal environment. Not only are such ‘defective’ Men tolerated by polished nations, he claims, they are even wont to multiply – it is the power of the mind that gives them their strength, now that the power of the body has ceased to be of prime importance (3.486).

In Britain, Buffon’s natural philosophy was widely disseminated through the writings of the Anglo-Irish physician, playwright, and part-time naturalist Oliver Goldsmith. There has been a somewhat unwarranted tendency in modern research to dismiss Goldsmith’s six-volume work of naturalism, The History of the Earth and Animated Nature (1774), as an ill-informed piece of hackwork, made by an amateur enthusiast of Buffon and Linnaeus, but without any real merit of its own. This, admittedly, was a view shared by some of Goldsmith’s own acquaintances: “Goldsmith, Sir, will give us a very fine book upon the subject;” Samuel Johnson was reported to have remarked, “but if he can distinguish a cow from a horse, that, I believe may be the extent of his knowledge of natural history” (qtd in G.S. Rousseau ed. 1974, 135). In fact, the History contains so much material directly translated from Buffon that one nineteenth-century edition of the work describes its authorship as “from M. de Buffon, Goldsmith and
The value of Goldsmith’s work, however, does not particularly lie in its originality or innovation (qualities Goldsmith never claimed for it in the first place), but in its popularity and subsequent influence as a ‘scientific’ text. Indeed, to downplay the importance of The History of the Earth as a work of eighteenth-century naturalism, notes Arthur Lytton Sells, would simply be historically negligent. Goldsmith’s work, he stresses, must be understood as an extremely significant work of compilation: not only did he bring together some of the most important research on natural philosophy from around Europe, but his History became one of the major references for that research in the English language. As Sells explains, “quand on a fait constater que le livre de Goldsmith est suranné du point de vue scientifique, on a tout dit contre lui. Son Histoire naturelle était le meilleur ouvrage en son genre qu’on eût encore vu en anglais: elle devait avoir de nombreuses éditions et rester populaire pendant plus d’un demi-siècle” (178).

Certainly, certain contemporary reviews of this posthumous publication more than reflect Goldsmith’s popular esteem: the History was a “judicious system of natural history” announced the Critical Review in 1774, “blending entertainment with information, [the like of which] has never appeared in the English language, nor indeed has been accomplished in any other” (qtd in G.S. Rousseau ed. 1974). Indeed, in many ways the unscientific nature of Goldsmith’s accomplishment makes it even more valuable as a document in the history of race thinking, since it represents a learned eighteenth-century mind from outside the realm of naturalism, taking the doctrines of multiple theorists, Buffon and Linnaeus in particular, to their logical conclusions.

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112 Namely the British Apollo Press edition, printed at Alnwick, 1810.
113 Sells also points out, quite justifiably, that Goldsmith’s text never pretends to be an original work—and quite dutifully makes reference to all its source material in footnotes (178).
114 “Having noted that Goldsmith’s work is scientifically obsolete, we have said all we can against him. His natural history was the best work of its kind that had yet been seen in English: it was reprinted in numerous editions and remained popular for more than half a century” (my trans.).
One of these logical conclusions was Goldsmith’s own model of ‘principal’
human varieties, which would – albeit indirectly – go on to exert considerable influence
on the formation of modern race theory. Starting with Linnaeus’s four varieties of Man,
complete with their carefully counterbalanced physical and humoural attributes, he
identified two additional ‘principal’ varieties amidst the extensive catalogue of physical
types described by Buffon. From studying Linnaeus and Buffon together, that is,
Goldsmith concluded that there were not four, but six principal varieties of human being:
the Laplanders (including the Arctic peoples of the New World); the Tartars (East Asians);
the Asiatics (South Asians); the Africans; and the Europeans (see fig. 7; 2.75).
Furthermore, Goldsmith’s ‘hybrid’ system of human variety integrates both the Linnaean
notion of fixed human types and the Buffonian notion of skin-colour gradation by climate,
food and ‘civility’ – thus enunciating a distinctly *racialised* template of *varietal* human
hierarchy. That is to say, while Goldsmith’s system distinguishes defined varietal
boundaries within the human species, the movement from one to another of these species is
achieved by climatic degeneration; thus, by the effects of climate and the external world, a
group or population could be varietally *demoted* into lower category of human being. Most
importantly, these categories were to be defined above all by skin colour. Different skin-
colours, Goldsmith asserts, “are actual marks of degeneracy of the human form; and we
may consider the European figure and colour as standards to which to refer all other
varieties, and with which to compare them” (2.92). In fact, notes Wheeler, “Goldsmith is
among the first [naturalists] to single out [skin colour] above all other characteristics by
which humans were distinguished” (180).

Interestingly, in the 1795 edition of *De generis humani varietate nativa* (‘On the
Natural Varieties of Mankind’) – a volume in which, it will be remembered, the author
asserted his own ‘five principal races of Mankind’ – Johann Blumenbach fallaciously
attributed Goldsmith’s six varieties to Buffon (who never actually compiled a list of principal varieties): “Buffon distinguished six varieties of Man” he writes, “(1) Lapp or Polar, (2) Tartar … (3) South Asian, (4) European, (5) Ethiopian, (6) American” (293). Not only does Blumenbach’s mistake seem to suggest that he knew Goldsmith’s work better than Buffon’s, it also explains how Goldsmith’s ‘hybrid’ interpretation of Linnaeus and Buffon entered the popular discourse of race theory under the pretext of ‘Buffonian variety theory’. In fact, it became received wisdom: ‘Buffon’s six varieties’ were already featuring in Encyclopaedia Britannica’s entry on ‘Man’ by 1810 (544), and, remarkably, the incorrect assertion that he created a six-variety classificatory system continues to appear in modern research today.\footnote{Examples can be found throughout modern research: Ashley Montagu’s Race and IQ (1975) reads ”In 1749 Buffon introduced into the scientific literature a classification of six human varieties” (56); Kenneth A.R. Kennedy’s God-apes and Fossil Men (2000) notes that Buffon “classified the human species into six racial divisions” (51); Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban’s Race and Racism: An Introduction (2006) records that “In 1749 Count de Buffon introduced six varieties of the human species on the basis of colour, body shape and disposition” (74).}
Fig. 7: Four of Goldsmith’s six principle human varieties (no prints were made for the European and South Asian), printed in *The History of the Earth and Animated Nature* (1774, 71, 77, 81, 64). With these prints, notes Wheeler, Goldsmith’s work became “one of the only natural histories in the eighteenth century to have illustrations of varieties of men” (2000, 243). Many other naturalists, most notably Blumenbach, would continue the trend.
Another aspect of Goldsmith’s work which seems to have considerably influenced Blumenbach was his rendition of the Buffonian principle that nourishment and civility worked in conjunction with climate to mould the human body. Indeed, Goldsmith considers the states of barbarity and ‘civility’ to be universal conditions, expressing themselves in the same way on every continent and in every culture (2.85). Even in the hottest climates, Goldsmith proclaims, certain peoples will manifest lighter skin tones because of their different levels of civility:

[T]his [variation] ever proceeds from some accidental causes; either from the country lying higher and consequently the country being bolder … or the natives bathing oftener and leading a more civilised life … we find the peasants of every country, who are most exposed to the weather, a shade darker than the higher ranks of people (89-90).

Like the peasants described in the medical discourses of George Cheyne and William Grant (discussed in chapter 2.2.2), Goldsmith’s uncivilised peoples are less sensitive, physically and mentally, than the more civilised Europeans. The “women of savage nations” he notes, just like “the hard-working wives of the peasants amongst ourselves” experience the pains of childbirth “with much less sensibility” (2.80-1). Indeed, he adds, “these pains seem greatest in all countries where the women are most delicate, or the constitution enfeebled by luxury or indolence” (2.80). This same dearth of sensibility is reflected in the clothes of barbarous nations, which are designed to accommodate the more ‘sensual’ pleasures of their inhabitants; the “effeminate silk vestments” of the Asian peoples are, for Goldsmith, inextricable from the fact that Asians are “satisfied with sensual happiness alone, they find no pleasure in thinking … [they are] too dull to find rapture in any pleasures, and too indolent to turn their gravity into wisdom” (2.81-2). In the description of his African variety, Goldsmith considers the “large and languid” sexual features of the Africans – namely the ‘Hottentot apron’, the reportedly large penises of the
men, and the traditionally distended breasts of the nursing mothers – in the very same
terms as the flowing silk vestments of the Asians: “[a]s their persons are thus naturally
deformed, at least to our imaginations,” he remarks, “their minds are equally incapable of
strong exertions” (2.83-4). A chronic lack of civilised behaviour, he explains, is also the
reason why North Americans manifest a “tawny” skin colour despite living at roughly the
same distance from the equator as Europeans. Not only does their savage mode of life
leave them at the mercy of the sun, but they actively contribute to the darkening of their
skin by “painting [it] with red ochre and anointing it with the fat of bears,” (2.90). The
civilised behaviour of Europeans, including the use of ‘foundation garments’ and tight-
fitting clothes among wealthier ranks, he intimates, can be seen as “precautions to brighten
their colour”, which, if the Amerindians would take the pains to emulate, “they would in
time come to have similar complexions; and, perhaps; dispute the prize of beauty”
(Goldsmith 2.90; Wheeler 2000, 180). This curious statement does not only privilege
colour as the defining feature of European ‘beauty’ (for which we can read ‘varietal
perfection’), but interprets European civility as an active way of conserving this white-
skinned beauty. It is perhaps not surprising, in fact, that in his earlier Citizen of the World
(1760) – a sometimes satirical work which nonetheless contains quite serious remarks on
climate theory – Goldsmith had also identified physical differences between the vulgar and
polite ranks of Englishmen. “I know of no country where the influence of climate and soil
is more visible than in England …” he claims in the Citizen, “but chiefly this ferociousness
appears among the vulgar. The polite of every country pretty nearly resemble each other.”
All Englishmen, he says, are prone to disorders of the spleen, but while the vulgar react
with heavy drinking, idleness and ill humour, “The rich, as they have more sensibility, are
operated upon with greater violence by this disorder. Different from the poor, instead of
becoming more insolent, they grow totally unfit for opposition” (2.120-1).
Blumenbach’s *De generis humani varietate nativa* originally published as an M.D. thesis one year after the publication of Goldsmith’s *History*, also seems to have been significantly influenced by Goldsmith’s thoughts on civility and climate theory. “It is scarce worthwhile”, he writes,

to notice the well-known difference which occurs in the inhabitants of one in the same country, whose skin varies wonderfully in colour according to the kind of life they lead. The face of the working man or the artisan, exposed to the force of the sun and the weather, differs as much from the cheeks of a delicate female, as the man himself does from the dark American, and he again from the Ethiopian. Anatomists not unfrequently fall in with the corpses of the lowest sort of men, whose reticulum comes much nearer to the blackness of the Ethiopians, than to the brilliancy of the higher class of European (Friedrich ed. 108).

This extraordinary passage reinforces links between social rank and development of Western human variety theory from multiple perspectives. Firstly, the darker skin of the ‘working man’ is *well-known*, just as seems to have been the case with Goldsmith’s darker-skinned peasants, as well as Buffon’s ugly, physically deformed, and mentally diminished rustics. Secondly, this *well-known* darkness of skin among the lower ranks of European society is here being rationally considered on the same scale as racialised varieties – it is a logical digression, for Blumenbach, from a labourer to an Amerindian, and from an Amerindian to an Ethiopian. Indeed, it must be kept in mind that, according to Linnaean-Buffonian variety principles, the exotic human body was largely the result of uncivilised *behaviour* in the first instance. Thirdly, the “brilliancy of the higher class of European” here unambiguously identifies elite society with ‘racial’ (a term which, in Blumenbach, we can begin to understand in its modern sense) superiority; Blumenbach is at once assuming that social elites manifest brilliant whiteness – the ‘ whitest’ people of the white peoples – and understanding this whiteness in a train of degeneration which first passes through the labouring poor, and then, ‘logically’ passes into the hierarchically-organised colour variations of the human species.
Blumenbach’s remarks about human dissection also recall the autopsy literature of William Grant who, it will be remembered, observed the enlarged stomachs of the upper orders and the enlarged lungs of the poor in 1779. *De generis*, however, is particular in that the idea of examining differences between upper and lower social ranks centres almost exclusively on the idea of skin-colour degeneracy. “Such an European, blacker than an Ethiop” had been recently dissected by one of Linnaeus’s close correspondents, Christian Gottlieb Ludwig, notes Blumenbach, contributing to a wider interest in this perceived pigmentation in the lower orders:

I myself dissected at Jena a man’s corpse of this kind, whose whole skin was brown, and in some parts, as in the scrotum, almost black… Haller [the Swiss naturalist Albrecht von Haller] observed in the groin of a woman the reticulum so black that it did not seem to differ much from that of an Ethiopian; one as dark in the groin of a man was in the possession of B.S. Albinus [the Dutch anatomist Bernard Siegfried Albinus] (109).

Colour alone, in fact, was enough for Blumenbach to draw comparisons between certain humans and certain apes which happened to manifest similar skin pigmentation. In his examination of two specimens of the simian cynomolgus (the crab-eating macaque, a bare-faced monkey native to South-East Asia), he remarks that “the tint of the face was not very different from that of an Ethiopian or a dark European” (109). A ‘dark European, of course, here makes reference to a member of the lower orders.

The same ideas of external influence on the human body and mind which so characterised noble ideas of breeding and civility, then, can be seen to have played a central role in the most prolific discourses of human variety theory in eighteenth-century Europe. Linnaeus’s delineation of human types as geographically, physiologically and culturally distinct was
in many ways countered, but in many other ways enriched, by Buffon’s theories of individual degeneration in extreme environments. This enrichment, indeed, is encapsulated in Goldsmith’s subsequent inference of ‘principal groups’ amidst a mass of individual gradation – allowing the theory of human variety to claim a certain hierarchical determinism in varietal type, while assigning that determinism to various levels of degeneration on the part of inferior varieties themselves. This was a purely corporeal inequality, a catalogue of expressions of the human body in which each classification was one step further removed from the ideal shape, mind and sensibility of a perfect human being. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, given that human variety discourse gradually took on the same lineal, hierarchical shape as the human society which created it, that Goldsmith and Blumenbach should search for ‘physical’ evidence of the cultural inequalities that this new science so often seemed to reflect. By far the most powerful aspect of such cultural inequalities, however, was ultimately expressed in the genealogical value-system of race – an element of Western hierarchy on which, as mentioned previously, the entire coherence of variety theory depended, and on which it would increasingly lean as a binding and central element of scientific human hierarchies.

2.2.3: Human Variety and Heredity: The Idea of Genealogy in Human Variety

For every strand of human variety theory in the eighteenth century, the question of generation was of central concern. As has been examined in chapter 2.1.1, in the absence of biological heredity or the concept of direct ‘reproduction’ of anatomical traits,
generation was the principal mode of understanding how characteristics in a certain family, a certain ‘species’, or a certain ‘race’, could persevere across successive generations, ostensibly assimilating and adapting to the external environment. Indeed, the very notion of generation evoked serious tensions within a discourse that was overwhelmingly dominated by climate theory. For, generation implied a certain temporal continuity, a certain permanence in the path of transmission from parents to their offspring, which sat rather uneasily with the idea that the entire human body could be transformed by the external environment. One of the most difficult theories of generation for climate theorists, furthermore, happened also to be one of the most dominant: preformationism. This theory, largely influenced by William Harvey’s assertion of a human egg in his *Exercitationes de generatione animalium* (‘On the Generation of Animals’, 1651), posited that, since all Creation was full and complete, all future beings must already exist in miniature form somewhere in the Creation. “All living beings,” explains Clara Pinto-Correia, “existed preformed inside their forebears in the manner of a Russian doll, put there by God at the beginning of Creation with a precise moment established for each one to unfold and come to life” (3). The idea of preformation, then, which survived well into the nineteenth century, could explain the evident continuity of traits in certain family lines without impinging on traditional Scriptural accounts of human genesis. It could also reinforce a concept of Biblical history which both justified a single humanity and the stratification of this humanity into ‘natural’ hierarchies. “Preformation ‘scientifically’ established that all men were, in fact, brothers, since they all came from the same gonad”, notes Pinto-Correia, yet it also explained why it was “inevitable that servants would always originate from servants, just as kings would always originate from kings” (4). At the same time, however, notes Phillip Sloan, preformationist theories necessarily “worked directly against any assumptions of environmentalism … colour differences between humans, for example,
themselves became a problem to be explained by God’s creative action rather than by means of traditional accounts of climatic alteration … provid[ing] a metaphysical basis for the distinction of races” (117). It was a subject, then, which more than troubled the major human variety theorists of the time. Turberville Needham of the Royal Society, for instance, expressly made contact with Buffon to discuss his doubts that sperm, which he had studied at microscopic level, could possibly be an ‘animal’. Indeed, in a series of readings to the Royal Society in 1748, Needham made the case that the tiny homunculi (little men) which eventually formed infants were comprised of decaying vegetable matter, and grew in the same manner as plants (A. Thomson 260-1). It was one of Johann Blumenbach’s colleagues, in fact, Caspar Wolff, who eventually mounted a successful challenge to the preformationist model with his Theoria Generationis (1759), in which he demonstrated that certain tissues in an adult chicken had no correspondence whatsoever in the tissue of an unhatched chick, and thus must have been somehow derived from the external environment. Despite such challenges, however, and in the absence of any credible alternative, preformation theory continued to dominate mainstream understandings of generation for decades to come (Pinto-Correira 5).

Implicit in any challenge or even query about preformationism was one of the most significant debates in the field of human variety theory: the question of whether all human beings actually did come from “the same gonad”, or whether certain ‘varieties’ might have sprung from an alternative source. The idea of polygenism was a potentially heretical theory of multiple human origins, which stood in contrast to the mainstream assumption of a single genesis through Adam, monogenism. Traceable to the ‘pre-adamite’ theories of Isaac de la Peyrère’s Praeadamitae (1655)117, which conjectured that certain human groups had been created before Adam and Eve, the theory of polygenesis was more

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117 Praeadamitae was published in English the following year as A Theological System upon the Presupposition That Men Were before Adam. For more, see David N. Livingstone, Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins (2008, 26-52).
a minority exception to the monogenetic rule, than a truly challenging alternative. Indeed, while it gained somewhat more traction in France and the United States,\textsuperscript{118} notes Wheeler, in Britain polygenism always remained a minority theory, not gaining intellectual recognition until the mid-nineteenth century and even then remaining on the sidelines of mainstream science (2000, 37). The tangible presence of the polygenetic ‘threat’ in the major monogenetic texts of human variety, however, amply demonstrates the extent to which monogenist theorists – who had more than likely grappled with the idea of Edenic creation themselves – were concerned with this alternative vision of human variety. As has been previously cited in chapter 2.2.1, Linnaeus made certain to dissociate his human varieties from any ‘pre-Adamites’ in the 1758 edition of his \textit{Systema Naturae}, but he was far from the only one. Buffon, for instance, devotes the entire closing paragraph of his \textit{Variétés dans l’espèce humaine} to refuting the possibility of polygenesis: “\textit{le genre humain n’est pas composé d’espèces essentiellement différentes entre elles} …” he affirms, “\textit{il n’y a eu originairement qu’une seule espèce d’hommes, qui s’étant multipliée & répandue sur toute la surface de la terre, a subi différents changements par l’influence du climat} …” (3.573).\textsuperscript{119} In the 1775 edition of his \textit{De generis humani varietate nativa}, Johann Blumenbach too denounced the supporters of polygenetic theory as sensationalist atheists: “The idea of the plurality of human species” he remarks, 

\begin{flushright}
\begin{quote}
has found particular favour with those who made it their business to throw doubt on the accuracy of Scripture … such is the subtlety of the human intellect, and such the rush for novelty, that many would rather accept a new, though
\end{quote}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{118} A notable example of French polygenism can be found in Voltaire’s \textit{Traité de Métaphysique}, wherein he remarks: “\textit{Il me semble ... que les blancs barbus, les nègres portant laine, les jaunes portant crins, et les hommes sans barbe ne viennent pas du même homme}” (Barber ed. 14.423); one the most potent early examples of polygenism in a North-American context can be found in the work of Edward Long, discussed below. For more on polygenism in France and the United States respectively, see George W. Stocking, \textit{Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology} (1968, 38-41) and John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, \textit{Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction} (2005, 45-61).

\textsuperscript{119} “Human kind is not composed of species that are essentially different from one another, there was originally but one single species of man who, having multiplied and spread over the surface of the earth, was subjected to different changes by the influence of the climate …” (my trans.).
insufficiently considered opinion, than subscribe to ancient truths which have been commonly accepted for thousands of years (98).

*Intimations* of polygenesis were generally more common in the British field of naturalism than fully-fledged defences of the theory, yet even passing references to the theory of multiple origins often revealed a striking tendency towards racialised separatism in the broader (usually ‘un-scientific’) discourse of human variety theory. As previously mentioned in chapter 1.3.3, some theorists rationalised polygenism by relating it to the Great Chain of Being, such as the geographer Richard Turner, who in his *View of the Earth: Being a Short System of Modern Geography* (1771) noted the possibility that Africans were “a different species of being, and therefore ranked them a link lower than us in the Chain of Existence”, or the parliamentarian Samuel Estwick who, in his *Considerations on the Negro Cause* (1772), claimed that slaves “differed from other men, not in *kind*, but in *species* … verifying that unerring truth of Mr. Pope” (Turner 17; Estwick 82). Indeed, these theorists, and a great many other polygenists, largely used the argument of multiple origins to justify the trans-Atlantic slave trade, portraying the African victims of slavery as universally and ‘incurably’ sub-human – and thus, in the words of Estwick, “articles of trade and commerce only” (83). The most notorious pro-slavery text on polygenism was the *History of Jamaica* (1774), authored by the British planter Edward Long. Long argued that inherent corporeal differences between Africans and Europeans made them more suitable for slave labour in the colonies than white servants, and that, in fact, “the Negro was an intermediate group between humanity and the higher apes” (Kitson 13). *Orang-outangs* (by which he means anthropoid apes in general) display as much humanity as human children, he declares, and in form “[h]as the Hottentot … a more manly figure than the oran-outang? … that the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied, is, I think, more than probable” (2.365).
In Britain itself, the best-known polygenist theorist was probably the Scottish philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames, who laid out the philosophical problems of monogenetic variety theory in his *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774). Provocatively, Kames justifies his anti-*monogenesis* position in the opening pages of his work by making reference to *Genesis* 2.19, in which Adam recognises and names distinct and separate species: “The Deity has left none of its beings imperfect” Kames declares, “animals are formed of different kinds, each kind having a figure and a temper peculiar to itself” (1.2). Both Linnaeus’s binomial taxonomy and Buffon’s climate theory, he states, have “wandered wonderfully far from nature” by ignoring the simple, obvious animal classifications established by Adam, which everyone learns to distinguish naturally as a child (1.9). Climate undeniably has an effect on men’s appearance, he concedes, but Buffonian theory has neglected to recognise that certain climates might also attract certain kinds of men, whose bodies are best suited to the nutrition and weather of those zones. Indeed, no amount of conjecture on migration, Kames asserts, can explain why the people of the New World seem to maintain the same colour in the length and breadth of the continent, from the Arctic north, through the tropical centre, down to the Antarctic south (1.10, 2.72). Climate could not possibly account for the full diversity of human difference, not could it entirely explain the peopling of North America and Australia, when both land masses are entirely isolated from Europe. How, for instance, could ‘gradation’ explain the curious absence of body hair in Amerindians, and why had they seemed to remain in the hunter-gatherer stage of human development? Could it have been that “Adam and Eve might have been the first parents of mankind, i.e., of all who at that time existed, without being the first parents of the Americans[?]” (2.75). From observing the “very frame of the human body”, he affirms, which seems to vary by ‘climate’ more than any other animal, it can clearly be inferred that
there must be different races of men fitted for different climates … we find men of different kinds, the individuals of each kind remarkably uniform; and differing not less remarkably from the individuals of every other kind. Uniformity and permanency are the off-spring of design, never of chance (1.37).

Another much-discussed instance of polygenetic advocacy in eighteenth-century Britain was to be found in the 1753 revision of David Hume’s essay ‘Of National Characters’ (1748), in which an inflammatory footnote led to an intense backlash of criticism, still as potent today as it was at the time. “I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds), to be naturally inferior to whites” he remarks:

There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures among them, no arts, no science. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present TARTARS, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men (Essays 291).

Among those who responded to Hume’s polygenetic assertions was the Scottish moralist James Beattie, who in his Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in Opposition to Sophisty and Scepticism of 1770 compared this footnote with Aristotle’s assertion in the Politics that the Greeks would naturally always be masters, and non-Greeks always slaves. “To suppose [a negro slave] of an inferior species, because he does not thus distinguish himself” Beattie declares, “is just as rational, as to suppose any private European of an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty” (Feiser ed. 258). The Austrian physician François Xavier Swediaur noted with horror in his Philosophical Dictionary (1786) that Hume’s “suspicion (for it seems scarcely to have matured into an opinion) concerning an original distinction in the breeds of men, has
unaccountably given occasion to some writers to quote Hume as an advocate for the slavery of the negroes” (Feiser ed. 345). For all this, however, (and perhaps owing to its negative reception) Hume’s apparent polygenism never went further than this single revision to a single footnote, in a single edition of his work. In fact, notes Colin Kidd, in the (posthumous) 1777 edition, the polygenetic intimations were carefully removed, with the note ultimately causing only a “ruffle” in the “instinctive monogenism of Enlightenment Scotland” (93). Certainly, the idea that Hume was a polygenist would seem to run against “the grain of his wider oeuvre”, which otherwise assumes a monogenist perspective (Kidd 94). In fact, while ‘Of National Characters’ argues for a division of mankind based on national sympathies rather than climatic influence, it nonetheless endorses some quite ‘Buffonian’ principles – in particular the influence of a refined mode of life. “The vulgar are very apt to carry all national character to extremes …” Hume announces in the opening sentence of the essay, “difference is founded on circumstances, whose operation is eternal and unalterable” (279). Indeed, in his earlier Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40), Hume had actually characterised a similar set of ‘eternal and unalterable’ circumstances between the ‘vulgar’ and the ‘polite’ as a anatomical feature of the human body, recalling the Cheynan discourse of nerve fibres which had been popularised only a few years earlier: “The skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day labourer are different [from] those of a man of quality” he states,

so are his sentiments, actions and manners. The different stations of life influence the whole fabric, external and internal; and these … arise necessarily, because uniformly, from the necessary and uniform principles of human nature. Men cannot live without society, and cannot be associated without government. Government makes a distinction of property, and establishes the different ranks of men (2.3.1, 259).
The adaptation of the human body and mind, then, Hume suggests, is an integral element of the diversity of industry and action that powered human life. The vulgar who carried national characters to an ‘extreme’, it follows, may well have been doing so on account of their cruder sensibilities.

When discussing polygenism as an element of the history of race, however, some caution must be exercised. Polygenism was certainly a potent manifestation of racialised discrimination within eighteenth-century human variety theory, but its deployment in pro-slavery discourse does not necessarily mean it was any more influential over the modern concept of race than monogenist theories. For many modern researchers, it would seem, the fact that polygenetic discourse is so poignantly redolent of modern paradigms of ‘race as based on skin colour’, has often led to the assumption that eighteenth-century polygenists can be read as a sort of ‘pathway’ toward the modern construct of race, weaving through an older and increasingly obsolete discourse of monogenesis. Stephen Spencer, for instance, in his Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity and Representation (2006), portrays polygenism as the ‘next stage’ of monogenism, stating that “monogenism, which was maintained by many Enlightenment thinkers, gradually gave way to notions of hierarchical ordering and separate generation of races as species” (emphasis added, 36). Peter Sloan, too, in suggesting that Linnaeus’s varietates signalled that “natural history was embarked upon a slide into polygenism”, implies that a slide into polygenism was ultimately a slide into modern race theory (123). It is a mode of thought in historiography, notes Claude-Olivier Doron, which has led innumerable historians to privilege the idea of “a radical alterity of types” as the most important element in the history of race (76). 120 On closer inspection of polygenetic theory, however, it is clear that, while it certainly foreshadows patterns of racism in the modern world, it does not particularly add to the

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120 Doron gives the example of Pierre Taguieff’s Le Racisme (1997), Benjamin Isaac’s Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity (2004) and George M. Fredrickson’s Racism: A Short History, as works that privilege this idea (76).
construct of race. The culture of race thinking, claimed Hannah Arendt, must be distinguished from the culture of racism, in that the former addresses the conceptualisation of racialised groups, and the latter concerns the ideologies that are built around these conceptions (160). As this study has shown thus far, the concept of race did not depend solely – if ever – on division by skin-colour, nor does it always do so today. The fundamental structure of both racism and race, as Balibar and Wallerstein have noted, is conceived independently of specific ideologies of skin colour and origin stories – ‘race’ and ‘race thinking’ can be just as powerful in relation to, say, immigrants or religious minorities. There is a “‘racisme sans races’…” say Balibar and Wallerstein, which exists in “la nocivité de l’effacement des frontières” (33). Michel Prum has similarly asserted that to study race is not to study differences in skin colour, but to study social ‘alterisation’ – the fabrication of an ‘other’ (2012, 7). Perhaps most importantly, polygenesis did not allow for what was one of the most influential and ‘racialised’ elements of monogenist human variety discourse: the idea of degeneration, which at all levels of mainstream human science, encouraged empirical investigation of human blood and lineage.

The development of genealogically based ‘race thinking’ within the framework of empirical human variety theory is probably the single most important element in the history of race in the eighteenth century. As was mentioned at the beginning of chapter 2.2.1, the traditional notion of ‘race as lineage’ always existed within human variety theory as a sort of conceptual ‘bridge’, or support of ‘common sense’ in empirical understandings of human population diversity. As monogenetic climate theory became more complex, however, the ‘race’ paradigm became increasingly important to the human sciences – something which is particularly noticeable in the work of Buffon. One major innovation of Buffon’s Variétés, in fact, was his systematic use of the French word race to describe

121 “[R]acism without race … a harmfulness that stems from the erasure of boundaries” (my trans.).
human anatomy. The term was not, of course, employed to describe ‘principal varieties’ – in many ways the opposite was true. Buffon seems to use this decidedly ambiguous term partly to undermine Linnaeus’s arbitrary system of taxonomy, which he regularly uses in conjunction with his own terminology, though without respecting Linnaeus’s intended taxonomic hierarchy (Buffon’s espèce, for instance, is used as a sub-section of race in the Variétés, as are nation and peuple) (Sloan 1995, 134). At the same time, however, by using the term race systematically, Buffon is methodically asserting the role of lineage and blood-family in order to characterise the vast degree of variation in human anatomy. That is, in order to understand the catalogue of human physical types he describes in the Variétés – a catalogue far too copious and nuanced to accord with Linnaeus’s carefully balanced varietates – Buffon is importing the tradition of race as lineal bloodline into empirical discourse, portraying his groups as above all families whose particular physical deviations are inextricable from their experience of generation. “Theoretically, Linné allowed for some plasticity at the subspecies level” of varietas, notes Nicolas Hudson,

Yet the rigid tables of Systema Naturae gave little indication that there is any room for change or development … ‘Race’, on the contrary, suggested a family lineage of animals or humans that was by no means permanent or inflexible, but formed a veritable ‘history’ of traits passed down through generations in innumerable different forms … Negroes, Americans, Lapps, Orientals, Europeans and so forth represented particular stocks whose members, like those of great families, showed a considerable degree of resemblance, yet were in a state of constant variation … as previously used, ‘race’ denoted the bloodlines of animals, a bestial connotation that suited Buffon’s presentation of Lapps or Negroes as having degenerated as the result of harsh climates … yet ‘race’ also commonly denoted a ‘noble race’ … there was no dishonour or inconsistency in calling Europeans a superior race (253-4).

Not only did the concept of ‘race’ not contradict Buffon’s theory of climatic influence, it was essential to it. The entire notion of individual gradation, it will be remembered, depended on the continuance of climatic conditions for several generations, over the course of centuries in fact, which necessarily meant that with each generation the parents were
passing down some of their externally acquired anatomical traits as inherent traits in their offspring. This perpetual reinforcement of the climate’s actions, Buffon held, went to explain how corporeal differences were so pronounced. The alterations of the human body, he states in the *Variétés*,

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sont devenues plus générales, plus sensibles, & plus constantes par l’action continuée de ces mêmes causes [le climat]; qu’elles se sont perpétuées & qu’elles se perpétuent de génération en génération, comme les difformités ou les maladies des pères & mères passent leur enfans (3.573).
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Thus, in a system like this, suggests Claude-Olivier Doron, there is no longer any room for a taxon such as *Homo troglodytes* or certain members of *Homo monstrosus*, which are based on multiple, sometimes disparate anatomical anomalies taken as a whole, without their strict identification as a blood-related group. ‘Race’ instead provided an intermediate category of human being, which was more stable and continuous than the merely descriptive *varietates*, and yet incredibly flexible regarding individual variability across and within species (87). While polygenists were content with strict divisions of ‘species’ and ‘variety’, notes Doron, “monogenists used a third concept – that of race – to define a peculiar level, different from species but more constant than mere varieties … a difference may appear to be *logically* a difference of species, *while being*, in reality, based on a *genealogically* common root” (88).

The idea of lineal succession would in fact become central to Buffon’s theory of species formation – explaining how individual gradation seemed to settle into distinct groupings of similar entities. For, unlike Linnaeus, who had defined a ‘species’ simply as a group of animals with a set of shared characteristics, Buffon linked the coherence of a species with their temporal succession: they must not only be similar, but must be capable

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122 “[B]ecame more general, more perceptible, and more constant by the continued action of these same causes [the climate]; … that they persisted, and persist still from generation to generation, like deformities or illnesses pass from mothers and fathers to their children” (my trans.).
of indefinitely generating more beings like themselves. “The reality of species was to be found only in material connections” explains Sloan, “two beings are members of the same species not because they ‘look alike’ or even because they share essential defining properties … [but] only if they have a material relation to one another” (132). This principle was most notably employed in Buffon’s discussion of hybridity and fertility in donkeys and mules in the chapter devoted to ‘l’asne’ in his Histoire naturelle:

Ce n’est ni le nombre ni la collection des individus semblables qui fait l’espèce, c’est la succession constante et le renouvellement non interrompu de ces individus qui la constituent … le barbet & le lévrier ne sont qu’une même espèce, puisqu’ils produisent ensemble des individus qui peuvent eux-mêmes en produire d’autres … On pourrait même dire que ces intervalles entre les espèces sont les plus égaux & les moins variables de tous, puisqu’on peut toujours tirer une ligne de séparation entre deux espèces (Œuvres philosophiques 355).  

The monstrous peoples of the world, claims Buffon – such as the great legged people known as le race de St Thomas on the island of Ceylon, or the red-eyed, white-haired tribes of the Darien Isthmus – have clearly bred accidental defects among themselves, contained in their isolated populations. Any human trait can be continued, he claims, if it is sufficiently isolated within one line of lineage, and thus it can be explained how individual faults are “ensuite propagés de race en race [here meaning generation], comme les autres vices et maladies héréditaires” (356). By this action, of course, traditional notions of preformationism were implicitly negated, since Buffon is linking anatomical transformation with the process of sexual generation: what was being born was not the product of infinitesimally nestled human ova or sperma, miniature beings with predestined bodies and minds, but the result of generation upon generation of intensified

123 “It is not the number nor the collection of individuals that makes a species, it is the constant succession and uninterrupted renewal of these individuals which constitutes it … the barbet and the greyhound are but one species because together they produce individuals who can, themselves, produce others … it could even be said that these intervals between species are the most equal and the least variable of all, since one can always draw a line of separation between two species” (my trans.).

124 “[they are] then propagated from one race [generation] to another, like other vices and hereditary illnesses” (my trans.).
climate influence. “Buffon”, notes Sloan, “provided a means by which the contingencies of geography and climate, acting upon the molecules, could affect the actual reproductive lineage of the species” (133).

The dynamic of external influence overlapping with, complementing, and eventually becoming part of, inborn traits was, as will be remembered from chapter 2.2, entirely in accordance with the received wisdom about human generation. Indeed, in the wake of Buffon the inheritance of acquired traits not only became a common assumption within monogenist human variety theories, but largely re-orientated the logic of population diversity toward a more universally understood notion of lineage. Goldsmith, for instance, (again betraying quite valuable assumptions by applying his own logic to contemporary systems of natural philosophy) noted that in areas where the human varieties tended to interact, a certain ‘hybridity’ of skin colour occurred over time. “In those places where trade has long flourished, or where enemies have made many incursions,” he observes,

the races are usually found blended … in the islands of the Indian Ocean, where a trade has been carried on for time immemorial, the inhabitants appear to be a mixture of all the nations upon the earth; white, olive, brown and black men, are all seen living together in the same city, and propagate a mixed breed (86).

This is a vision of racial formation, indeed, where climate has been entirely neglected: that is, climate did its work in the distant past by creating these white, olive and brown varieties of human being, but the process on which Goldsmith has focused is purely racial – in the sense that it is working along the same lines as animal breeding, with the pre-existing traits of the parents observably blending in their offspring to create a ‘race’ distinct from either one of them. At the same time, Goldsmith does not doubt that the environmental experiences of past generations – as in the notion of noble breeding – survive as innate traits in the family line. Indeed, interestingly (and unusually) he uses the adjective ‘hereditary’ to describe this process – a term which, as has been mentioned, must be
primarily understood as ‘inherited as with an object’, but which is here used in such a corporealised, racialised context that it could easily assume its modern signification:

[n]ature, in the course of ages, shapes itself to the constraint, and assumes hereditary deformity. We find nothing more common in births than for children to inherit sometimes even the accidental deformities of their parents … I myself have seen a child, distinctly marked with a scar, similar to one the father had received in battle … from this, therefore, may have arisen the small eyes and long ears of the Tartars … the flat noses of the blacks … and the flat heads of the American Indians (92).

Here, of course, Goldsmith is dutifully relaying the climate theory principles of Buffon, but in his own interpretation of generational succession, the formation of races becomes significantly more reliant on traditional, rational, ideas of ‘race’. Once again, the climate is somewhat forgotten in the preceding paragraph, while the general processes of breeding and generation are almost attributed full responsibility for the formation of entire human varieties.

There is a very similar sense of ‘racialisation’ in the climate theory of Blumenbach. By the 1795 edition of his De generis he has begun to question whether “deformities or mutilations” can, over a succession of generations, “terminate in a sort of second nature”. It is undeniable, he notes, that marks of race “which have come into existence from other causes … are universally propagated in families for few or many generations with less or greater constancy, just in the same way as organic disorders …” (203-4). Quite aside from this direct consideration, the presence of lineage-based understandings of human variety in both the 1775 and 1795 editions of De generis is often remarkable – manifesting, much like his human races, the attributes of a decidedly ‘modern’ race theory. The ‘hybrid’ offspring of blacks and whites, he mentions, can be quite accurately catalogued according to their exact degree of varietal lineage – there exist, he notes, the varieties of “mulatto, mestiço, mameluk, quarteroon, octavoon etc.” whose
racial identities accord directly with the genealogy of their parents’ racial backgrounds (1775, 122). Hybridisation, he holds, had probably ‘bred’ out the real Patagonian Giants from South America, where long interbreeding with Europeans had resulted in only slightly taller individuals remaining in the region (104-5). The Spanish, too, he notes, have “so much degenerated towards the native colour of the soil,” in Central America not only because of the sun or air, but because “they had not taken care to preserve their paternal constitution by intermarrying with Europeans, but had chosen to follow the same kind of life as the American nations” (111). In fact, Blumenbach’s very premise of racial characterisation is profoundly underpinned with an implicit template of racialised breeding and animal husbandry: “In the same way as we classify races and degenerations of horses and poultry, of pinks and tulips,” he explains, “so also, in addition, must we classify the varieties of mankind which exist within our common original stock” (303).

One of the most influential voices to advocate the influence of lineage within human variety theory was Immanuel Kant, whose Über die verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen (‘Of the Different Races of Man’) (1775) would eventually become one of the most infamous texts of skin-colour hierarchy of the entire eighteenth century. All division of species and genera, he asserted, must be in accordance with the (Buffonian) “law of common propagation” – that is, two beings must be able to breed and produce an identical being together in order for them to properly form a ‘species’. Thus, he proclaims, it is useless to classify animals strictly according to their similarities; instead it was necessary to focus on their “natural division [which] is based on identifying distinct lines of descent that divide according to reproductive relations” (8). This traditional, Buffonian method of species definition, of course, implicitly confirmed monogenesis as the only possible theory of human origin – since all human varieties could generate new human individuals with each other. Kant, however, places far more emphasis than Buffon had on the role of race
as an arbiter of ‘principle’ human differences. While accepting climate theory as a foundational premise of human variety, Kant constructs his races as ‘sub-species’ based on lineage: if a species represents two entities that can generate fertile offspring together, a ‘race’ represents two individuals who will propagate a specific, principle set of human characteristics together. Races, then, like species, exist only in their own successive generation – if a member of one race was to ‘breed into’ another human variety, Kant claims, their colour and anatomy would quickly disappear into the ‘dominant’ racial lineage. It is, indeed, only a matter of course that Kant should find an example of his propagation-based race in the best known exponents of such human selective breeding: the nobility. “Features ultimately become rooted in reproductive power … ”, he claims,

indeed this development has presumably been observed in the old Venetian nobility, especially the women. At any rate, all of the noble women on the recently discovered island of Tahiti do have longer noses than is common. – Maupertuis believes that we may cultivate a noble stock of human beings in any province, a stock in whom understanding, diligence, and probity were hereditary … [any] stock would always be recognisable and might even be called a race, if their characteristic feature does not seem too insignificant (10-11).

Now, the ‘noble stock’ Kant attributes to Maupertuis is not, strictly speaking, a noble stock, but a stock with noble qualities such as beauty and good posture. In his Vénus Physique (1745), the French mathematician had suggested that if he were a bored sultan, he might ‘breed’ the most beautiful women of his harem to form various “nouvelles espèces de beautés” (he went on to surmise that nature automatically ‘bred’ beautiful varieties by making beauty itself sexually attractive) (134-5). But for Kant, ‘noble stock’ and a ‘stock with noble qualities’ have become almost one and the same thing – noble blood here represents the template of human selective breeding, whether it be in a Persian concubine, a Tahitian princess, or a Venetian duchessa – essentially isolating a strain of
humanity with desired physical/moral/political traits. Kant’s example of physical traits in noble lines (or selectively bred lines which follow a noble template) are indeed extremely appropriate for his subsequent assertion of ‘pure blood’, which can define the degree to which one belongs to any one of his four ‘major’ varieties of mankind – White, Hindu, Hun, and Negro (11). Even within these varieties, there are purer races than others, again depending on their lineage; thus, the Hindustani are “purer” and more “ancient” than other Hindus, for example, as are Kalmuks among the Huns. Just as in the tradition of noble race, this ‘purity’ is linked to the ancientness of a people’s direct line of descent. Even the effects of climate, for Kant, are limited to their effects on the “reproductive power” of the inhabitants – which he holds to be most vulnerable to the sun and air.

Within Kant’s racial theory, notes Bruce Baum, one can identify “three properties that would remain basic to racial thought for most of the next two centuries” (72). The first of these was an idea of race as being primarily defined by a handful of characteristic physical features (such as skin colour, hair texture etc.) which were reproduced across generations. The second was that race was different from more casual and inconsistent bodily variation (such as the sporadic occurrence of blond or red hair), and that this difference could be identified in its dependence on successive generation. The third, though not immediately obvious, is probably the most important: it is the idea that individuals born from two different principle races would automatically be “half-breeds”. In fact, Kant’s essay asserts that all peoples who do not fit into one of his four human types have resulted from interbreeding between them. And in this can be seen a remarkable construction of fixed races by exclusion: by defining all those who did not fit into to his four major races as ‘half-breeds’, Kant is actually reinforcing the reality of his races by characterising them as something that can be deviated from. His handful of arbitrary characteristics, by becoming the rule that is defined by exceptions, can be reconceptualised
as the fundamental ‘biological’ identity of an entire set of global populations. In this way, the firmly monogenist Kant creates a separatism between his races that is just as racist, if not even more so, than his polygenist contemporaries. Furthermore, it fully supports a monogenist line of slavery justification: Pauline Kliengeld notes that, in the preparatory material to his 1780 lectures, Kant recorded that “Americans and Negroes cannot govern themselves. Thus [they] serve only as slaves” (qtd in Kleingeld 97). Kant, then, promotes a sense of ‘fixed’ race which conceptually holds the monogenist notions of generation and degeneration at its core; human ‘races’ here are truly races in the older sense of the word (if not yet fully in the modern sense of the word) in that they depend on being born into a ‘pure’ bloodline, and indeed depend on that bloodline being protected from contamination in each successive generation for their continued existence. Nobility itself is used as a passing example for a global, racialised dynamic which, paradoxically, is almost entirely founded on the traditions of noble hereditary privilege.

Race thinking, then, can be seen at every level of human variety theory in the eighteenth century. Even within the empirical formation of early human taxonomies (which, as we have seen, were in many ways diametrically opposed to the genealogical structure of eighteenth-century race) the modelling of a human hierarchy according to the basic tenets of the Great Chain of Being immediately and irrevocably established a lineal inequality of human anatomy, which was reflected in each variety’s perceived accordance with European social virtues. The same value-systems of civility and morality which were traditionally used to express the socio-political dominance of the upper orders were, through the medium of ‘climate theory’, re-appropriated as ‘empirical’ expressions of full (European) humanity, while the effects of uncivilised behaviour was reconceived in a new discourse of anatomical inferiority – inherently portraying non-Europeans in direct relation
to the European lower orders, and identifying the bodies of the European lower orders in terms of varietal degeneration. Finally, it can be seen that throughout the active construction of human variety theory in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, traditional templates of race thinking – grounded as they were in the culture of carefully controlled noble intermarriage – came to characterise a new form of human division based not only on appearance and civility, but on lineage and purity of blood. Just how much the idea of nobility remained centrally important to this construction of modern ‘blood race’ will be examined in the next chapter.
2.3: Exotic Nobilities: Ireland, Scotland, and Tahiti

2.3.1: Superior Inferiority: Literary Representations of Irish Nobility

The nobility of Ireland has thus far been largely absent from this study – and for good reason: the very idea of an ‘elite’ in Ireland was entirely distinct from anything to be found on the Island of Great Britain, while the official institutions of Irish nobility were so embroiled in the greater colonial turmoil of the country that their history was almost incomparable with their British counterparts. Indeed, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ireland had become a uniquely volatile locus of antagonistic cultural authorities, where notions of ‘nobility’ and ‘noble race’ were constantly being undermined and reasserted according to political, sectarian, and nationalistic persuasions. Furthermore, the Irish peerage remained politically distinct from its Scottish and English equivalents in the fact that it continued to exist, along with the rest of the Irish parliament, outside the Union until 1801. Nor was its eventual accession into the United Kingdom in any way inevitable or even anticipated – on the contrary, less than twenty years before the Act of Union, the nationalist Dublin parliament was rejoicing in having obtained more legislative independence from Westminster than it had held for three hundred years, accepting Union only after the calamitous aftermath of the doomed 1798 rebellion.125 In fact, the idea of Irish nobility stands as one of the most paradoxical elements of hereditary privilege in either Britain or Ireland in the eighteenth century: on the one hand, the Irish peerage

125 In 1782, Henry Grattan, leader of Dublin’s Patriot Party, repealed the Irish Declaratory Act (1719) which had denied any court jurisdiction to the Irish House of Lords, and amended the medieval Poyning’s law, which had guaranteed the authority of Westminster over the Irish parliament.
represented the same models of noble ‘race’ and ‘breeding’ as the British, despite the fact that they held a drastically inferior social status, and were tarred with the image of political profiteering, pretentious social climbing, and parochial, *arriviste* vulgarity; on the other hand, however, the established Irish peers were *not the only claimants* to nobility on the island, vying for recognition with the deposed Catholic elite, and even individuals who asserted claims of ancient Gaelic royalty. Most importantly, however, in Ireland the racialised notions of nobility existed within a sectarian hierarchy of cultural groups that were themselves remarkably racialised. This sub-chapter, then, first considers the paradoxical situation of the Irish peerage as a British-style hereditary elite in a conceptually inferior and quintessentially ‘non-British’ environment, before considering competing notions of ‘noble race’ in alternative visions of colonial Ireland. The concepts of racialised nobility and racialised Irishness will subsequently be examined through analyses of selected ‘stage Irishmen’ in drama and literature from the mid-to-late eighteenth century.

The idea of race thinking and racialisation in Irish historiography, notes G.K. Peating, is “potentially a subtle concept, admitting numerous distinctions and capable of suggesting valuable lines of approach to moments of Irish history” (115-16). While the active racialisation of the Catholic Irish during the nineteenth century has been seen by some as the construction of “a missing evolutionary link between the ‘bestiality’ of black slaves and that of the English worker as well as dangerous currents in European thought, including republicanism”, the *pre-racist* racialisation of groups within Ireland was, and to a certain extent still is, an integral part of the country’s competing cultural identities (P. Cohen 74). Ireland’s religious hierarchy – or, to recall Winthrop Jordan’s term, its various “defective religious conditions” – was inextricable from a history of ethnic cleansing,
colonial settlement, and cultural subjugation, making it a prime example of active race thinking as distinct from anatomical variety (which was also nascent, nonetheless in ‘monstrous’ notions of Irish barbarism) (20). In fact, eighteenth-century Ireland’s sectarian hierarchy was so intertwined with ‘racial’ patterns of lineage that the four distinctive cultural groups on the island could each be correlated to a genre of family name. An O’Flathery (Ó Flaithbertaigh) or an O’Neill (Uí Néill), almost certainly belonged to the ‘native’ Irish-speaking majority – who, in fact, were most often excluded from the epithet ‘Irish’, warranting qualifiers such as ‘indigenous’ or ‘wild’. A De Burgo or a Fitzgerald, however, would probably have identified with the former Franco-Norman Catholic elite, known as the ‘Old English’, who were largely dispossessed after the Williamite Wars. More typically Scottish surnames, such as Wallace, Buchanan, or Kirkpatrick could, in all likelihood, be linked to the Scottish and English Dissenters who had been settling plantations in Ulster since the early seventeenth century, while other British surnames indicated descent from the most recent Anglican colonists, the ‘New English’ – who had taken control of the vast tracts of Catholic land confiscated by Cromwell.

These distinct cultural groups, the result of centuries of migration, war and retribution, were not only segregated by their conflicting politico-religious allegiances, but by stringent sectarian legislation. The so-called ‘Penal laws’ (active c. 1652-1829) often inverted ‘traditional’ social hierarchies by disempowering the vast majority of Irish Catholics and Dissenters in favour of an Anglican minority. Only by converting to Protestantism, notes Theodore W. Allen, could an Irishman “enjoy social recognition and the privileges normal and essential to members of their class” (1.77). This included the right to purchase land, to enter the military, to bear arms, to avail themselves of education, to hold office, or to serve on juries. In effect, then, a Catholic peer possessed fewer property rights than an Anglican free-holder, since only the latter could take advantage of
inheritance by primogeniture (Lecky 1.152). Concordantly, even minor Protestant landlords, (about 5,000 of whom possessed 95% of Irish land by 1776) often wielded a brutal authority over their tenants that would have been unthinkable for even the most powerful nobleman in Britain (McCracken 34). In 1776, the travel writer Arthur Young echoed the sentiments of countless astonished observers when he reported that:

A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order which a servant, labourer or cotter dares to refuse to execute. Nothing satisfies him but unlimited submission ... a poor man would have his bones broke if he offered to lift his hands in his own defence. Knocking down is spoken of in the country in a manner that makes an Englishman stare. It must strike the most careless traveller to see whole strings of cars whipped into a ditch by a gentleman’s footman, to make way for his carriage; if they are overturned or broken in pieces, no matter ... were [the tenants] to complain they would perhaps be horsewhipped... (Ed. Bohls 120).

This same sectarian legislation, however, also protected one of the most extraordinarily ‘racialised’ dimensions of the country’s ethnic divisions – the concept of an Anglican ‘Irish nation’ from which the population’s vast Catholic majority and (to a lesser extent) Dissenter communities\(^\text{126}\) were excluded by reason of religious non-conformity. “When I was a boy”, declared the Lord John George de la Poer Beresford, Archbishop of Armagh, shortly before his death in 1862, “‘the Irish people’ meant Protestants; now it means the Roman Catholics” (qtd in Bartlett 2014, 517). Indeed, when Beresford was a boy in the 1770s, most members of the colonial establishment would have agreed. For the best part of the eighteenth century, the majority of Irishmen remained, on paper at least, existentially questionable: “The law does not suppose any such person to exist,” declared Lord Chancellor Bowes during a court ruling of 1759, “as an Irish Roman Catholic” (qtd in Scully 334). As late as 1812, the emancipationist political writer Denys Scully noted that

\(^{126}\) The often-overlooked Dissenters, mostly located in the northern province of Ulster, were also denied full citizenship through certain penal laws (in particular exclusion from municipal office), though their exclusion from institutional society was no-where near as brutal as that of Catholics. For instance, Barnard notes that at times of political unrest, such as the years 1745-6, Ulster’s Dissenters were strategically re-embraced by the British government to form a united Protestant front (Barnard 17).
“all the effective inhabitants of Ireland are presumed to be Protestants, and ... therefore Catholics, their clergy, worship &c., are not to be supposed to exist, save for reprehension and penalty” (333). Thus, when Jonathan Swift addressed the “Whole people of Ireland” in his _Drapier’s Letters_ (IV, 1724-5), notes Thomas Bartlett, it would have been implicitly understood that he was referring only to Protestants (518). Interestingly, the precise religious make-up of the country was never fully documented during the eighteenth century, possibly, claims Bartlett, because it would have highlighted the minority status of the Protestant elite while implying legal vindication of the Catholic majority, but also because it may simply have seemed irrelevant – “quality, not quantity counted,” he notes, and as concerned land-ownership and political authority, “Protestants were the quality”. From tax records, on the other hand, it can be estimated that Catholics represented about 80% of the island’s total population throughout the century (521).

This remarkable strategy of conceptual dehumanisation, of course, must be understood within the context of centuries-old traditions of military suppression and cultural proscription of the ‘native’ Irish. Throughout the early modern period, ‘Wild Irish’ propaganda had been employed without fail to justify the indiscriminate slaughter that so often accompanied military campaigns in Ireland. In 1592, Edmund Spenser had recommended systematic crop burning, since the reputedly cannibal “Wild Irish” would thus hurry along their own extermination by eating each other: “[B]y this hard restraint they would quickly consume themselves, and devour one another …”, he advised, just as he had recently seen effected in Munster, after which “in shorthe space theare were none allmeste lefte and a moste populous and plentiful Counrye soddenlye lefte voide of man or beaste” (158, lines 3252-3, 3266-8). In 1682, Richard Lawrence recorded his account of the 1641 rebellion in his _Interest of Ireland_, wherein he saw “miserable old women and children” squatting by a camp fire, watching “a dead corpse broiling, which as the fire
roasted they cut off collaps and eat” (2: 86, 87, qtd in Gordon 361). Indeed, as late as 1808 James Gordon’s *History of the Rebellion in Ireland in the Year 1798* warned that similar scenes to those described by Lawrence would have been inevitable if the Catholic rebels had overthrown the British crown in 1798 (345-361). The penal laws themselves had been devised in the wake of Oliver Cromwell’s “state-sanctioned and systematic ethnic cleansing” of the ‘native’ Irish in the mid-seventeenth century – a campaign which had succeeded in decimating the island’s population from almost 2 million to just 850,000 in the space of only eleven years. “The fact that [Cromwell’s campaign] did not include ‘total’ genocide in its remit ...”, notes Mark Lavene, “says less about the lethal determination of its makers and more about the political, structural and financial weakness of the early modern English state” (56). Indeed, the nature of Ireland’s ethnic subjugation – ‘clearing’ the land of ‘natives’ in order to install ‘plantations’ of a more desirably ethnicity – frames it as a curious reflection of colonial projects further afield, particularly the contemporary ‘plantations’ of North America. One extremely important and often forgotten element of this racialised dehumanisation, in fact, was Cromwell’s extensive sale of the Catholic Irish into the slave trade. Though estimations vary considerably, tens and maybe even hundreds of thousands of Irish ‘undesirables’ were shipped to the West Indies as slaves in and around the 1650s, with 12,000 political prisoners deported between 1648 and 1655 alone (Butterly and Shepard 180). The victims of these deportations, notes Kevin Brady, were invariably the “guardians of native culture – Catholic priests, teachers and Gaelic Bards”, while their enslavement was fully validated – and indeed encouraged – by the Westminster parliament (1.369).

Such parallels with American and African colonialism are reflected in the conviction that the ‘native’ Irish manifested certain varietal differences in their body and mind, mostly expressed through a traditional discourse of ‘wildness’ and barbarism. It will
be remembered from chapter 2.2.2, that descriptions of the ‘monstrous’ Irish body during the seventeenth century (namely distended breasts and reports of suckling children over the shoulder) were re-used in the monstrous variety discourse of Hottentots during the eighteenth. Likewise, in 1603, Fynes Moryson, secretary to Lord Mountjoy, had ascribed the very same phenomenon of “little or no payne in chlydebearing” and a “strang ability of the body after [deliuerance]” to the native Irish women as the Scots physician William Grant would ascribe in English peasant women in 1759, and Oliver Goldsmith would report in the barbarous nations of India in 1774 (see chapters 2.1.2 and 2.2.2 respectively) (qtd in Feerick 627). Johann Blumenbach could still casually refer to the unusually large thighs of Irish women in 1775, which for him were redolent of certain human varieties to be found in New Zealand (250).

This tradition of racialised dehumanisation must also be understood as a logistical foundation for the eighteenth-century British colonial project in Ireland. For, the exclusion of the vast majority of the Irish population from full citizenship – the conceptual denial of their existence – was actually essential to the Anglican regime: “If the whole body of the Catholics had become Protestant,” asserted the nineteenth-century Irish historian William K. Sullivan, “the Ascendancy would lose their advantages … one of the great central facts of Irish history is that the colonists never wished the Catholics to become Protestant” (1.36). This, indeed, might explain the conspicuously low conversion rate from Catholic to Protestant during this time, with only 5,800 official conversions recorded between 1703 and 1800 (Allen 77). In particular, Catholic subjugation protected the Irish nation’s social elite: the so-called ‘Ascendancy’ – an ill-defined oligarchy of power and interest within an already privileged religious minority. While this “charmed circle” of “self-made men” exerted considerable influence over the Irish parliament and its legislative decisions, it was

yet remarkably heterogeneous in its social composition (Malcomson 1978, xix; R.F. Foster 170). “The definition [of the Ascendancy]” notes R.F. Foster, “revolved around Anglicism” which meant that it comprised both professional and landed elites from Old English, New English, and sometimes even ‘native’ Gaelic backgrounds (170). Indeed, the considerable privileges that came with Anglican faith often led to the inversion of even the most basic hierarchical templates that underpinned the Anglocentric social structure of colonial Ireland. “A plebeian oligarchy is a monster, …” complained Edmund Burke, in a letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, On the Subject of Roman Catholics is Ireland (1792), “the Protestants of Ireland are not alone sufficiently the people to form a democracy; and they are too numerous to answer the ends and purposes of an aristocracy” (251). How could the Irish Catholics be expected to admire their Protestant counterparts, he demanded, when the very existence of the Ascendancy threw all semblance of social hierarchy into disarray?

[It is] impossible for two millions of [Catholic and Dissenting] plebeians … to become so far in love with six or seven hundred thousand of their fellow-citizens (to all outward appearance, plebeians like themselves, and many of them tradesmen, servants, and otherwise inferior to some of them) as to see with satisfaction or even patience, an exclusive power vested in them, by which constitutionally they become the absolute masters …every franchise, every honour, every trust, every place … is reserved for this master caste (251-252).

The sectarian privileges of the Ascendancy thus profoundly upset the ‘normal’ course of social hierarchy in the Irish nation – with one of the most pronounced examples being the Irish peerage. The Irish peerage had not only become synonymous with absenteeism, corruption, and cynical political ambition, but was regularly touted as a domain of ‘new men’ who could boast few meaningful links with ancient noble dynasties. It was “a purely legal concept,” notes A.P.W. Malcomson, “and Irish peers were not necessarily characterised by birth, residence or lordship in Ireland, or even by the common denominator that their patents of peerage had all passed the great seal of Ireland” (2000,
293). Originally, notes Tony Barnard, the Irish Peerage, along with an attendant system of esquires, yeomen and primogeniture, had been established “to bring the island closer in character to England” (7). Yet, by the eighteenth century, the House of Lords in Dublin had almost become a parody of that at Westminster – wielding even less power than any of Britain’s colonial assemblies, playing a lesser part in Irish legislation than the Irish and British privy councils combined, and ultimately existing at the whim of English rule (Bartlett 2004, 6; Malcomson 1978, 306). In 1802, Judge Robert Day described the Ascendancy’s ostentatious new parliament buildings at Dublin’s College Green as “an assembly ridden, and with very little ceremony, by the poor chancellor ... [compared to] the imperial house of peers ... the Irish was no better than a parish vestry” (qtd in Malcomson 1978, 305).

In their capacity as social representatives of hierarchical cohesion and moral authority, the Irish peerage was nothing short of catastrophic. Malcomson notes that less than half of the peers of Ireland made for a clear-cut example of ‘Irish’ nobility, that is to say individuals who had a membership of the Irish House of Lords, who could boast at least some Irish ancestors, who had a residence and estates in Ireland, and might be called an Irishman (Malcomson 1978, 294). Instead, vast numbers of Irish noble titles belonged to Englishmen, many of whom had never set foot in the country. C.R. Mayes relates the account of an early English purchaser of an Irish title who recorded that he was “certain that there [are] such towns as Lucan and Granard, but [I] cannot find it on the map, but divers tell me for certain there is such a place ... if it is possible we will change Granard for a whole county” (qtd in Barnard 23). In fact, so many Irish peers were content to live out their days in London that throughout the latter half of the century there was “a distinctive dearth of temporal peers in the Irish House of Lords, because [so] many of the then Irish peers were Englishmen, absentees, or bad attenders” (299). As for their landed estates,
Ireland’s artificially stunted economy\textsuperscript{128} meant that many noble ‘mansions’ were dwarfed in comparison with even modest residences of the British quality. The relative cost of fashionable life in London financed by a weak Irish income meant that it was not unusual for Irish peers to be crippled with debt, in contrast to many Ascendancy professionals such as William Connolly, the son of an inn-keeper, who was Ireland’s wealthiest man on his death in 1729, or the tradesmen Joseph Leeson, a brewer’s son who built Ireland’s largest mansion in 1755 before being hastily ennobled the next year (Barnard 26). Worse still, the embarrassing poverty of Irish peers was fully inheritable. In 1720, Lord Blayney had to be bailed out of debt by George I, who finally acquiesced, “being desirous to support the dignity of our nobility” (qtd in Barnard 26). The seventeenth-century Earls of Cavan and Roscommon amassed so much hereditary debt that they ended up totally at the mercy of charity from the state, with their descendants still harassing the government for money, and receiving it, in 1744 (27).

In Britain, unsurprisingly, there was little question that an Irish title made for a drastically less favourable honour than an English or Scottish one. “For [many] Englishmen,” notes McCahill, “the Irish peerage constituted a sort of middle passage ... it consoled them until they finally attained the great object of their ambitions – a British peerage” (265). In 1776, during revolutionary turbulence in the American colonies, Horace Walpole was moved to proclaim that he could not find anything but “brewers and poultry” amongst the Irish House of Lords, denouncing them all as “mushrooms ... half of whom will not be gentlemen in under a generation or two ... their very number makes them a mob...” (qtd in Cannon 16\textsuperscript{129}). Indeed, the American wars saw a particular escalation in

\textsuperscript{128} Successive embargoes had been imposed on the Irish economy at the close of the seventeenth century to ensure that it bolstered, rather than rivalled, English economic expansion; a ban on the exportation of cattle and dairy products (1680) was followed by a ban on colonial trade (1696) and a ban on the exportation of wool (1699). The suppression of the woollen industry in particular ushered in an age of endemic poverty and famine, vigorously criticised by Jonathan Swift (Lecky 1:173-80).

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Letters to Mann}, 16 July 1776.
Irish ennoblements, possibly as a precautionary measure against a similar uprising in Dublin. In 1776 alone “Lord North’s ministry created twenty-two Irish peers, eighteen of them within a two-day period” (F.G. James 89). Thus, depending on the circumstances, the granting of an Irish title could just as well have been considered a demotion, rather than an elevation, in one’s political career. Michael McCahill records Lord Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, who upon receiving an Irish marquisate in 1801, reacted with outrage rather than gratitude: “As I was confident there had been nothing Irish or pinchbeck in my conduct, or in its result,” he raged, “I felt an equal confidence that I should find nothing Irish or pinchbeck in my reward” (qtd 274). Tellingly, in 1761 Lord Kildare preferred to walk in the royal coronation procession as a British viscount rather than marching as Ireland’s only marquess (Malcomson 1978, 304).

What is particularly interesting about the Irish peerage, however, is that it was not the only group to claim ‘nobility’ in eighteenth-century Ireland. In fact, for many Catholics and Protestants alike, it was a distinctly non-noble entity, whose poor reputation only confounded its status as an imposed regime of new-men who had usurped the true elite rulers of the country. Since it was considered to be primarily composed of ‘New English’ families, the peerage was regularly derided by critics from all backgrounds as a vulgarly recent construction, thrown together from the disparate descendants of Cromwell’s army; in the words of one political analyst of 1742, the Irish House of Lords was a measly concoction of “late descendants of the subalterns or common soldiers of Cromwell’s officers, or the newer offspring of clerks of offices” (qtd in T. Barnard 448-9). On the other hand, since the peerage still incorporated a number of ‘Old English’ Catholic and even Gaelic family lines, it was open to the accusation of inherent contamination with ‘mere Irish’ blood. Despite popular conviction, the latter of these criticisms was probably closer

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130 Lord Frederick North, second Earl of Guilford, Prime Minister 1770-1782.
to the truth: The Irish Ascendancy was, in reality, far from the ethnically pure society of New Englishmen it was vaunted to be. In a study of patronymic repetitions in Irish records, Francis Godwin James notes that “over half the peers studied had at least one pre-1485 Irish ancestor. At least seventeen were related by descent or marriage to a Fitzgerald, eleven to a Barry, eleven to Butler [all quintessentially ‘Old English’ names], nine to an O’Brien, six to a Burke, six to a Dillon, and five to a McCarthy”. In fact, records James, only five of the one hundred peers counted in the attendance records of the Irish House of Lords between 1692 and 1727 were descended from post-Cromwellian settlers (11).

Running parallel to the idea that the disempowered Old English were Ireland’s true nobility, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed a revived interest in Gaelic nobility, whose major branches had mostly been driven into exile during the Tudor conquests. “The growing interest of the aristocracy in Irish history”, notes Francis Godwin James, “including most definitely its Gaelic and Norman past, reflected the current European fascination with Celtic and other early cultures ... Some of the Burkes [an Old English line] changed their names back to de Burgo, the Powers to de la Poer” (155). A prime example of this Gaelic ‘revival’ is the monumental Irish history Foras Feasa ar Éireann [Foundation of Knowledge on Ireland], originally composed in 1634 by the Old English cleric Geoffrey Keating (an Anglicisation of Seathrún Ceitinn), with English translations appearing in both Dublin and London up until 1734 (B. Cunningham 14). The work is particularly notable not only in that it reasserted the natural leadership of Ancient Irish dynasties, but also in that it resurrected the defunct Irish term Éireannach (Irish person) to mean exclusively an Irish Catholic (Bartlett 2014, 518). It was the ancient high-king Brian Ború who had “appointed surnames of distinction, to all the several branches of the Milesian race,” reads the 1723 Dublin edition, “in order … that the genealogies might be better preserved with more regularity” (Keating 90). The translator of this edition was
certainly aware of the work’s cultural significance, describing it in his dedication as:

a most sacred refuge … from the centuries of illiterate and unjust men who insolently attempt to vilifie and traduce the lineal descendants of the great Milesians (a marshall, a learned, and generous race), as a nation ignorant, mean-spirited and superstitious (10-11).

Keating’s careful association of Gaelic lineage and Catholic faith with ‘true’ Irishness thus adds a crucial new layer of racialised identity to early modern Irish society: by linking the Catholic Irish together by their shared Gaelic lineage, Foras Feasa simultaneously excluded the Protestant Irish by reason of their British heritage. Thus, though they may have lived in Ireland for generations, ‘New English’ dynasties could not possibly claim ‘Irish’ nobility because they were not ‘racially’ Irish. The Catholic Stuart Kings, conversely, could claim rightful authority over Ireland because of their original ‘Scotic’ descent (B. Cunningham 16). Keating’s interpretation of Irish history also delineated a valuable element of nationalist rhetoric by foregrounding the historical links between the Old English and traditional Gaelic nobility – a shared identity which significantly distinguished them from their New English successors. The Old English, after all, had long held a reputation for being Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis – ‘More Irish than the Irish themselves’. Back in 1612, the poet and member of parliament Sir John Davies had identified this very phenomenon as the reason the Irish had never been subdued: the Old English nobles had totally assimilated into Gaelic culture, he bemoaned; the two great heads of the Bourke family now called themselves “Mac William Eighter [William’s Son Lower]” and “Mac William Oughter [William’s Son Upper]”, the Baron of Athenry now went by “MacYoris”, and the Baron Duboyne had taken the name Surname MacFeris. “This they did in contempt and hatred of the English name and nation, whereof these degenerate families became more mortal enemies than the mere Irish” (qtd in Crowley 59).

The fact that a considerable number of Irish people seem to have laid claim to
ancient Gaelic privilege is reflected in eighteenth-century caricatures of the Irish in drama and literature. Bombastic pride in family name, linked with fantastical and often ridiculous historical figures is an element of Irish caricature that can be found throughout the literature of eighteenth-century Britain. Tobias Smollett’s *Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771), for example, sends up the typical Irishman at Bath in the heiress-hunting figure of Master Macloughlin:

> My name (said he) is Master Macloughlin; but it should be Leighlin O’Neale, for I am come from Tir-Owen the Great; and so I am as good a gentleman as any in Ireland; and that rogue, your servant, said I was a tailor, which was as big a lie as if he’d called me the pope. I’m a man of fortune, and have spent all I had ...

Later in the novel, again, the idea of the treacherous Irishman using phoney genealogy to manoeuvre his way into English high society is given a somewhat sinister edge, when Jery describes some of his new acquaintances:

> The Irishman is a political writer, and goes by the name of my Lord Potatoe [sic]. He wrote a pamphlet in vindication of a minister, hoping his zeal would be rewarded with some place or pension ... [then] he published an answer to his own production. In this he addressed the author under the title your Lordship with such solemnity, that the public swallowed the deceit ... (120).

In the 1759 London stage play *Love-à-la-Mode*, the Irish-born Charles Macklin (originally Cathal Mac Lochlainn) rehearsed the trope of family pride through the medium of farce. Macklin’s main character, Sir Callaghan O’Brallaghan – a figure who at once imports the barbarity of the ‘Wild’ Catholic Irish and the administrative incompetence of Protestant landlords – derives his main dramatic motivation from the ostensibly ridiculous idea that a Irish surname was not only as good as, but better than a British noble title. As the (heiress) romantic heroine is informed near the beginning of the play, “You may laugh

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131 Interestingly, the McLoughlins are part of the once-prestigious *Uí Néill* dynasty, which traditionally ruled the northern territory of *Tír Eoghain* (a region rather than a person) – suggesting that this character was based on a real encounter (perhaps even with Charles Macklin, discussed below).
madam, but he [Sir Callaghan] is as proud of his name as any of your lovers are of their
titles” (1.4). The farcical nature of Sir Callaghan’s parochial pride, however, may well be
seen as provocative – in that it actively defines true Gaelic nobility against a denigrated
“upstart” British nobility: “My moder’s side …” he announces, “is a little upstart family
that came in vid one Strongbow … my father’s side are all the true old Milesians, and the
O’Shoknesses and the Mac Loughlins … and all the tick blood of the nation” (1.19).
‘Strongbow’ (Richard de Clare, second Earl of Pembroke), of course, was the symbolic
fountain of British-style nobility in Ireland, while his marriage to a Leinster princess in
1166 was the founding myth of the colonial ‘Irish nation’; in stark contrast, Mac Loughlin
(Mac Lachlainn, meaning ‘Son of the Lakes/fjords’) is the Gaelic original of Macklin’s
own Anglicised name – hinting at an intimate sense of lineal ‘blood’ that existed
independently of all British institutions.

Far more explicit was Macklin’s later play The Trueborn Irishman (1762), which,
owing to its subject matter, had to be re-titled The Irish Fine Lady before it went on stage
in London. Here, Macklin presents the typical naiveté and rusticity of the Irish gentleman
as inherently superior to the superficial trappings of title and honour in the British system.
When Murrough O’Dogherty, the trueborn Irishman of the title, learns that his wife wishes
him to vie for a peerage, he replies with disdain for the whole institution:

She would have me desert my friends and sell myself, my honour, and my
country, as several others have done before me, merely for a title … and sink the
antient name of Dogherty in the upstart title of Lady Thingum (1.8).

“[W]hat are your Jones and your Stones …” he declares later, when he has convinced his
wife to value her Gaelic Irish lineage,

and a parcel of little pimping names that a man would not pick out of the street,
compared to the O’Donovans, the O’Callaghans [etc.] … for they come out of the
mouth like a storm; and are as old as the Bog of Allen, though they have been
dispossessed by upstarts and foreigners” (2.48).

The ‘foreigners’ he refers to are, of course, the ‘Irish nation’ and their British cousins, judged by a cultural standard which holds Gaelic nobility as a touchstone of social value, while re-appropriating established peers as the pretentious arrivistes. Unsurprisingly, the London production of Macklin’s later play caused immediate outrage – despite the fact that he had vigorously edited the text for smoother consumption by its British audience, while in Bath it only ran for one night. “Macklin was yet indiscreet enough to bring it on the London stage …” declared one observer, “but John Bull, pit, and gallery, said no!” (qtd in Goring 64).

The rhetoric of superior Gaelic nobility only grew more popular in the 1780s and 90s – an era which saw the unprecedented rise of a Home Rule movement within the Ascendancy, firmly supported by Dissenting and Catholic lobbies such as the armed Ulster ‘Volunteers’. In one little-known novel of 1797, Mrs F.C. Patrick’s The Irish Heiress (1797), the author identifies the unrecognised Gaelic and Old English nobility as the Catholic saviours of British social order, while the Westminster peerage, ruined by fashionable excess and superficial morals, is conversely associated with the architects of the French Revolution. Augusta O’Flaherty, the novel’s heroine, is born of a Catholic Irish squire and a Protestant English noblewoman, yet she derives her sense of nobility from her convictions of Gaelic lineage. Describing her family’s history, she explains:

My father was not noble, but of acknowledged good blood ... My grandfather was offered a title by the late Duke of Bedford, on condition of rising his influence at an election – his answer was an Irish one, for it was a question, ‘Is it me, honey? Me, Terry O’Flaherty that you would make a lord? Me, that am descended from the kings of Connaught? ... everybody knows me and mine these four thousand years, nor will they forget those after me as long as they keep up their names, but if we take up titles, then we shall mix with all the new lords that nobody knows, nor anybody wants to know (1.5-6).

Indeed, though Patrick’s novel is primarily concerned with Catholic vindication, her
characters also represent a section of the Protestant Ascendancy who, through the rhetoric of nationalist politics, do not shy away from proclaiming themselves Ireland’s ‘real’ hereditary rulers – a clandestine nobility which has been bubbling menacingly beneath the surface of colonial Ireland for centuries. Moreover, the blossoming of this ‘true’ aristocracy goes hand in hand with a revolutionary image of Ireland’s true ‘elite’ throwing off the yoke of British rule. It is a concept of nobility, in fact, that relies even more on notions of pure blood than the British system of honours (one cannot be ‘ennobled’ into Gaelic lineage) – a fact of which Patrick seems well aware; when Augusta’s noble father-in-law Lord Mostyn questions the significance of ‘Irish blood’, her outraged father replies in kind: “it is not withstanding ... the purest [blood],” he roars, “for Ireland has been once betrayed, while England has been often conquered”(emphasis added 1.9).

The idea of ‘pure’ Irish blood itself posed a significant counterbalance to the traditional parameters of noble race. For, as explored in Section 1, the very notion of isolated bloodlines worked in opposition to the anarchic descent of the non-noble – an uncontrolled mixture of lineages and inheritance, which inherently diffused and negated the potential for hereditary privilege. The racialised ‘families’ of ‘native’ Ireland, however, with their individual surnames identifying lineal blood patterns and connected with distinct locations and political allegiances, actually provided a template of pureblood inferiority faced with a heterogeneous colonial elite. The co-existence of competing racialised identities, on the one hand, and the model of noble race promoted by the colonial establishment, on the other, was thus deeply problematic. The juxtaposition of the term ‘Irish’ (denoting Catholicism, barbarism, and disloyalty) with the term ‘nobility’ (ideally denoting British descent, British civility, and parliamentary fidelity to Westminster) invoked a set of cultural anxieties that were difficult to ignore. Even the most ‘English’ of the Anglo-Irish nobility in eighteenth-century British literature are invariably stained with
the negative associations of Irish identity. Nor were these negative associations entirely symbolic. The tradition of *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis* could, in many respects, be understood as the literal effects of Irish culture on the body and mind of highborn Englishmen. The native Irish are known for their “gaiety and levity of their dispositions,” remarked Oliver Goldsmith in *The Royal Magazine* in 1760, and it was notable that the English, when transported to Ireland, “become gay and thoughtless, more fond of pleasure, and less addicted to reasoning. This difference of disposition cannot properly be said to arise from climate or soil … but merely from the nature of their government” (qtd in Wheeler 2000, 5132). Such notions are recurrently touched upon in eighteenth-century literature, especially in the intriguing character of the ‘degenerated’ Irish peer.

The depiction of Irish peers in Elizabeth Blower’s 1785 society novel *Maria; A Novel*, for instance, is a prime example of ostensibly elite blood betraying the inherent degeneracy of the Irish condition. This novel’s villainous rake, Lord Newry, presents a traditional peerage identity that has been perverted by his very Irishness, embodying a strangely paradoxical persona, in which the body and title of a peer seem to have been somehow possessed by the treacherous spirit of the wild Irishman. When he is first introduced, entering into a drawing room full of wellborn ladies, the duplicity of Newry’s character almost envelops his physical presence:

Lord Newry was a native of the Kingdom of Ireland, about the age of five and twenty; his figure was tall and manly; his eyes were dark and had a fire and wildness bordering on ferocity; his complexion was florid, his features prominent and masculine; and his profile of the Grecian turn ... render[ing] his person generally pleasing to the ladies; though his manners had more ease than elegance, and his conversation displayed a greater degree of spirit and vivacity, than wit or solid understanding ... (emphasis added, 1.137).

Terms like ‘native’, ‘wildness’, and ‘ferocity’ here leave little doubt about Newry’s

132 The essay, it is important to note, was published anonymously. *The Royal Magazine; or, Gentleman’s Monthly Companion* 3. Jul.-Dec. 1760 (139).
decidedly Irish constitution, almost boiling over into his ‘florid’ complexion, but what is most interesting about this description is the veneer of exotic beauty which masks his true nature. Even his civility seems ‘not quite right’, presenting all the expressions of wellbred disinterestedness, while appearing to tend towards ‘spirit’ and ‘vivacity’ which can be understood in the given context as intemperance and extravagance. As it follows, Newry goes on to abuse the symbols of his peerage in order to satisfy his basest desires. Drawing on the tradition of the ‘fortune hunting’ Irish squire, a routine characteristic of the contemporary literary Irishmen (including Sir Callaghan, ‘O Dogherty, and Mac Loughlin, above), he uses his social rank in order to seduce every woman he meets in hierarchical order, starting with the highest-ranking heiresses and working his way down the social ladder. When he discovers that the young heroine of the novel is considerably less wealthy than he had supposed, he resolves “to renew his suit with redoubled ardour: thinking the hope of possessing a coronet ... was enough to turn the head and enchant the heart of the wisest woman in the world in her circumstances” (2.86). This damning attribute of performing one’s peerage badly – and thus exposing one’s inherent lack of natural nobility – is an essential quality of Newry and other characters of his ilk. Typically, he misunderstands the critical tools of conspicuous display, using it not to uphold the dignity of his rank but simply to enjoy himself; concordantly, instead of presenting himself as a local scion, he is content to boast of his tyranny – importing a wealth of contemporary stereotypes about the brutish Anglo-Irish landlord. Locked in a conversation with a gaggle of admiring noblewomen, he gloats about his extravagant lifestyle, mistakenly believing that it will impress his English audience:

I wish you had seen the crowds that used to resort to my father’s seat in Armagh to celebrate my coming of age. My lord kept open house there for several months, during which time two conduits placed on each side of the great door ran continuously with claret and whiskey ... there were forty boys every day constantly employed in the single article of picking parsley ... There never was
another man in the world that had such a damned fine taste for spending money as my father. I have heard him say himself, that when he was a young fellow, he kept an opera girl in Paris, who used to curl her hair every day with bank bills ...

Newry’s audience listens on in horror as he continues his tales of debauchery, entirely insensitive to the spectacle that he is making of himself. When he mentions that many of these festivities were so fuelled with alcohol that they resulted in duels, riots and even mass murder, his listeners are left agog. When asked if there were not several prosecutions pertaining to such activity, Newry seems to reflect the highly criticised tradition of peer trials in which all manner of crime could be excused (see chapter 1.3.3), “Oh no …”, he assures his friends, “we easily adjust matters of that kind in my country; our family and some others united interests; money flew about; the effects of those affrays were brought in accidental murder; and the delinquents came off scot free.”

Lord Newry is an interesting figure to compare with the ‘Irish’ peers of Elizabeth Gunning’s 1794 novel *Lord Fitzhenry*, which associates the duplicity of the Irish nobleman with both Catholic and Revolutionary insurgency. The Lord Fitzhenry of the title, however, is not an Irish but an English peer, despite the fact that his name bears marked connotations of Old English Catholic dynasties. This young paragon of British nobility is a touchstone of morality throughout the novel, and his introductory description is certainly worth comparing with the exotic deceptions of Blower’s Lord Newry:

At eighteen his height was determined sufficiently above the common size to give dignity, and not enough to take anything away from gracefulness ... his heart was struck in a handsome type ... he was frank, generous, gentle, tender, thoughtless, spiritless, rash and precipitant; qualities that never acted together ... His classical knowledge intitled [sic] him to the approbation of learned men, and his knowledge in the science of refined politeness to the admiration of well-informed women. If to all these agrémens be added his pretensions to a splendid earldom ... the calculations of good deserts and good fortune will know exactly how to estimate Lord Fitzhenry ...

Fitzhenry’s Irish nemesis, Lord Hillford, provides a direct foil to this poised, ‘bred’
nobility. Possessing yet another misleading name (possibly meant as an additional layer to his many deceptions), the Irish Hillford does not only manifest sexual profligacy and a profound disregard for decorum, his Irishness is actually expressed as a maniacal compulsion to convert those around him to Catholicism – a skill he seems to have perfected on the European continent where he has recently spent much time in conversation with the Pope. In fact, Lord Hillford initially hides his own Irishness – which might be taken as a clue to his duplicity; he is introduced as an Italian before the reader later discovers that he is “only a native of Italy by adoption, his title, and his estates were Irish” (1.194). “France has loaded him with honours,” we are told,

and Italy conferred the high dignity of Prince of the Empire on this bigot son of her own holy church – Lord Hillford was a bigot, stern, harsh, cruel and relentless – vices to which his hypocrisy gave the colour of moderation, placidity, humanity, and acceptability ... Lord Hillford was an adept in hypocrisy – he was everything but what he appeared to be (1.192-3).

That is, he is the opposite, trait by trait, of the true nobility expressed in the body and mind of young Fitzhenry. Furthermore, he figures not only as an explicitly treacherous version of Blower’s Lord Newry, but unlike Newry he has taken this dimension of deception in hand, using it actively and directly against the Anglican faith, against the British state, and against the moral integrity of his own supposed rank.

Literary Irish peers could be said to represent the height of anxiety underlying eighteenth-century notions of Irish rulership – whether it be ‘native’ or Anglo-Irish, Protestant or Catholic – in the turbulent lead up to the 1798 rebellion and the subsequent shift of governmental power to the Union (see chapter 3.1.3). As has been explored in this subchapter, Irish peers ultimately represent a ‘racially’ pure strand of an already highly racialised society, which, in this very racialisation, presented a direct challenge to the integrity of British hereditary privilege. Irish nobility offers a much more intricate vision
of the racialised body, because it does not simply oppose a noble-caste of ‘super-humanity’ against a slave-caste of ‘sub-humanity’, but – *by its very essence of racialisation* – allows the slave-caste to independently assume a race-based superiority, while permitting an invalidation of the noble-caste on account of its lack of racial integrity. Whether it was used to vindicate Ireland as a land peopled by Hibernian royalty, or to condemn the inherent barbarity of the native Irish, the lineage-based identity of the Irish peoples during the eighteenth century laid the groundwork for the subsequent, and relentless racial discourse of the inferior Irish that survived into the twentieth century. As such, the remarkably paradoxical ideas of nobility in eighteenth-century Ireland offer a particularly clear insight into the importance of nobility and noble blood in the construction and vindication of racialised identities before race.

2.3.2: Nobility and Race in Highland Scotland: James Macpherson’s *Ossian* poems and Samuel Johnson’s *Journey through the Western Islands of Scotland*

The frontispiece to the (anonymously edited) 1745 compilation of travel narratives, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels ... Compiled from the Curious and Valuable Library of the Late Earl of Oxford*, displays sixteen depictions of men and women in their respective national dress, including the ‘Dutch’, the ‘Muscovites’, the ‘Hottentots’, the ‘Mexicans’, the ‘Floridians’ and ‘Virginian Indians’ and, in the bottom right hand corner, the ‘Scots Highlanders’ (see figs 9 and 10). The images present a typical eighteenth-century vision of national type as defined by climate, soil and civility: each representative couple is depicted against a backdrop of their ‘native’ landscape, and each is attributed a symbol of their civilisation, such as a sled for the Laplanders, a minaret for the Turks, and, bleakly, an
incoming European ship for the Floridian Indians. The bodily ‘deformities’ of the Negroes and Hottentots likewise stand in as a sort of national dress unto themselves, with both groups displaying typically distended breasts, while the Hottentots’ ankles are decorated with sheep guts (one length of which dangles between the legs of the female figure, perhaps hinting at \textit{sinus pudoris}). Out of all the national representatives on display, however, the most interesting are the Scots Highlanders: in this depiction, the (apparently elite) male figure is dressed in a doublet and sash, while his wife wears a full court dress, both fancifully tailored in matching tartan; they stand against a backdrop of barren mountains, while the man’s gaze follows his wife’s pointed finger out of the scene. The Highlander’s left hand firmly grasps his representative object: a rifle. This dense cluster of Highland symbolism is, of course, especially poignant considering the year of this volume’s publication: in 1745, the Highland clans would rise up in support of the ‘young pretender’ Charles Edward Stuart, leading to a massive defeat which would permanently transform the balance of hereditary jurisdiction in Scotland. In fact, one year after the publication of the \textit{Collection}, this Scots Highlander would no longer have the right to brandish a weapon, disarmed under the ‘Act of Proscription’ of 1746, nor would he or his wife be suffered to wear tartan fabrics or indeed any form of Highland dress, forbidden by the ‘Dress Act’ of the same year (Jonsson 41).
Fig. 9: ‘A Description of the Habits of Most Countries in the World’. Frontispiece to *A Collection of Voyages and Travels … Compiled from the Curious and Valuable Library of the Late Earl of Oxford* (London: Thomas Osborne, 1745).
The notion of the Scottish Highlander as an ethnic *other* within Britain assumed a wealth of contradictory significance during the second half of the eighteenth century: on the one hand, the Gaelic Scot represented Catholicism, backwardness, treachery, and foreignness, while, on the other, Highlanders were increasingly associated with military excellence, ancient-blood, romantic patriotism, and stalwart Tory tradition. At the very crux of these opposing notions was hereditary clan chiefdom – an alternative vision of British nobility, which not only found legitimacy in the economic structure of Gaelic-speaking society, but which was also fundamentally interwoven with the traditions of Scottish peerage and royalty. William Mosman’s 1750 oil painting of the Young Pretender, for instance, the ‘Portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart’, was just one of many images
to depict the prince in full tartan regalia, asserting his clan chiefdom as an integral element of British kingship (fig. 8). At the very same time, the Highlands remained one of the most mysterious terrains in the Empire, largely bereft of urban settlements and major road systems, subject to clan law and jurisdiction until 1746, and speaking a language alien to the rest of Britain. It was a source of fascination, notes Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, that this mountainous land, home to exotic natives with an ancient way of life, was only a few miles from the dense urban hubs of Edinburgh and Glasgow (12). Just as the Swedish Linnaeus had adopted Lapland as a base for his anthropological experiments, Jonsson asserts, the Highlands became the “laboratory of the Scottish Enlightenment”, where large-scale ‘improvement’ projects in agriculture and social engineering could be considered in terms of a ‘polished’ nation civilising its decidedly ‘rude’ neighbour (12). In this context, the idea of Highland nobility occupied a unique conceptual space in eighteenth-century Britain – representing a ‘race’ of hereditary privilege as well as a decidedly inferior ‘race’ of un-English primitiveness.

The first and most prominent institution of blood privilege in Scotland was, of course, the Scottish peerage, which was assimilated into the British peerage after the 1707 Act of Union. As will be remembered from chapter 1.3, seventy-seven Scottish peers had once sat in the House of Lords at Edinburgh’s Parliament House, but these had since been replaced with a carefully chosen panel of sixteen representative Scottish Lords in Westminster (Allan 14). Though the Scottish Lords were held in immeasurably greater esteem than their Irish counterparts, they only played (as their diminutive representative number would suggest) a trivial role in British government. Mistrust and reticence on the part of the English Lords had ensured that Scots peers remained distinctly marginal in the upper house, with a ‘Peerage bill’ of 1719 (proposing a further nine representative peers) having
been voted down by a combined majority of Tories and Whigs (Shaw 30). Scottish representation in the House of Commons was similarly low, with the forty-five seats set aside for Scottish representatives not even guaranteeing a member of parliament for each Scottish county (Allan 15, 32). Alongside the peerage, there also existed a uniquely Scottish form of non-hereditary nobility within the country’s highly esteemed legal system. Maintained under the 1707 Articles of Union, the Scottish Court of Session traditionally granted its judges a “social status that in some respects resembled the French noblesse de robe” – a form of nobility, for instance, claimed by Lord Kames and Lord Monboddo, who both assumed a peerage title on being ‘raised to the bench’ (Sher 185). The Scottish ‘lairds’ formed yet another quasi-noble rank, their title being less esteemed than those of the peerage, but markedly more so than the English ‘squires’. Peers, judges, and lairds, indeed, all enjoyed their fair share of Georgian Britain’s economic “golden age”: David Allan has noted that two thirds of the one hundred and twenty-three estates in Scotland with incomes over £4,000 were owned by titled noblemen during the eighteenth century, while about one thousand lairds boasted property worth between £500 and £2,000 during this same period (109).

The second major system of hereditary privilege was the Gaelic clan system, to which some Scottish peers also belonged. The Dukes of Argyll, for instance, were (and are) also the hereditary Tòisichean (chiefs) of the Clann MacCalein Mór (Clan Campbell), while the Earls of Seaforth once formed part of the Clann Maccoinneach (Clan Mackenzie). Regardless of whether or not his clan chiefdom was joined with a peerage, however, a Tòiseach was at the forefront of a largely self-regulating socio-economic system – the hierarchy of which, as in Ireland, was grafted into the surnames of the Gaelic-speaking population. “Strictly defined, notes Martin MacGregor, “a clan was a biological phenomenon, a patrilineal descent group deriving from a common ancestor … as the ruling
family grew, collateral lines were established, and the clan expanded” (93-4). Indeed, the word *clann* itself means ‘children’, indicating the importance of familial ‘expansionism’ in the maintenance of hereditary power, while also incorporating the group’s lower members into a kind of “paternalistic trusteeship” (Sher 195). A clan’s territory, notes Andrew Mackillop, was in many ways the *hereditary* property of the entire clan, traditionally constituting what was known as their *dáithchas* or ‘heritage’, and was thus of vested interest to all members high and low (96). This traditional system was to be gradually and systematically disassembled during the improvement projects of the post-war period, replaced after the Heritable Jurisdictions Act of 1747 by a more “legalistic concept of heritage as ownership without social obligation” known as *oigreachd* or ‘inheritance’ (Sher 195). Unsurprisingly, in a social structure so fundamentally based on blood ties, the emphasis on genealogy was strong amongst Highland elites – with many families tracing their ancestors to the illustrious heroes of Celtic mythology, and the wealthier chiefs employing bards to document their ancestral history in verse (Stafford 13). “The Highlanders are exceedingly proud to be thought an unmixed people, and are apt to upbraid the English with being a composition of all nations;” remarked the military engineer Edward Burt dismissively in his *Letters from a Gentleman from the North of Scotland to his Friend in London* (1754), “but, for my own part, I think a little mixture in that sense would do themselves no manner of harm” (334). Contemporary representations of the Highlanders’ ancestral pride are certainly comparable to the contemporary manifestations of ‘genealogical nationalism’ in Ireland (examined in the previous chapter). In fact, caricatures of high-blown Scots gentlemen were regularly lambasted alongside their Irish and Welsh counterparts for their ancestral claims. In Macklin’s *Love-à-la-Mode* (1759), for instance, much of the farce normally reserved for the Stage Irishman is passed
off onto a Scottish character, Sir Archy MacSarcasm, who, boasts of his forbears in heavily accented dialogue. “In Scotland”, he announces,

aw our Nobility are sprung frai monarchs, warriors, heroes and glorious achievements; now here, ‘i the south, ye are aw sprung frai sugar hogsheads, rum puncheons, wool-packs, hop-sacks, iron-bars and tar-jackets; in short, ye are a composition of Jews, Turks, and refugees, and of aw the commercial vagrants of the land and sea – a sort of amphibious breed ye are (1.14).

The isolation of clan bloodlines in the uncivilised Scottish Highlands was also a fundamental element of their identification as an ‘other’ within human variety discourse. The mountain-dwelling Gaels, indeed, were often held up as a ‘local’ example of the same climate dynamics which had supposedly transformed the bodies of further-flung human populations. In his De generis, for example, Johann Blumenbach addressed speculation about the Highlanders’ anatomy as a matter of course, focusing on their lack of tight-fitting clothing. “The northern Scotch, who do not wear trowsers”, he notes, were rumoured to have particularly large penises, resembling “the remarkable genitory apparatus of the Æthopian” (though, having been assured “on the weightiest testimony”, Blumenbach later decides that such rumours are incorrect) (249). Oliver Goldsmith, for his part, took it for granted that “the natives of the Highland of Scotland … are short, broad and hardy,” while “those of the Lowlands are tall and shapely”, directly attributing this corporeal distinction to mountainous terrain and an attendant lack of food (History 91). Edward Burt makes a similar pronouncement, though he asserts the role of social rank in such physical distinctions: “The stature of the better sort … ”, he claims, “is much the same with the English, or Low-Country Scots, but the common people are generally small; nor is it likely that, by being half starved in the womb, and never afterwards well fed, they should by that means be rendered larger than other people” (334). Contrary to what he had heard in London, Burt affirms, the Highlanders’ features did not seem to be deformed, and they
were not immune to disease as rumoured – though he admits that they generally resisted “the ailments occasioned by luxury” (335). Samuel Stanhope Smith, the president of Hampden-Sydney College (later to become Princeton University), also subscribed to the idea of physical distinction between the upper and lower orders of Highlanders, employing this difference as a measure by which to consider anatomical degeneration in American slave plantations. In his *Essay on the Causes and variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787), he declares that “the poor and labouring part of the community are usually more swarthy and squalid in their complexion …”:

“they want the delicate tints of colour, the pleasing regularity of feature, and the elegance and fine proportions [of persons of better fortune]. Such distinctions have become more considerable by time, after families have held for ages the same stations in society … in which the laws have made the most complete and permanent divisions of ranks. *What an immense difference exists in Scotland between the chiefs and the commonality of the highland clans? If they had been separately found in different countries, the philosophy of some writers would have ranged them in different species.* A similar distinction takes place between the nobility and peasantry of France, of Spain, of Italy, of Germany (emphasis added 52-54).”

Here, indeed, the Highlander has become a *touchstone* point of reference for the anatomical differences engendered by social rank – a benchmark of the greater varietal distinctions between hereditary elites and heterogeneous commonality, intensified by the ostensible ruthlessness and permanence of their genealogically based hierarchy.

The most infamous texts addressing Gaelic nobility and ethnicity during the eighteenth century, however, were not scientific treatises but rather a series of fraudulent poems. In the 1760s, the Highland poet James Macpherson claimed to have ‘translated’ a series of ancient Gaelic verses he discovered in the north of Scotland, recounting numerous heroic adventures supposedly narrated by a third-century nobleman named Ossian. Macpherson produced three editions of these ‘translations’ in quick succession, the
Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland, and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language (1760); followed by Temora: An Ancient Epic Poem (1763); and the Works of Ossian (1765). All three, notoriously, were almost entirely of Macpherson’s own composition, yet enjoyed decades of enormous popularity nonetheless (Stafford 1-2). In fact, their success spread right across Europe: the Works of Ossian alone went through twenty-five editions, and was translated into twenty-six languages, being championed by major figures of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Hugh Blair and Adam Ferguson, and providing inspiration for later generations of romantic artists such as Goethe, Mendelssohn and Robert Burns (Stafford 1-2; Carruthers and McIlvanney eds, 120). The poems were enormously influential in two ways: firstly, they invested the ‘primitive’ history of the Highlands with Greco-Roman connotations of epic narrative, military valour, and illustrious dynasty, thus presenting an eminently ‘civilised’ image of Gaelic culture to an English-speaking audience; secondly, the works were profoundly validating for Scottish Highlanders themselves, for whom the legends and places referenced in the Ossian poems shored up a “deep sense of antiquity of their race” by reinforcing the mythological origins of Gaelic genealogy (Stafford 15). The Ossian poems, in effect, “offered a putative origin and antiquity to Gaelic literature that went further back than anything in Scots or English … a Gaelic, Homeric ‘epic’” (Carruthers and McIlvanney eds 120-1). For Macpherson, however, this deep sense of antiquity of race is fundamentally bound up with the Highlanders’ purity of blood and isolation from foreign influence. True and ancient traditions, he explains in his Temora, are to be found only among a people, from all time, free of intermixture with foreigners … Such are the inhabitants of Scotland. We, accordingly, find that they differ materially from those who possess the low and more fertile part of the kingdom. Their language is pure and original, and their manners are those of an antient and unmixed race of

133 Macpherson’s narrative and style loosely emulates the Fenian cycle of Irish mythology, ‘Ossian’ and ‘Fingal’ being based on Oisín and Fionn Mac Cumhaill. By the end of the century, works like Malcom Laing’s History of Scotland (1800) were routinely denouncing the ‘historical’ sources of Macpherson’s work.
men … [the Highlanders] are the genuine descendants of the antient Caledonians, and not a pretended colony of Scots [as in Scoti, or Irish]… (ii, iv).

This, then, is a Highland identity firmly based in the idea of ‘unmixed blood’, which in itself signifies the genealogical basis of the clan system – in a word, the Highlanders’ purity as a ‘race’ is here confounded with the systems of blood purity that underpinned the Gaelic systems of noble race. Interestingly, Macpherson is also careful to distinguish Highland Gaels from Irish Gaels (to whom he refers as the “colony of Scots” referring to the Scoti tribes), thereby conceiving Highland ‘racial’ purity in decidedly nationalistic terms. The debates surrounding the authenticity of the Ossian poems, as well as their literary value, notes Kenneth McNeil, were partly debates about the Highland Gael as “the originary ‘race’ of the Scottish nation … an aspect of heightened cultural and racial difference, as literary tradition, mode of government, language, and other sociological markers became identified with particular ‘races’” (27).

Macpherson’s romantic vision of ancient Highland ‘race’ is even more interesting when considered alongside his later Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland (1772), wherein he explicitly asserts that ancient Celts formed a distinct human variety. Unlike the ancient Tartars, who were “low of stature, a squat swarthy race of men”, Macpherson explains, the Celts “under whatever climate they were placed” were “tall, robust and lusty, of a ruddy complexion, with yellow hair and large blue eyes …”.

Among mankind, as in other animals, there seem to be a variety of species; some are by nature mere pigmies, others of gigantic proportions. No climate, no change of food can raise the Laplander to the height of the German. Of all the branches of the Celtæ, the ancient Britons, the Germans not even excepted, were the greatest in the height of their bodies. They generally exceeded by half a foot the tallest Romans … (emphasis added, 203).

One of the most notable elements of this varietal description is, of course, Macpherson’s rejection of climate theory – a rejection which is, indeed, necessary to support the
otherwise problematic construction of a ‘super-human’ race of people in the quintessentially ‘extreme’ climate of Highland Scotland. Instead, Macpherson asserts a firmly ‘racial’ mode of ethnic historiography – recalling the earlier race histories of Boulainvilliers and Bolingbroke by re-imagining the Germano-Celts and Tartars as opposing ‘branches’ of humanity, with one faction unambiguously superior to the other. This emphasis on blood over climate also links the anatomical superiority of the Celtic race with the pure-blood nobility of the characters in Macpherson’s Ossian poems. As Kenneth McNeil has noted, Macpherson’s Celts represent a tall, blond nobility while his Tartars are imagined as a small, dark commonality – inverting the stereotypical ethnic assessment of Highlanders as espoused by theorists like Goldsmith or Burt (McNeil 37). In fact, Macpherson’s ‘varietal’ descriptions of the ancient Celts are so idealised as to sometimes drift into almost novelistic rhetoric. Consider, for example, his account of ancient Celtic women:

The women did not yield to the men in stature … [they] were fair, blooming and stately, just and full in the proportion of their limbs; active, high spirited and bold. Their long yellow hair flowed carelessly down their shoulders, and their large blue eyes animated their looks into a kind of ferocity less apt to kindle love than to command respect and awe (206).

The “uncorrupted chastity” of Celtic women, as with Boulainvilliers’s Gothic women, is, according to Macpherson, one of the reasons for the Celts’ remarkable size – again carefully linking ideas of Celtic decorum and purity with their physical appearance. Likewise, Macpherson is also careful to subvert earlier ethnic stereotypes by refuting the notion that the Celts went unclothed, instead insisting that they wore close-fitting trousers and shirts, unlike the Persians who “adopted the womanish stole of the east” (215-6). In addition, he adds, the Celts were the cleanest among all the ancient peoples: “the
cleanliness of modern nations proceeds from luxury,” he states, “it was the result of nature among the Celtæ” (216).

Macpherson’s firmly racial understanding of ‘ancient’ human variety had a significant impact on Lord Kames, who later attributed the virtues of the Highlanders to their ancient blood, and their vices only to the ensuing harsh environment (climatic and political). Leading a particularly passionate defence of Highland populations in his *Sketches on the History of Man* (1774), he asserts that the ancient Caledonians had been, as evidenced in Macpherson’s Ossianic ‘translations’, the only civilisation to develop polished manners in the ‘first’ (hunter-gatherer) stage of human development. “[T]he manner of the Caledonians described by Ossian,” he claims, “[are] so pure and refined as scarce to be equalled in the most cultivated nations” (282). Kames illustrates his point with several lengthy quotations from Macpherson’s poem *Fingal*, which he also uses to exonerate the translator from recent accusations of inauthenticity; the poetic narrator Ossian, he insists, “was no inventor, but drew his picture of manner from real life” (307). Though the “magnanimity and heroism of the Caledonians” might seem absent in the present-day Highlanders, Kames proclaimed, this was only because “their country is barren, and their language deprives them of intercourse with their polished neighbours” (308). If one considered them closely, however, a uniquely Caledonian character could sometimes still be ascertained in the manner of the Gaelic-speaking Scots, who were “eminently hospitable”, had a natural “disposition to war”, and “when disciplined, make excellent soldiers” (308).

One writer who was certainly not swayed by Macpherson’s romantic vision of the ancient Celts was Samuel Johnson – nor did he give any credence whatsoever to the authenticity of the *Ossian* Poems. In his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), he records that few, if any, Gaelic-speaking peasants recognised the epic stories
supposedly ‘found’ by Macpherson, while some even pointed out incoherences in his translations. “I believe [the original Gaelic verses] never existed …” Johnson remarks in the Journey,

The editor, or author, never could shew the original … it would be easy to shew it if he had it; but whence could it be had? … It is too long to be remembered, and the language formerly had nothing written. [Macpherson] has doubtless inserted names that circulate in popular stories, and may have translated some wandering ballads … If we know little of the ancient Highlanders, let us not fill the vacuity with Ossian. If we have not searched the Magellanick region, let us however forbear to people them with Patagons (118-9)

The Journey itself, of course, alongside an account of the same voyage penned by Johnson’s travel companion James Boswell, The Journal of A Tour to the Hebrides (1785), provided two of the most notable investigations into Highland ethnicity of the eighteenth century – being neither works of human variety theory nor romantic visions of ‘uncorrupted’ Highland blood. Indeed, Johnson and Boswell both provide a distinctly unromantic account of the contemporary living conditions of the Highland Scots, considered primarily in terms of the socio-economic changes instilled by the Union and post-war disarmament acts. This is confounded by Johnson’s sardonic and somewhat affected anti-Scottish bias – which, of course, has a largely comic function in relation to his Edinburgh-born travel companion. Dr Johnson’s “prejudice against Scotland” remarks Boswell in his Tour on the eve of their trip, “was announced almost as soon as he began to appear in the world of letters … like the ancient Greeks and Romans, he allowed himself to look upon all nations but his own as barbarians” (Johnson, P. Rodgers ed. 6). Biased or not, Johnson’s descriptions of Highland populations showcase an extremely different – though equally racialised – vision of Gaelic Scotland from Macpherson’s pure-blood ‘super-humans’. Indeed, even his basis for doubting the authenticity of the Ossian poems, notes Roxann Wheeler, firmly asserts contemporary understandings of the Gaelic Scots as
an inferior human variety. Just as climate theorists like Montesquieu had dismissed African languages as “gibberish … believed to reflect an undeveloped culture because unwritten and composed of few words”, notes Wheeler, Johnson refuses to believe that anything as literary as the Ossian poems could be conceived in an ‘unpolished’ language like Scots Gaelic (195). “Earse”, he declares in the Journey, is “the rude speech of a barbarous people, who had few thoughts to express, and were content, as they conceived grossly, to be grossly understood” (118). Such a position, Wheeler suggests, is entirely in line with a racialised dynamic of colonial authority which functioned the same way in Highland Scotland as it did in the West Indies – constructing an image of the subordinate culture as a “feudal stage of society”, against which one could thus define a “racialised interpretation of Englishness” (192).

Certainly, a racialised sense of Englishness (and Lowland Scottishness) is just as important to Johnson and Boswell’s narratives as are their racialised Gaelic populations. Just as the Highlanders’ bodies, mind, morals and culture are expressed as a product of their isolation and unpolished mode of life, the bodies, mind, morals and culture of Johnson and Boswell represent the civilising influence of England and the Lowlands, steadily incorporating the region into political and ethnic union. “What the Romans did to other nations, was in great degree done by Cromwell to the Scots … ”, Johnson muses on seeing a Cromwellian defence tower at Fort George, “I was told at Aberdeen that the people learned from Cromwell’s soldiers to make shoes and to plant kail” (27). In both the Journal and the Tour, the Anglocentric improvement projects in Gaelic Scotland are consistently compared with colonial incursions into the New World, with the backwardness of Gaelic society likewise expressed in terms of varietal ‘retardation’. The Gaelic-speakers in Inverness, declares Johnson, were “ingenious and inquisitive”, yet their isolation from the civilising influence of England meant that they
were content to live in total ignorance of the trades by which human wants are supplied, and to supply them by the grossest means. Till the union made them acquainted with English manners, the culture of their lands was unskilful, and their domestic life unformed; their tables were coarse as the feasts of Eskimeaux and their houses filthy as the cottages of Hottentots (28).

One of the most striking encounters described in both texts recounts Johnson and Boswell’s visit to the village of Auchnasheal in the valley of Glen Shiel – which is, they discover, no more than a collection of shielings, or temporary dwellings used during the summer pasture. “I observed to Dr Johnson,” Boswells recalls of the visit, “it was much the same as being with a tribe of Indians” (Tour 84). Surrounded by curious villagers who Johnson later recognises as the impoverished remnants of the once-powerful Maccrea clan, Boswell cannot help but notice the “great diversity in the faces of the circle around us: some were as black and wild in their appearance as any American savages whatever. One woman was as comely almost as the figure of Sappho, as we see it painted” (86). Later, when watching their boatsman as he rows them across a river, Boswell again makes an observation on the man’s racialised appearance: he is “a robust, black-haired fellow, half-naked and bare-headed, something between a wild Indian and an English tar” (112). Johnson, in his description of the same encounter at Auchnasheel, is likewise moved to comment on the ‘inevitable’ ethnic peculiarities of such an inaccessible region: “Mountainous countries commonly contain the original, at least the oldest race of inhabitants, for they are not easily conquered …” he declares,

they are likewise long before they are civilised … That the primitive manners are continued where the primitive language is spoken, no nation will desire me to suppose, for the manners of mountaineers are commonly savage, but they are rather produced from their situation than derived from their ancestors’ (44).

While recognising the ‘antiquity of race’ in the Highlands, then, Johnson’s pronouncements have a strikingly generalising effect on the idea of Gaelic culture – his
very use of the term “mountaineer” to describe them is redolent of Linnaeus’s *Homo monstrosus alpinis*. The particulars of life in the Gaelic clans, according to this logic, are not the legacy of their illustrious Celtic forbears or even their unique cultural heritage, but simply the result of a certain geographical location and a certain exposure to climate. Highland culture, as it were, is not as much a ‘culture’ as it is a *specific degree of savagery*, which makes it directly relative to every other civilisation that might be subject to the same circumstances. *All* mountain societies, Johnson holds, maintain their original language, simply because they reside in the most inaccessible and least valuable territories to invade. Just as the mountain Scots speak Gaelic, he notes, the mountain Welsh speak Welsh; the mountain people of Biscay speak Cantabrian (*Montañés*), and those of the Dalecarlia speak “old Swedish” (*Dalmái*). “Mountaineers are warlike” because of their high degree of competition for resources; “Mountaineers are thievish” because their limited subsistence makes them poor; and just like the Amerindian tribes of the New world, “Mountaineers” tend to have “lost that reverence for property, by which the order of civil life is preserved” (45).

Johnson, however, also manifests a particular interest in the evident social hierarchy of Gaelic villages. In Auchnasheel, he notes that one old woman, who had brought the men some pales of milk, was possessed of a hut that was “distinguished by greater spaciousness and better architecture” than the others in the village – and when he and Boswell later feel guilty of having deprived her of the little food she had, they are informed by a Highland Lady “that we might spare our commiseration; for the dame whose milk we drank had probably more than a dozen milk cows” (*Journey* 42). In fact, the idea of blood-based hierarchy forms an essential part of his general appraisal of ‘mountain’ society: “Civility seems part of the national character of Highlanders”, he observes at Inverness, “Every chieftain is a monarch, and politeness, the natural product of
royal government, is diffused from the laird through the whole clan” (30). Similarly, Johnson considers the notion of pure blood in the Scottish clans – an idea that was so central to Jacobite tradition and Ossianic nationalism – as itself a natural feature of any mountain-dwelling society, while their genealogical assimilation into the rest of the British population is presented as just another part of the civilising process:

The inhabitants of mountains form distinct races, and are careful to preserve their genealogies … They who consider themselves as ennobled by their family, will think highly of their progenitors, and they who through successive generations live always together in the same place, will preserve local stories and hereditary prejudices. Thus every Highlander can talk of his ancestors … Such are the effects of habitation among the mountains, and such were the qualities of the Highlanders, while their rocks secluded them from the rest of mankind, and kept them an unaltered and discriminated race. They are now losing their distinction, and hastening to mingle with the general community (47).

Crucially, blood purity is here portrayed as a negative, even destructive aspect of clan society – while dignity of rank is imagined as an inevitable delusion of a long-isolated peasantry. Indeed, the “effects of habitation among the mountains” here includes a tradition of intermarriage which, following the general conjecture of climate theory, furthers every other corporeal effect of Highland environment, consolidating ethnic difference in the Highlanders from one generation to the next. Accordingly, the process of ‘interbreeding’ with Lowland populations is an essential aspect of the Highlanders’ ‘racial’ accession to English standards of social ‘polish’.

Interestingly, Johnson notices that this same isolation of bloodline has resulted in animals taking on a distinct appearance in the Scottish Islands. On the Isle of Skye, he records that the stags seemed to be much smaller in the mountains than they were in England, while he reports rumours of tiny horses and tiny cattle in the Hebridean islands of Barra and Rùm “where perhaps no care is taken to prevent that diminution of size, which must always happen, where the greater and the less copulate promiscuously”. Highland
cattle also seemed to lack horns, he records, but “what is produced by putting a horned and unhorned male and female together, no man has ever tried, that thought the result worthy of observation” (82). It is only a page later that Johnson notes the physical differences he has observed between different social orders on the island, where “the tallest men that I saw are among those of higher rank” – possibly, as with the mountain peoples, because “in the islands … [between ranks] one does not encroach here upon one another” (83-4). Such differences, he contends, are particularly evident in the highborn women, whose ease of life has allowed their full beauty to develop unhindered even by the extreme climate: “The ladies have as much beauty here as in other places,” he explains,

but bloom and softness are not to be expected among the lower classes, whose faces are exposed to the rudeness of the climate, and whose features are sometimes contracted by want, and sometimes hardened by the blasts. Supreme beauty is seldom found in cottages or workshops, even where no real hardships are suffered. To expand the human face to its full perfection, it seems necessary that the mind should cooperate by placidness of content, or consciousness of superiority (83-4).

Accordingly, Johnson often characterises the lower-ranking Highlanders as particularly physically agile – possessed of a corporeal sensibility that simply does not exist in more civilised societies. Even though they are not “perhaps able to endure a long continuance of manual labour”, he notes, they “can with great agility skip over the bog, or clamber the mountain” (84). Indeed, as he travels through one mountain pass he points out what he believes to be a naked rock at the top of one mountain, though the guides “who had better eyes”, could clearly see that it was snow.

James Macpherson and Samuel Johnson present two opposing views of Highland Scotland that are nonetheless equally racialised in their understanding of ethnic otherness in Scottish society. Macpherson vindicates the Scots Highlanders on account of their uncorrupted bloodlines, linking them to a tradition of ancient purity expressed through the super-human
anatomical beauty of his ancient Celts. Johnson uses this very same tradition of blood purity to denigrate the backwardness of Highland civilisation, nourishing and sustaining an ethnicity which has become debased by long continuance in a harsh environment, and which is likewise expressed through the savage and exotic physical form of contemporary Gaelic-speaking peasants. For both, however, the alternative nobility offered by clan hierarchy stands as an essential means for understanding inherent difference in the Highland body. The noble race espoused by Gaelic clan tradition here becomes a microcosmic representation of an ethnic group whose anatomical difference – whether racial or climatic in origin – is defined along the very same lines of isolated and uncorrupted bloodlines. The racialised nature of Highland nobility, in short, at once allows it to be cherished as a foundational aspect of British royalty and to be reviled as the apex of a primitive, foreign society; it can be a temporal vehicle of ancient virtues and illustrious legacy, or the persistent source of human degeneracy, born of isolated lack of civilisation and progress. Either way, nobility remains a fundamental template for understanding human difference in Highland Scotland at this time, highlighting a remarkably blurred distinction between ideas of noble, familial, and national ‘race’.

2.3.3: Nobility and Race in the South Seas: Race Thinking and Tahitian Nobility in the work of Joseph Banks and Johann Reinhold Forster

When the English ethnologist, James Cowles Prichard, published his *Researches into the Physical History of Man* in 1813, he included what had by then become a routine observation about the populations inhabiting the islands around Tahiti. There were two principle types of islander in this region, he recorded: the first “are universally in that rude
unimproved state, which precedes all division of professions and employments”, with a political system of “perfect equality” and the rudest “form and complexion approximate to those of the Negro”; the second type, however, were quite different, incorporating an elevated rank of people who are distinguished in many respects from the lower orders, and particularly in the physical description of their persons. Their form and complexion approach considerably towards those of Europeans, while the aspect of the inferior class borders closely on the rude and uncultivated constitution of the races arranged in the first division (250).

Prichard was drawing from decades of solid anthropological tradition: since the ‘discovery’ of Tahiti in the 1760s, natural philosophers had consistently distinguished the South Seas islanders among all exotic human varieties for their highly advanced system of social hierarchy – and, especially, for the upper orders of this hierarchy manifesting a remarkably ‘European’ body type, while the lower orders remained anatomically degenerate. What is perhaps most interesting about contemporary narratives of rank and race in the South Seas is how seamlessly and unquestioningly successive waves of theorists and commentators accepted the idea that precise social status had transformed the physical bodies of the Tahitians; so much so, in fact, that they manifested distinct human varieties. After all, the notion that a civilisation might be discovered wherein rank and race were visibly and unambiguously correlated had been implicit right across the spectrum of eighteenth-century human variety theory: from Hume and Cheyne’s distinction of nerve fibres and moral sensibility, to Buffon’s physiological differentiation between the urban rich and the rural poor, to Goldsmith’s and Blumenbach’s observations of skin colour degeneration in the lower ranks and ‘brilliant whiteness’ in the elite, the racialised ranks of Tahiti simply provided a particularly forthright example of the race/rank dynamic that had been accepted in the discourse of natural philosophy for generations. Furthermore, it is an idea of race and rank which involved the reinterpretation of Tahitian ritual and religion in
terms of ‘feudal’ social structures, constructing a schema of corporeal ‘race’ around an equally constructed schema of racialised, Euro-centric political hierarchy. The simultaneous projection of racial and social hierarchy in colonial Tahiti makes it a particularly interesting chapter in the history of race, subjected, as it was, to a full and explicit system of theoretical concordance between specific social status and specific physical stature. It was a correlation, furthermore, which held traditional notions of noble ‘civility’ at its core.

Kathleen Wilson has noted that Captain James Cook’s three voyages to the South Seas – first aboard the Endeavour (1768-71), and twice more aboard the Resolution (1772-5 and 1776-80) – fell during a period of “political, cultural, and imperial crises [which] had raised urgent questions about empire, ‘race’, and their relationship to national identity” (56). Indeed, as the British disseminated their civilisation around the globe, whole facets of this same civilisation seemed to be imploding, with revolution in the American colonies, calls for abolition of the slave trade, and violent tensions with indigenous peoples not only undermining the British colonial project, but consequently interrogating the very notion of ‘Britishness’ – and more specifically Englishness – in relation to the nation’s overseas possessions. In fact, claims Wilson, Cook’s Pacific voyages, and the celebrated personality of ‘Captain Cook’ himself, were fundamental to the contemporary rehabilitation of English national character in an imperial context. An endless series of biographies, dramas and paintings, she notes, constructed an image of Cook as a modern and enlightened English explorer, bringing art, government, and moral judgement to the most primitive corners of the world, and sowing seeds of British civilisation which would flourish indefinitely for future generations. This idealised image was considerably nourished by Cook’s famously upstanding character: a self-made man, born into a Scottish farming family in Yorkshire,
he was known above all as a beacon of humanity, professional discipline, and humility – even lauded for his sexual restraint (unlike his crew) in the face of the reportedly concupiscent women of the Pacific islands (58-61). The voyages, however, were also noted for their dedication to empirical research, receiving significant sponsorship from the Royal Society, the king, and the admiralty, for the commission of “trained naturalists, astronomers, and artists” who were to collect vast new banks of data and subsequently generate an “industry of highly ethnocentric commentary” on Pacific civilisations (56-8).

The idea that there were numerous and distinctive ‘races’ in the islands of the South Seas had already been established well before Cook’s first voyage. George Robertson, the master of the HMS Dolphin when it had briefly anchored at Tahiti in 1767, later recorded in his (less than eloquent) Discovery of Tahiti (1771) that there were “three distink colours of people here”,

which is a thing most difficult to account for of anything which we have yet seen, the red people are ten times more numerous nor the mustees, which is a medium between the whitest sort and the red or Indian colour, and the mustees are near ten times as numerous as the whitest sort (179).  

There were also, notes Robertson, “a great many familys of jolly fatt well made people,” on the island, “mutch fairer nor any that we ever saw before”, and these families seemed to form “the people of the first rank” (204). All of the servants who paddled these families from place to place in canoes, he observes, “[were] of a coper colour and their masters and mistresses seemd to have a great power over them, the whole of the fair people sit under the canopys” (227).

It was Louis Antoine de Bougainville, however, who arrived at Tahiti one year after the HMS Dolphin in 1768 and who claimed it for France under the name La Nouvelle-

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134 It should be noted that Robertson’s somewhat unique interpretation of spelling and grammar has been maintained.
Cythère, who probably had the greatest influence on how this island hierarchy was to be conceived – immediately recognising ranks he called les rois, les grands, les gens du peuple, les esclaves, and les valets (Oliver 752-3). For Bougainville, Tahiti was un monde d’idées premières, where even the thoughts of the islanders were as yet unsullied with the moral duplicity of the West. Amidst this ‘Elysium’, where he believed the weather was so mild and the food so bounteous that the sailors never fell sick, and that all islanders naturally lived long into old age, the social divides still ran deep. When Johann Reinhold Forster (soon to claim the position of naturalist aboard Cook’s second voyage) translated Bougainville’s travel narrative, the Voyage autour du monde (1771), he transcribed this account of Tahitian hierarchy for an English-speaking readership: “The distinction of ranks is very great at Tahiti, and the disproportion very tyrannical”.

the kings and grandees have the power of life and death over their servants and slaves, and I am inclined to believe they have the same barbarous prerogative with regard to the common people, whom they call Tat-einou, vile men. The grandees have livreees for their servants. In proportion as the master’s rank is more or less elevated, their servants wear their sashes more or less high. This sash is fastened close under the arms, in the servants of the chiefs, and only covers the loins in these belonging to the lowest class of nobility (J.R. Forster trans. 269-70).

The very notions of ‘grandees’, ‘liveries’, and ‘servants’ (seigneurs, livrées, and valets) here establish an important sense of modern European social organisation – despite the apparent incongruity of such. Indeed, even though the ‘servant’ Bougainville observes is very nearly naked, his ‘sash’ (pièce d’étoffe), by virtue of this language of European civility, does not become a symbol of moral degeneracy or social primitiveness as it might

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135 The text above is taken from Forster’s 1772 translation, A Voyage Round the World (not to be confused with similar titles authored by himself and his son). Since this translation, in the context of this chapter, is actually more relevant than the original French, the latter will be provided in notes.

136 [L]a distinction des rangs est fort marquée à Taiti, & la disproportion cruelle. Les rois et les grands ont droit de vie & de mort sur leurs esclaves & valets; je serois même de croire qu’ils ont aussi ce droit barbare sur les gens du peuple qu’ils nomment Tata-einou, hommes vilz; toujours est-il sur que c’est dans cette classe infortunée qu’on prend les victimes pour les sacrifices humains. Les seigneurs ont des livrées pour leurs valets; suivant que la qualité des maîtres est plus ou moins élevée, les valets portent plus ou moins haut la pièce d’étoffe dont ils se ceignent. Cette ceinture pend immédiatement sous les bras aux valets des chefs, elle ne couvre que les reins aux valets de la dernière classe des nobles (230-1).
have done amongst the Hottentots or Bushmen, but instead stands as a perfectly solemn declaration of the precise social rank of his master in the “classes” of Tahitian “nobility”.

The notion that Tahiti is a fundamentally hierarchical society indeed informs Bougainville’s very perception of their racialised differences. Notably, the Frenchman employs the term *race* to describe the island’s different social groups – a term which expressed the idea of ‘hereditary’ rank, while also importing a Buffonian dimension of varietal hereditary succession. Forster, accordingly, translates the term to ‘race’:

> The inhabitants of Tahiti consist of two races of men, very different from each other … The first, which is the most numerous one, produces men of the greatest size; it is very common to see them measure six feet … and upwards in height. I have never saw men better made and whose limbs were more proportionate: in order to paint a Hercules or a Mars, one could nowhere find such beautiful models. Nothing distinguishes their features from those of the Europeans: and if they were cloathed; if they lived less in open air, and were less exposed to the sun at noon, they would be as white as ourselves: their hair in general is black. The second race are of a middle size, have frizzled hair as hard as bristles, and both in colour and features, they differ but little from mulattoes (249).  

Here then, Bougainville has firmly set the groundwork for a thoroughly racialised vision of the upper and lower orders of Tahiti. Interestingly, each is implicitly assigned a different mode of varietal ‘causality’: the ‘first race’ already manifests a fundamentally European body type, replete with connotations of cultural and moral superiority in its comparison to ancient Greek figures, and so very slightly affected by climate that its complete transformation into a full ‘European’ variety requires little more than studied avoidance of the mid-day sun; those of the ‘second race’, on the other hand, are immediately characterised by those features which oppose them to ideals of European beauty, denote

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137 *Le peuple de Taiti est composé de deux races d’hommes très différentes, qui cependant ont la même langue, les mêmes mœurs & qui paroissent se mêler ensemble sans distinction. La première, & c’est la plus nombreuse, produit des hommes de la plus grande taille : il est ordinaire d’en voir de six pieds & plus. Je n’ai jamais rencontré d’hommes mieux faits ni mieux proportionnés; pour peindre Hercule et Mars, on ne trouveroit nulle part d’aussi beaux modèles. Rien ne distingue leurs traits de ceux des Européens; & s’ils étoient vêtus, s’ils vivoient moins à l’air & au grand soleil, ils seroient aussi blancs que nous. En général leurs cheveux sont noirs. La seconde race est d’une taille médiocre, les cheveux crépus & durs comme du crin, sa couleur & ses traits différent peu de ceux des mulâtres* (214).
varietal ignobility, and are definitively *unchangeable* (hair, height, and facial features) – their comparison to mulattos, moreover, identifies their darker skin colour not with climate, but with the *unchangeable and inherent* hereditary effects of racial, blood-based miscegenation.

The first English naturalist to accompany Cook aboard the *Endeavour* was Sir Joseph Banks, whose subsequent observations “catapulted him into prominence among natural historians” throughout Europe, gained him a directorial position at Kew’s Royal Gardens, and led to a lifelong friendship with George III (Gascoigne 9). Banks, a dedicated follower of the Linnaean method, was equally intrigued by the physical differences between ranks on the Tahitian islands, though he idealised the physique of the “superior sort” somewhat less than Bougainville. The tall and handsome upper orders, he notes, could not truly accede to the beauty of Europeans because of their generally ‘broader’ noses – a fault he nonetheless forgives by virtue of their remarkably fine teeth. The “inferior sort”, however, were certainly much smaller in stature – probably owing to their “early amours”, to which he believed they were “much more addicted … than their superiors” (1.334-5). Differences in the skin colour between ranks, for Banks, could be more or less directly attributed to their respective daily activities:

> those of inferior rank who are obliged in the exercise of their professions, fishing especially, to be much exposed to the sun and air are of a dark brown; the superiors again who spend most of their time in their houses under shelter are seldom browner (the women especially) than that kind of brunette which many in Europe prefer to the finest red and white (1.334).

What is most notable about Banks’s observations, however, is his interpretation of the Tahitian form of government, which he identifies as an “*early state of feudal laws* by which our ancestors were so long governed” (emphasis added, 1.432). The superior rank the Tahitians called the *Earee ra hie*, he claims, answers to the European rank of ‘king’,
being always the male head of the best family in the country. Ranking directly below the *Earee ra hie*, are a set of about one hundred important figures known as *Earees*, each of whom represents an individual district of the island, and whom Banks likens to the rank of ‘baron’. Accordingly, these baron figures appeared to rent their land by the parcel to a middling sort of islander, known as the *Manahounies*; these Banks dubs as ‘vassals’, since they offered their service to the local *Earee* in return for military protection. Each *Earee* also presided over a kind of court, at which their younger brothers held distinguished positions, and where they could display the splendour and riches of their estate. Between the ranks of *Earee* and *Manahounie*, Banks also identifies two additional median ranks, the *Erate* and *Towha*, whom he believed answered to the positions of ‘Yeoman’ and ‘Gentleman’ respectively. At the very bottom of Tahitian hierarchy were the *Toutous*, “who are almost on the same footing as the slaves in the East Indian Islands, only that they never appeared to us transferable from one [island] to the other” (1.433). Now, much like the comparable tendency among naturalists to compare Oceanic islanders with figures from Greek and Roman antiquity, this attribution of ‘feudal’ titles should be understood as conscious cultural interpretation – a deliberately Eurocentric presentation of an incredibly exotic civilisation using terms that a European reader could immediately understand. Yet, there is also an implicitly historicising element to Banks’s descriptions – situating this remote island community at a remarkably advanced ‘stage’ of civil progress. Indeed, the historicising conventions of the ‘four-stage theory’ and its variants are here used to portray the Tahitians as living in a sort of golden age of feudal hierarchy, where rank is natural and uncontested and the order of nature is imprinted onto the bodies of the islanders. At the same time, this historicised view of social order is overlaid with a quintessentially modern template of varietal hierarchy – the *Toutous* are here directly aligned with a modern
conception of slavery; Banks seems surprised that they are not bought, sold, and traded from island to island as in the British system.

Alongside this nascent form of European governance, Banks also recognises a significant degree of ‘civility’ in the way the Tahitians dress and present themselves. The custom of tattooing, he notes, though at first brutal to European eyes, often served the very same purpose for Tahitian women as black felt patches did for “our European ladies”; tattoos were a more extreme cosmetic recourse, he suggests, because even the best Tahitian complexions were not so brilliantly white as those of European ladies – yet their similar employment nonetheless demonstrated that “whiteness is [here] esteemed the first essential in beauty” (1.339). Likewise, the superior ladies of Tahiti, just like their counterparts in Europe, derived “gentle amusement” from sewing, dying, and constructing new clothes from bark cloth. Their general dress is “often very genteel”, he notes, and is composed of “a kind of petticoat wrapped around their hips”, made from a single piece of cloth two yards wide and eleven yards long – “for the rich seem to show their greatest pride in wearing a large quantity of cloth” (1.340). Atop all this, they wear wigs of “human hair plaited” in coconut oil, which are then wrapped around the head, “the effect of which if done with taste was most becoming” (1.342). In addition, Banks insists that all Tahitian islanders are remarkably hygienic, taking care to remove excess body hair and always perfuming themselves with a special coconut lotion infused with flowers and herbs. And though he warrants that the smell of coconuts was quite difficult for an unaccustomed European to adapt to, once one had adjusted to it, “it must be preferred to the odoriferous perfume of toes and armpits so frequent in Europe” (1.343).

The colonial projection of European civility and governmental systems is all the more interesting when contrasted with what the colonists appear to have been actually observing. Douglas Oliver, the foremost authority on Tahiti in the pre-colonial era, has
noted that what visitors interpreted as hierarchy and deference in island society was actually an extremely complex system of *tapu* (taboo), which marked out certain members of the community (often hereditarily based) as sacred and/or proscribed from normal social interaction. One of these ritual practices, for example, was the system of *ha’apori*, which translates as “to make fat and delicate by keeping out of the sun”, and which undoubtedly encouraged certain islanders (often distinguished as *tapu* from a very young age) to grow dramatically taller and more corpulent than others (Oliver 158). The physical bodies of those who underwent *ha’apori* were themselves considered *tapu*, and were subject to a broad range of ritualistic treatment: often the subjects could not walk on common ground, as they would render it *tapu* in their wake and thus forbidden to others, so they were carried everywhere or ferried in canoes; they were not permitted to feed themselves, so they had to be hand-fed by devotees; and, in the aim of bleaching their skin and developing as much body fat as possible, they were often confined to their dwellings for months at a time, whilst others brought them food and provisions (157-9). As J.C. Beaglehole explains in the introduction to Cook’s journal, “The *arii* commanded and was obeyed; he was addressed in special forms; his person, his clothing, his possessions were protected by *tapu*; he had his officials – his priest, his war-leader, his orator, his executive assistants … he had his mountain, his promontory, his gathering place for assemblies; he had his symbols of authority, his staff and spear … if he were an *arii nui* or *rahi* his sanctity extended to his house, his canoe, the ground on which he trod; his body and his head especially was sacred, or *tapu* (clxxix).

In Georg Forster’s later *Voyage Round the World* (1777) (to be further examined in chapter 3.1.1), the author provided a particularly interesting description of what he assumed to be a pantomime performed by the chief’s daughters, but which was, according to Oliver, probably a standard island ceremony used to validate agreements, wherein bark cloth and gorgets were hung as offerings from the waist of female *Arees* (Oliver 158-9). In Georg’s
eyes, however, the young noblewomen (as he sees them) are dressed in a strangely exotic version of European court fashion:

Their dress was remarkably different from the usual fashion of these islands. It consisted of a piece of brown cloth … [or] a piece of blue European cloth, closely wrapped around the breasts so as to resemble the close dresses which our ladies wear; a kind of ruff of four rows of their cloth, alternately red and white, rested on their hips … and from thence a great quantity of white cloth descended to their feet, forming an ample petticoat … the neck, shoulders and arms were left uncovered, but the head was ornamented with a kind of turban, about eight inches high, made of several skains [lengths] of plaited human hair… (216).

It is a description, of course, which bears remarkable similarity to the genteel dresses Banks had so admired among the ‘superior’ women he had encountered during Cook’s first voyage. The artist James Webber, who accompanied the second sailing of the Resolution, appears to have illustrated a similar ceremony, with his female figure donning a Tahitian version of European court attire, and her single exposed breast imparting a sense of allegory and aesthetic decorum to the scene (see fig. 11).
The influence of Bougainville and Banks runs deep in Joseph Reinhold Forster’s *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World* (1778), which would eventually become one of the most famous ethnographical works on Tahitian civilisation and language of the eighteenth century. Forster was, in fact, a last-minute choice for Cook’s second expedition on the *Resolution*, with Banks unexpectedly withdrawing shortly before the voyage (Gascoigne 10). Dour, irritable, and already disliked by many in the Royal Society (including Banks), Johann Reinhold Forster was so difficult to work with that he would become a constant bone of contention amongst the *Resolution*’s crew and its sponsors (10). Nevertheless, this former dissenting minister, born in Prussia to a Scottish family, had gained such a shining reputation as professor of natural history in London that Carolus Linnaeus had personally written to congratulate him on his appointment to Cook’s expedition: “never, I swear, have I known a man more noble and generous”, he exclaimed, “… you are a natural-born scientist … [the king] could not have chosen a more outstanding man” (qtd in Forster, Hoare ed. 53). Every bit as remarkable as his father was Forster’s eldest son Georg, who accompanied him aboard the *Resolution* as draughtsman and artist – and who ultimately published his own *Voyage* a full year before his father. Together, this extraordinary pair documented the flora, fauna, language, ritual and geography of the Pacific archipelago in an exhaustive detail “the likes of which had not been seen before,” (Gray, part 1). It was a distinctly ‘modern’ methodology, comparing extensive data from different island groups using a system of tables and indexes, which would eventually establish them amongst the foremost naturalist authorities of the late eighteenth century.

One of the most notable elements that Forster adopted from Bougainville was the term ‘race’ itself, which he employs to describe principle ‘subsets’ of Oceanic populations. Three distinct races, he observed, peopled the Tahitian archipelago: the “first...
race” was characterised by its lighter skin and more beautiful, athletic body type, and was found on the island ‘O-Taheitee’ itself; the “second race” was darker skinned and of slighter build, and mostly seemed to reside in New Caledonia; the “third race” was darker still, and was found further afield in the Friendly Isles (the Tonga archipelago) (Observations 303). What is interesting about these three principal ‘races’ is that, while they are each assigned to a distinct territory, they are also linked with a certain degree of environmental degeneration dependent on their social station. That is to say, while the first and most beautiful race lived on Tahiti, the lower orders of this same race had ostensibly ‘degenerated’ in such a fashion that they resembled the principal islanders of New Caledonia, and so forth:

Each of the [first] two races of men, is again divided into several varieties, which form gradations toward the other race; so that we find some of the first race, almost as black and slender as some of the second … [The O-Taheitee and the Society Isles] no doubt contain the most beautiful variety of the first race … the common people are most exposed to air and sun; they do all kinds of dirty work; they exert their strength in agriculture, fishing, paddling, building of houses and canoes; and lastly, they are stinted in their food. From these causes, they degenerate, as it were, towards the second race, but always preserve some remains of their original type; which in their chiefs or Arees, and the better sort of people, appears in its full lustre and perfection (154).

There thus seem to be several different layers of degenerative influence at work in Forster’s racial system: there is a basic geographic division of body type, implicitly maintained through successive generations, or subverted through migration and miscegenation (Bougainville, for instance, had suggested that darker women from other islands had been taken to Tahiti as tokens of war, subsequently darkening the skin of the lower orders) (254); at the same time, Forster’s system asserts the powerful effects of civilisation, which seem to resurface on every island in the same way, though not to the same degree. Even among the darkest skinned population in the Friendly Isles, Forster notes, the elite seemed to have maintained the typically light skin tone of O-Taheitee:
“many among them,” he writes, “especially the better sort of people, and the greater part of their women, approach near to the complexion of the O-Taheitean fair ones” (157). Implicit in these basic observations, is a strange congruence of rank and racial formation – light skin, it follows, is a direct consequence of the islanders’ polished mode of life, yet this lightness has also become a racial characteristic of the whole island of Tahiti, barring its lowest ranking members. There comes a point, it follows, when the body type engendered by civility becomes general to an entire ‘race’, with only slight shades of skin colour – as in Blumenbach’s dark-skinned peasants and brilliant-white elites – characterising the social hierarchy of a community. Indeed, in the Observations, it seems that the Tahitian population must be engaged in constant battle with the effects of climate and incivility to maintain this general whiteness of their race. The ‘better sort’ seem to be aware that their race and their rank are connected, notes Forster, and they thus deliberately avoid degenerative climatic influences. The “lower ranks of people … who all go naked,” he claims, “are much exposed to the air and sun: hence they become thin and slender; for even their bones are not strong, but solid and hard”, but the “better sort of people … carefully study and endeavour to keep themselves cool, and avoid as much as possible, an exposure to the heat of the sun, [they] are succulent, fleshy, and fat” (180). Likewise, he claims that the women maintain their ‘European’ physiques by wearing the “genteel” European-style clothing that Joseph Banks had so admired:

[the breasts of the women of O-Taheitee and the Society Isles … are not so flaccid and pendulous as is commonly observed in Negro women … and some of the women of the lower sort at the Society Isles. …[the women of the Aree never have them so pendulous and long. I should rather ascribe it to the greater relaxation of the body in the women of the lower class, who are more exposed to the air and sun, than those of the Aree tribe. The gentle constringion of the upper part of the body, by the finer sorts of cloth in which the O-Taheitean women of quality gracefully wrap themselves, contributes likewise to keep the breasts high … (181).}
Forster, then, is here concentrating on the same traditional practices that Banks had found redolent of European aesthetics and relative to a polished, feudal society – yet in this passage such practices become a causative factor in the formation and maintenance of European racial type. His observations, indeed, are clearly evocative of Linnaeus, who (as discussed in chapter 2.2.1) had linked the physique of *Homo sapiens europeanus* with Europeans’ tendency to wear tight-fitting clothing, and had matched the nakedness of African women with genital ‘relaxation’, distended breasts and excessive lactation. It might also be recalled that Oliver Goldsmith (discussed in the same chapter) had directly linked constrictive, European-style clothing with quickness of mind and industry. Here, then, the better sort of Tahitians manifest visible racial superiority in direct consequence of their acting in a ‘civilised’ and European manner. Nor are they alone in doing so. The civilised behaviour and Western dress of Europeans themselves, asserts Forster, is actually a fundamental safeguard for their own racial integrity:

[i]f two Europeans, equally fair, are removed to the same hot climate, and the one is well-dressed and avoids, as much as possible, being exposed to the action of the air, and the power of the sun; whilst the other finds himself obliged to work in the open air, and has hardly any rags to cover his skin; they will, of natural consequence, become widely different in colour; moreover, if this diversity in the mode of living be kept up for several generations, the character of both must of course become more strikingly different (183).

Indeed, when Forster later describes the physical effects of hard labour, he references not the Tahitians, but the labouring ranks of Europe: “[v]iolent labour is equally hurtful in regard to the increase of the body;” he warns, “for too long an exertion of muscular fibres in young men causes a rigidity, and entirely exhausts the vital powers. Let us only cast an eye on the wretched objects, who, from their infancy, toil in confinement, and observe their distorted, disproportionate limbs, their ghastly faces, and their puny, stinted size,” (179). The British, in short, are no more immune from degeneration ‘towards the second
race’ than the Pacific Islanders – the latter simply offer a microcosm of a greater dynamic of rank-based human race.

One of the most interesting episodes in Forster’s *Observations* is his mention of an encounter between Tahitian nobility, with their pure and studied racial superiority, and the nobility of Europe – wherein, he believes, “the constant intercourse with foreigners, makes it impossible to preserve the purity of races without mixture” (167). The object of Forster’s ire is, of course, *Omai* – who was to become the most famous Pacific islander in eighteenth-century London, inspiring plays, poetry and works of art, and whose portrait even went on to represent the ‘Malay race’ in the 1810 edition of Blumenbach’s *De Generis*. The problem with Omai, for Forster, was that he was a *Tow-tow* (or servant rank, equivalent to Banks’s *Toutou*) and apparently displayed all the typical physical features of his ‘degenerate ‘race. In London, however, he was being presented as a Rai’atian prince – and was indeed believed to be such by his patron, Captain Tobias Furneaux of the *Resolution*’s consort vessel, the *Adventure*. This ‘prince’ had never assumed his royal heritage, remarked Georg Forster bitterly in 1777, or at least not before he was offered the chance to return with Cook’s fleet to London. On the contrary, he was in every way “one of the common people”; and even aboard the *Adventure* “he did not aspire to the captain’s company, but preferred that of the armourer and the common seamen” (211). For Georg and his father, it was clear that Omai’s “features did not convey an idea of that beauty which characterises the men at O-Taheitee … His colour was likewise the darkest hue of the common class of people, and corresponded by no means with the rank he afterwards assumed” (211). Johann Reinhold, who had erstwhile planned to bring a highborn *Aree* to London in order to demonstrate the racial effects of Tahitian nobility at the British court, was profoundly disappointed at Omai’s immense popularity – which, for him, indicated a
European elite that had lost all sense of true racial integrity. In profligate and corrupted bloodlines of modern Europe, he announced,

the guiles of art and deceit are so great in one sex, and curiosity, levity and lewdness, are so common in the other, that they contribute still more to make the preservation of races precarious. This depravation prevailed so far, that even OMAI became the object of concupiscence of some females of rank (167).

Fascinatingly, Omai’s body has here become a correlative for European racial identity. Forster expects the European elite to inherently understand Tahitians as an inferior variety of human being, but also to be able to recognise – through the object-body’s degree of anatomical similarity to European physical type – what rank he belongs to, and if this rank is equivalent to their own racially-bolstered social status. Instead, a sexual attraction to Omai, not as a Pacific Islander but as the lowest-ranking Pacific Islander, is here conceived as a symptom of racial degeneracy in the very same way as dark skin is perceived to be a symptom of racial degeneracy in the islanders themselves. What is more, the culprits of this degeneracy are “females of rank” who, it can be inferred, are the supposed guardians of highest racial purity in Britain, just as the Arees were in Tahiti. For Georg too, the British nobility’s own blindness to the fact that they were celebrating a slave in place of a prince, only evidenced their own degeneration: “O-mai has been considered either as remarkably stupid, or very intelligent, according to the different allowances which were made by those who judged his abilities” he noted in his Voyage.

Upon his arrival in England he was immediately introduced into genteel company … and presented at court amidst a brilliant circle of the first nobility. He naturally imitated that easy and elegant politeness that … is one of the ornaments of civilised society … [though] he was not able to form a general comprehensive view of our whole civilised system … his senses were charmed by beauty, symmetry, harmony, and magnificence; they called aloud for gratification, and he was accustomed to obey their voice (10-11).
The work of Bougainville, Banks, and especially Johann Reinhold Forster, had a profound impact on the development of modern race theory at the end of the eighteenth century. Forster’s empirical documentation of the racial impact of civilised behaviour – essentially confirming a hypothesis that had long been assumed but seldom satisfactorily demonstrated – became an academic benchmark of racial theory. In the 1781 edition of his *De generis*, Blumenbach – who was in regular correspondence with Banks and two Forsters – revised his four principal human varieties to five by weight of the new research carried out in Oceania. His fifth human variety, which would eventually come to form the Malay race, was further divided into two ‘tribes’ – the first black, and the second brown, meaning that “Forster’s dual classification of South Sea Islanders was thus firmly inscribed in metropolitan scholarly awareness within three years of its publication” (Douglas and Ballard 107). Indeed, note Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard, Blumenbach personally commissioned the extensive ‘Cook-Forster Ethnographic Collection’ (still on display at the University of Göttingen), and regularly exhibited their findings during his lectures on natural history there (106–7). When, in 1787, Samuel Stanhope Smith asserted racial differences between domestic and field slaves in North America in the *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion in the Human Figure*, he used the example of the Forsters’ “Eerees” as a well-known and widely documented example of race being moulded by civilised behaviour (85). In fact, by the time John Cowles Prichard, cited at the beginning of this chapter, referenced the well-established corporeal differences among ranks in Tahiti in 1813, he could rest assured that the greater scientific community in Britain would agree with him. “Civilisation appears, indeed,” wrote one anonymous reviewer of Prichard’s work, “to be the most permanent cause of change in the complexion … the most savage tribes [of the South Seas] are quite black, with wooly hair; while the more civilised communities are nearly of the same complexion.
as Europeans, and have long hair, with the same anatomical structure…” (qtd in Augstein, 87). What racial investigations of Oceania demonstrate, then, is that high rank – and a physical ideal attached to that idea of high rank – was an essential element in the construction of the basic racial phenotypes that went on to underpin modern racial divisions. Here, indeed, the idea of light skin being specifically identified with social elites was just as important to this racialisation process as was dark skin being identified with slavery and servitude. It was indeed, a steady correlative of the very idea of human variety with a basic linear hierarchy of human value which had been incarnated for millennia in a ‘natural order’ of social hierarchy, from top to bottom and from white to black.

Section 2 of this study began with the idea of ‘race’ as a concept entirely distinct from the modern notion of ‘biological’ divisions between human populations, instead characterising a genealogical understanding of human hierarchy that was fundamentally rooted in noble tradition. While examining the rapid rise of empirical human taxonomies during the eighteenth century, however, this genealogical interpretation of anatomical hierarchy can be seen to have steadily infiltrated ostensibly scientific classifications of human type – and, furthermore, to have functioned in tandem with the signifiers and divisions of social hierarchy which had played such an integral part in noble traditions of human race. The three test cases of pureblood nobility in Chapter 2.3 have thus demonstrated how the idea of blood elites and anatomical superiority played an essential role in the construction of a race concept which was at once nationalistic, imperialist, and definitively exclusionary. In Ireland, the idea of noble race – as a bastion of colonial incursion or nationalistic resistance to such – functioned in direct relation to the idea of Irish race, with the dynamics of pure blood simultaneously marking out a sub-culture as inherently inferior, and a super-culture
within this group as, by virtue of lineal bloodline, inherently superior. In Highland Scotland, pure noble blood could form a foundational element of the established peerage tradition, while also asserting a rival system of blood honours and hereditary privilege – which itself could be either lauded for its ancient purity, or denounced as an isolated, undeveloped strain of primitive humanity. Finally, in Tahiti where there was neither nobility nor race to begin with, both of these concepts were introduced together and in a system of human evaluation that made them fundamentally reliant upon one another. It is here, indeed, where it is most clearly seen that nobility is race, both in the traditional and the modern sense of the word, because by definition it invokes a hierarchy of human value which is inseparable from heredity and the human body, and because this structure ultimately became the prime methodology for ranking human types in a hierarchy of worth which was thereafter proclaimed part of the natural order of things. This considered, the following section will go on to consider how ‘noble race’ functioned in relation to Revolutionary discourses of human equality, and subsequently how the idea of the superior human body was increasingly considered in terms of selective breeding and the newer conceptions of ‘racial’ purity – a concept for which, of course, nobility had been the original and fundamental architect.
SECTION 3: From Human Variety to Race Theory

And Guinea’s captive kings lament,
By Christian lords to labour sent,
Whipt like the dull, unfeeling ox.

– Joseph Warton ‘Ode to Liberty’, 1746 (qtd in Johnson 1810, 166)
3.1: Enlightenment and Revolution: Race and the Noble Body

3.1.1: Georg Forster and Kant: Revolutionary Corporeality

On the 10th of January 1794, in a small attic lodging on Paris’s rue des Moulins, Johann George Adam Forster – the same Georg Forster who, at eighteen years old, had travelled across the known world on the Resolution beside his father Johann Reinhold – died in exile as leader of the Revolutionary Mainz Republic, as well as one of the most renowned naturalists of his generation. The extraordinary life and work of Georg Forster brought together three major dimensions of racialised humanity in the late eighteenth century: the maturation of detailed, heuristically based human variety theories, supported by extensive practical investigations; the emergence of a ‘race model’ of population distinction based on principal ‘types’; and the vast, overarching influence of Revolutionary thought in the notion of human hierarchy. Born in Nassenhuben in the Polish-Lithuanian province of Royal Prussia, the young Forster was prodigious from the outset. By the age of ten, he was already accompanying his father on botanical research trips down the Volga River, and by thirteen he had published a translation of Mikhail Lomonosov’s Russian History (1760), gaining him an honorary membership to the London Society of Antiquaries (G. Forster, Thomas and Berghof eds, 2.678). His acute mastery of languages is, indeed, one of the more remarkable elements of his account of the Resolution’s voyage, during which he acquired proficiency in various Polynesian dialects and indeed extensively compared and contrasted the linguistic systems from island to island. Ironically, had it not been for the determination of Cook and the Resolution’s sponsors to suppress the work of Johann Reinhold Forster, his son might never have shot to prominence as one of Europe’s foremost travel writers and ethnographers. Reinhold had been expected to compose the
official account of the four-year voyage, which had been strongly marked by tensions between him and Cook regarding the time allotted for experiments. Before he could complete the manuscript, however, the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty and patron of the voyage, voiced serious misgivings about the Reinholds’ opening chapters and demanded a full re-edit before publication. On Reinhold’s refusal, Sandwich revoked Reinhold’s publishing rights, and offered the ‘official’ account to Cook instead, not only denying Forster any payment for his work, but forbidding him to publish any account of the Resolution’s voyage until after the publication of Cook’s alternative account, the *Voyage towards the South Pole and Round the World, Performed in His Majesty’s Ships the Resolution and Adventure, In the Years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775* (1777) (Aulie 2.9). It was shared outrage, then, as well as the threat of financial ruin, that drove the twenty-two year-old Georg Forster (exempt from the publication ban) to rapidly compile his own account of the journey, with the aim of preceding Cook’s edition and thus capitalising on first edition sales (2.9). Within seven months (six weeks before the publication of Cook’s volume) he had published his *Voyage Round the World, in His Britannic Majesty’s Sloop, Resolution, Commanded by Captain James Cook During the Years 1772, 3, 4 and 5* (1777). A few months later he had already produced a German translation, printed in 1778. Both editions were “an immediate success,” and though they ultimately did little to alleviate the Forster family debt, they established the young Forster not only as an internationally recognised naturalist, but also “as an exemplary figure in the popular genre of travel literature that flourished throughout Europe in the late eighteenth century (Mikkelsen 143). The *Voyage*, indeed, stands at the very pinnacle of contemporary human variety discourse: along with J.R. Forster’s *Observations* which appeared the following year, it became one of the first studies of its kind to compare “indigenes with one another rather than solely with ‘civilised’ or classical societies” (Agnew 89). In this respect, notes
Vanessa Agnew, it established a “frame of reference for all subsequent eighteenth-century reflections on the question of human diversity”, marking a discursive intersection between close observation of anatomical difference and “increasingly abstract, speculative and implicit formulations of biological race” (90).

Georg’s sympathies for radical political ideologies are evident even in this first and most influential publication, linking the ideas of corporeal human variety – generation and degeneration – with the power of reason, economic inequality, and political tyranny. After publishing the *Voyage*, George took up various academic positions in Kassels, Vilnius, and eventually Mainz, and became preeminent in circles of the German Enlightenment, regularly corresponding with figures such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Gottfried Herder, Christoph Martin Wieland, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and especially Alexander von Humboldt – who later wrote of the *Voyage* that it “began a new era of scientific travels … the germ of something greater, brought to fruition in a more recent period” (Mikkelsen 144; qtd. in A. Smith 218). Along with his wife, the novelist Therese Heynes (later Huber), member of the all-female academic group the *Universitätsmamsellen* (and, incidentally, a member of Blumenbach’s extended family), Forster was actively involved in political and intellectual debates throughout his time at Mainz, where he worked as head librarian at the city’s university (Cipollini 159). Within two days of the city’s falling to French forces in 1792, he had already established a local Jacobin club, the *Freunde der Freiheit und Gleichheit*, and later became a founding member of the Mainz Republic, whose collapse the following year ultimately led to his exile in Paris (Mikkelsen 144). Forster’s fervent political ideology strongly marked his best-known piece of writing on human variety theory after the *Voyage* – a response to Kant’s theory of colour-based human races entitled *Noch etwas über die Menschenraßen* (‘Something More about the Human Races’, 1786). This extraordinary essay, which has
been largely neglected in the history of race, marks a remarkable intellectual crossroads between cultures, disciplines, and political philosophies, at once bringing together the colonial, civilising projects of London’s Royal Society, the teleological philosophies of Kant, and the iconoclasm of Jacobin radicalism – all converging on the idea of heredity and genealogy as an arbiter of human identity and human worth.

Before considering Noch etwas more closely, it is worthwhile to contrast Georg Forster’s account of the South Seas Islanders in the Voyage with the more conventional documentation made by his father in the Observations (examined in chapter 2.3.3). Indeed, one of the most interesting discrepancies between the two accounts is in the employment and understanding of the term ‘race’. Where Johann Reinhold uses the term race to describe his differently coloured ranks of islanders, Georg prefers the term ‘class’. More than this, in identifying the anatomical differences in rank, the younger Forster explicitly rejects the term race, and indeed any strict concordance between morality, heredity, and physical appearance. Like the “heroes of Homer”, he notes in the Voyage, “[t]he Tahitian chiefs, compared to the common people, are so much superior in stature and elegance of form, that they look like a different race” (emphasis added 1.378). Certain theorists, such as Bougainville, he continues in a footnote, have fallaciously been “led by this difference of appearance to assert that they [the chiefs and common people] really were two different races” (emphasis added, note 1, 1.378). Now, by ‘race’ here, of course, Forster is referring to lineal family – he is not rejecting the idea that the islanders can be separated into distinct corporeal categories, but only that these categories can be understood as a genealogical phenomenon. “The itch of tracing the pedigree of nations” he announces, “has lately made such havoc in history, by endeavouring to combine the Egyptians and Chinese, that the learned must sincerely wish it may never become a contagious distemper” (1.378-9). In place of race, Georg posits that the Tahitians’ anatomy reflects their current stage of
civilisation: “men in a similar state of civilisation resemble each other … even in the most opposite extremes of the world”, he holds, and thus the Tahitians are beautiful like the ancient Greeks simply because they lead a similar lifestyle to the ancient Greeks (1.378). The great feasts of the Tahitian *Arees*, for instance, recalled the famous banquets of the “men at the siege of Troy”; likewise a certain simplicity of manners is observable in both nations; and their domestic character alike is hospitable, affectionate and humane. There is even a similarity in their political constitution. The chiefs … are powerful princes, who have not more respect for *O-Too* [a local king], than the Greek heroes had for the ‘king of men’; and the common people are so little noticed in the *Iliad*, that they appear to have had no greater consequence than the *tow-tows* in the South Sea (1.378).

Furthermore, Forster cautions that, though the *Arees* are possessed of a more European physique than the *tow-tows*, this does not necessarily constitute an essential inner virtue. In describing the King of Tahiti, he remarks that the monarch’s skin was certainly “the fairest of his people”, that his hair was “lank” and of “a light brown, turning into reddish at the tips, or being what is commonly called, sandy”, yet the *countenance* of this same king was “unmeaning [i.e. vacant], and rather expressed some kind of fear and distrust at our first meeting, which suited ill with the ideas of majesty, and yet are often the characteristics of lawless power” (I.169). Indeed, the observation that “the classes of *aree, manahouna*, and *tow-tow* … bear some distant relation to those of the feudal system of Europe” is a matter of concern in Georg’s *Voyage*, rather than of admiration (I.200). For him, the European-style political systems of Tahiti stand in opposition to what he equates with the virtues of antiquity – threatening an idyllic, Homeric existence with the inherent inequality of feudal government. Such misgivings, indeed, demonstrate a remarkably politicised interpretation of the sense of ‘progress’ that underpinned traditional stadial history: rather than seeing the Tahitians as developing through stages towards polished, commercial society, Georg suggests that they are steadily degenerating from a pastoral Golden age to a modern state.
of disparity and unhappiness – an active degeneration evidenced by the anatomical inequalities among their ranks. For all the strict social hierarchy in Tahiti, he asserts, there is not yet “that disparity between the highest and the meanest man which subsists in England between a reputable tradesman and a labourer” (1.200). With time, however, this gentle cleft between ranks is destined to widen into a chasm as the islanders develop more effective agriculture and the idleness of the *Arees*, by consequence, becomes ever greater. “The indolence of the chiefs is already … a step towards its [equality’s] destruction” Georg warns, and

though cultivation is a labour scarce at present felt by the *tow-tows*; to whom it is allotted; yet by insensible degrees it will fall heavier upon them, as the number of chiefs must naturally increase … because the chiefs are perfectly unemployed (1.200).

Accordingly, while he and his fellow shipmen could easily trust the ‘middle-ranking’ *manahounas*, Georg takes care to note that they learnt to beware of “the specious politeness of the court and courtiers, who fed our hopes with empty promises” (1.170).

Georg, then, is essentially utilising traditional ‘noble savage’ imagery of Tahitian society to make a political point against the very ideas that underpinned supposedly polished societies. No more than his father, he directly links the corporeal state of the islanders to their exposure to influences that favour European sophistication, but unlike his father, he simultaneously identifies this sophistication with vice and misgovernment. Indeed, the very existence of a physically distinct *Aree* rank, no matter how closely they emulate the elegance of the European upper orders, is, for Georg, a sign of their social debasement into a state of *degenerate inequality*. In a passage which echoes Blumenbach’s, Buffon’s and Goldsmith’s convictions that the lower orders were invariably darker skinned than their superiors, Georg portrays the idea of anatomical hierarchy as a
physical expression of tyranny. The *tow-tows* may seem dark skinned now, he warrants, but once they are charged with the labours of modern agriculture,

they will grow ill-shaped, and their bones [will] become marrowless: their greater exposure to the action of a vertical sun, will blacken their skins, and they will dwindle away to dwarfs, by the more frequent prostitution of their infant daughters to the voluptuous pleasure of the great. That pampered race [the *Arees*], on the contrary, will preserve all the advantages of an extraordinary size, of a superior elegance of form and features, and of a purer colour by indulging their voracious appetite, and living in absolute idleness. At last, the common people will perceive these grievances, and the causes which produced them; and a proper sense of the general rights of mankind awakening in them will bring on a revolution (200).

Georg’s criticism of *domestic* social inequality here is, of course, clear: if such corporeal horrors await the Tahitians when they achieve a polished society, it follows that the same horrors must already be upon the civilised nations of Europe. The wretched poor in England are thus portrayed as a caste still more anatomically degenerated than the Tahitian *tow-tows*, and if revolution is the inevitable consequence of degenerative inequality in Tahiti’s far future, then in Europe the same revolution is imminent. More than this, however, Georg is also attacking the very basis of racialised hierarchy: he upturns the mould of climate discourse by refusing to hold the ‘whiter’ upper orders as an ideal from which the labouring ranks have deviated. Instead, the purity, beauty, and stature so prized by civilised society is equally indicted as a symptom of degeneration; this corporeal ‘ideal’ fed by luxury and sloth could not exist without the anatomical debasement of the exploited poor. That is, Georg employs a ‘Rousseauian’ brand reasoning to the anatomical hierarchy of the islanders, positing that their civil inequalities can be read in their physical bodies (see Rousseau, *Discours*, 123\(^{138}\)).

It is perhaps not difficult to see, then, how Immanuel Kant’s second essay on human variety theory, the *Bestimmung des Begriffs einer Menschenrasse* (‘

\(^{138}\) See also chapters 3.1.2 and 3.2.2 for further discussions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements d’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755).
Determination of the concept of a Human Race’, 1785) provoked a passionate reaction from Forster, who, during his lifetime, was probably the better known of the two men (Mikkelsen 143). Much of Kant’s Bestimmung reiterates the principles of successive racial variety he had outlined ten years previously in his Über die verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen (examined in chapter 2.2.3), yet the intervening decade of intensive exploration and experimentation in the field of human variety had offered the philosopher rich new material for his theory of colour-based human types. Kant, indeed, makes it the aim of his essay to define once and for all the concept of human race, or Menschenrasse, as a precise state of human anatomy based on hereditary purity. Since each human race must continue to breed with members of its own race in order for that race to exist – that is, since races are temporal and reliant on bloodline isolation – in the beginning there must have been, Kant posits, an original “phylum” of human being “of which the four kinds of skin colour are the outer mark” (152). This original phylum, in turn, proved without doubt the veracity of monogenesis. “The concept of race” Kant concludes, “is therefore: the classificatory difference of the animals of one and the same phylum in so far as this difference is unfailingly hereditary” (Kant’s emphasis, 154).

One of the recent developments that Kant specifically addresses in his essay is the wave of ethnographic research coming from the South Seas, which had significantly undermined his four-race model of human variety. The hypothesis that there were only four true races (as will be remembered from chapter 2.2.3) depended on the idea of ‘half-breeds’: The offspring of two different races will necessarily be a half-breed, Kant held, but half-breeds themselves cannot produce a new ‘race’ of half-breeds – rather, within a few generations their bloodline will be assimilated into whichever of the four principal races that is dominant in the region. Yet, reports from the South Seas invariably documented that multiple races were living side by side, and according to Bougainville,
Banks, and the Forsters, that these races even reflected social rank within one and the same community. While Kant admits that the South Seas expeditions had proved problematic for this theory, he maintains that the findings had likely been confounded by the direct effects of climate: “Only a child conceived by such a couple in Europe”, he decides, “would reveal without ambiguity the skin colour that belongs to them by nature” (146). Having heard reports that the primary colour of the Pacific Islanders is “mahogany brown”, he prefers to place his trust in descriptions provided by the English naval officer Philip Carteret in his *Voyage Round the World* (1773), stating, “I conclude that the inhabitants of most islands must be whites” (146).

Now, Georg Forster’s scandalous reply to Kant’s second essay on human races, the *Noch etwas über die Menschenrassen*, established a somewhat infamous exchange in the history of race – yet, for all this, *Noch etwas* itself has received surprisingly little attention. Rather, Forster’s essay is primarily known because of the counter-reply it provoked from Kant, the *Über den Gebrauch teleologischer Prinzipien in der Philosophie* (‘On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy’, 1788), a work which has been held as particularly significant in its foreshadowing of themes that Kant would later take up again in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (‘Critique of Judgement’), published two years later in 1790 (Mikkelsen 143). The fact that so many historians seem to have regarded *Noch etwas* (which went without an official English translation until 2013) as a mere reference point for the two Kantian texts that inspired and refuted it, can probably be put down to two reasons: the first, of course, is Forster’s relatively minor intellectual legacy compared to his adversary; the second is that *Noch etwas*, from the moment Kant replied, has been routinely disregarded as an assertion of Forster’s belief in polygenism. As discussed

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139 Philip Carteret’s account was included in David Henry’s *Historical account of all the voyages round the world, performed by English navigators* (1733), which had appeared in German translation as *Historischer Bericht von den sämtlichen, durch Engländer geschehenen Reisen um die Welt* in 1776 (Kant, Zöler and Louden eds 503).
previously in chapter 2.2.3, the theory of polygenism was not only dismissed as heresy by the mainstream scientific community in eighteenth-century Britain, but has continued to bear a (somewhat illogical) reputation as the ‘most’ racist of early modern racist doctrines (see chapter 2.2.3) – an assumption which has led to some serious mis-readings (or, it might suspected, non-readings) of Forster’s essay. Certainly, there seems to be a conspicuous lack of consensus among modern researchers who have commented on Noch etwas. Bronwen Douglas and Chris Ballard, for instance, describe the essay as “a graphic illustration of the liaison of ancient bigotry and new biology” (49); Denis R. Alexander and Ron L. Numbers use it to claim that Forster “recast his initially sympathetic view of the Pacific Islanders on returning to Germany” (129); Tony Ballantyne references the author as a “leading advocate of polygenism” (183); while Gustav Jahoda has written that “Forster was unable to make up his mind about monogeny or pologeny … [but] he clearly abhorred slavery” (24). The last of these assessments is probably the closest to the truth. Certainly, it is very unclear whether the polygenist argument in Noch etwas reflected Forster’s true beliefs or whether it was purely sophistic. More importantly, however, whether he really believed in polygenesis or not is largely beside the point: what few historians have noted before dismissing Forster as a polygenist is how incomparably different Forster’s polygenist argument is from those of, say, Lord Kames or Edward Long – not only is it radically anti-slavery, but it argues for total and indiscriminate equality among all human beings, against the idea of a superior white ‘race’, and against the idea of inherent human hierarchy. “Forster, for his part,” claims Pauline Kleingeld, was actually “a champion of cultural diversity and moral equality”, and held that “one should value the rich variety of human cultures and recognise these in their particularity [rather than] in terms of (‘racial’) variations in innate ability” (95). Though Forster’s work can hardly be held aloft as anti-racist, it must be recognised for being explicitly anti-race, and this stance
is the primary motivator of his polygenist rhetoric. Just as he defamiliarised the assumptions behind stadial history in the *Voyage*, Forster used polygenism to undermine the very assumptions on which Kantian race was based – namely a Judeo-Christian bias toward *monogenism*, and the racialised hierarchy implicit therein.

Forster, who had essentially been travelling the world for his entire life, had once lambasted the *weiser in Lehnstuhl* (wise man in his recliner) – that is, the European university professor who, though never daring to stray from the comforts of his study, deigned to make grand announcements about how the world worked (Agnew 92). When Kant, then (who had scarcely, if ever, left the Prussian seaport of Königsberg), used a single, and highly dubious passage from a questionable translation of a compilation of otherwise unpublished travel narratives, authored by a navyman who was entirely untrained in the empirical method, to support his grand announcement that the *primary colour of the South Seas Islanders was white*, Forster could simply not contain his frustration (Eze 229). Leaving aside the fact that Carteret had only encountered a few islanders, and indeed had only visited a few islands in the vast region (Kant himself had admitted that his source “had gone little ashore from his sea voyage but nevertheless had seen various islanders in their canoes”), Forster points out that, in other sections of his narrative, Carteret had written of dark-skinned islanders – “we could guess, according to these premises,” Forster concludes, “with just as much probability, that the inhabitants of the region are *black*” (Kant 146; Forster 149). Forster, however, having spent four years documenting the islands of the South Seas, is more than willing to rectify Kant’s assumptions. For the benefit of his peer, he explains Pacific anatomy in detail: between the Sandwich islands and New Zealand the ‘primary’ colour of Pacific islanders was a “light brown [*hellbrauner*]”, they had a “respectable stature, beautiful build and pleasing facial
formation, with curly black hair and thick beards”; in New Caldeonia and the Spice Islands, there were

a smaller, scrawny, black people, with frizzy, wool[l]y hair, and uglier features who distinguish themselves from the light brown peoples on account of the way they live, but especially through their totally different languages … Bougainville describe[s] these people [Menschen] as being as dark as African Negroes (151-2).

As for Kant’s suggestion that a Pacific Islander couple be brought to Europe to give birth, and thus that the ‘natural’ colour of their baby might be thereby determined, surely Kant himself understood that this went against his own understanding of climate theory – which, Forster reminds him, supposedly took generations to take noticeable effect (151-2).

Kant’s use of misinformation to support his abstract theories about hereditary race formation is representative of Forster’s primary line of criticism in Noch etwas – namely that Kant has privileged principles over observation, and, worse still, that these principles are based on misinformation and flawed reasoning from the outset, and that their conclusions are thus meaningless. His argument, notes Vanessa Agnew, builds a “dichotomy between the systematist, who knows in advance what he is seeking and is consequently likely to find something that is not really there, and the empiricist who relies on the evidence of his senses” (92). Kant’s methodology of setting out a hypothesis and then searching for its evidence in experience is a perfectly acceptable technique, Forster claims, but it becomes dangerous when what one is looking for may “not really exist” (148). And race, for Forster, especially as a genealogical phenomenon, was one of these cases. The very word rasse, he reminds his readers, is profoundly ambiguous:

we have borrowed the term from the French; it seems very closely related to the words racine and radix and signifies descent in general … for one talks in French of the race of Caesar in the same way as of the races of horse and dogs, irrespective of first origin, but, nevertheless, as it seems, always with tacit subordination under the concept of a species (163)
Whereas recent explorers of the South Seas had often used the term to describe the different islander groups in that region, he asserts, “they seem to take their refuge in the word only in those cases where it is uncomfortable for them to say variety” (164). The fact of the matter was, even though an observer might identify the immediate influences of lineal family on a group’s physical appearance, that there was no empirical proof to confirm that all members of a single ‘race’ had come from the same genealogical root – and this must be recognised before any definitive statement of human race could be made. Even Kant’s hypothesis of half-breeds is fundamentally flawed, he asserts; a Kantian ‘half-breed’ is no more than the offspring of most dissimilarly coloured people. That is to say, explains Forster, it is easy to name a child a ‘half-breed’ when it is born of a “Negroe” and a “Scandinavian”, but the offspring of an “Abyssinian” and a “Kaffir woman”, no less mixed in their heredity, will escape Kant’s racial system simply because the combination of skin tones is less obvious (154). Echoing Buffon (whose notion of successive generation was, of course, a prime basis for Kant’s racial theory), Forster reminds Kant that “the order of nature does not follow our divisions, and as soon as we want to force these divisions on nature, we lapse into absurdities” (159). He thus provides his own counter-definition of Menschenrasse, being little more than “a people of peculiar character and unknown descent” (164).

This, indeed, is the principal context for Forster’s evocation of polygenism in the essay: Kant’s idea of human races is based on an assumption that he cannot prove – namely that the major races are all blood-related – and, moreover, seems everywhere to be disproved by what is observed in reality; thus, polygenism, being equally unprovable (but supported by the otherwise inexplicable distribution of diverse anatomies), must be just as valid, with the additional consequence of obliterating the very bases of race conjecture.
Considering the well-documented and “lasting differences between Negroes and whites …” Forster claims, “I can neither believe that it is improbable or inconceivable that two different lines of descent – each perhaps from a sufficient number of individuals – have descended as autochthons in different regions of the world” (emphasis added, 164).\(^\text{140}\) In anticipation of his critics’ accusations of dehumanisation, as soon as Forster makes his heretical statement he turns the attention to the unpardonable acts of inhumanity everyday committed by monogenists. If, by his statement, he might be thought to have “cut through the last thread by means of which this ill-treated people might be connected with us”, he affirms, it should be remembered that it was monogenists with their unified vision of humanity who began the tradition of slavery, and who tolerated it still, who continued to persecute exotic peoples and treat them as innately, unchangeably inferior:

[Has] the thought that blacks are our brothers … ever, anywhere, even once, caused the raised whip of the slave driver to be lowered? … where is the bond, however strong it might be, that can hinder the decadent [entartete] European from ruling over their white fellow human beings equally as despotically as they rule over negroes? … How then are we supposed to believe that an unprovable dogma [lehrsatz] could be the sole support for our systems of duties when it has not prevented a single act of ignominy … no my friends, if moralists begin from a false theory, it is truly their own fault when their edifice totters and falls completely apart like a house of cards (166).

Indeed, Forster claims that bonds of brotherhood between all humans have nothing to do with Kant’s and others’ bias toward a monogenetic premise in human variety theory – for it has protected no humans, black or white, from being treated with inhumanity by those wielding power. Rather, he asserts, monogenesis is simply an expression of Christian bias

\(^{140}\) Forster’s choice of ‘Negroes’ and ‘Whites’ as differently originated groups (though not to say different species, which is something he never claims) is probably the closest he comes in the essay to more ‘traditional’ polygenist rhetoric, demonstrating the definitively ‘racist’ black/white dichotomy that underpinned even this call for full equality between all humans. Indeed, Aaron Garrett notes that Forster may well have taken this binary from his friend, the anatomist Samuel Thomas von Sömmering, “who had argued that black brains had larger nerves than those of whites and were thus mentally inferior” (2006, 198). Certainly, though Forster foresees equality one day for Africans, he concedes that this is despite their lacking the strength of mind (Willen) of white men (Noch etwas 167).
– yet another bastardisation of empirical research with false presuppositions and forced conjecture in order to support a Biblical worldview and white, Christian supremacy. “If mythology, which Kant chooses as a guide,” Forster declares scathingly, “makes in history the first-born son of a human couple forthwith the murderer of his brother, then it surely seems bad to provide for the security of humans by means of their common descent” (165).

In fact, the Christian basis of monogenist assumption, he continues, was supremely incompatible with any rational discussion of human diversity, since the Bible and Christian tradition seem to have so little to say on the subject. His suggestion of polygenism, he predicts, would scandalise much of the scientific community – but this was only because

although an old book, against which no one is permitted to write, makes reference in no syllable to the Negro, and although the great man, the reputed author of that book, has putatively seen no Negro, it is certainly an attack on this old book if one presents a possibility of more than one human line of descent, and this blow, which harms no one, is called heresy (167).

Unlike Kant, Forster proclaims, he had employed reason alone to consider the question of human diversity, and reason tells him not to believe in monogenesis without having first found proof, nor to believe in human ‘races’ when observation proves they don’t exist, nor to subscribe to an idea of human hierarchy in which white Europeans are inherently and invariably at the top when it is clear that the power of reason itself could be seized by any human who is given the chance. In a series of powerful declarations, Georg Forster denounces monogenist Christian cultural imperialism as delusional and despotic – an enemy of progress and equality by way of its own ethnocentric, self-absorbed sense of humanity. “Oh white man!” he exclaims

you – so proud and self-satisfied – discern that, wheresoever you push forward … [your] science and art helped the building of culture. Oh white man! You who feel that everywhere in distant Africa … the reason of the blacks climbs up only to that rung of childhood and succumbs to your wisdom. Oh white man! Why are
you not ashamed of the way you misuse your power on those weaker than you …
the black man is the most noble [of your pledges]. You should take the position of
a father to him, and when you develop the holy sparks of reason in him … he
could – no, should – become what you are, or can be, a being who is happy in the
use of all powers placed in him (166).

Kant’s reply to Forster in 1788, the rather less heated Über den Gebrauch teleologischer
Principien in der Philosophie, is largely a reassertion of the points he had already made in
the previous essays, though, significantly, offering an alternative term for race – progenies
classifica (200). He agrees that “the physical first origin of organic beings remains
unfathomable to both of us and to human reason in general”, but clarifies that what Forster
had taken as a religious premise was in fact a metaphysical premise; his monogenetic
assumptions, he maintains, are merely founded in the teleology of nature, which provides
the only observable hint towards the first origins of life (204). Quite independently from
Kant’s reply or even his original text, however, Forster’s Noch etwas remains a remarkable
document, which stands at the very frontier of older logical/empirical conceptions of
human variety and new genealogical/biological conceptions of race. What is striking here,
in relation to this particular study, is how both visions make use of the discourse of social
rank. For Kant, the template of lineal bloodline – compared directly (as will be
remembered from chapter 2.2.3) to the hereditary dynamic of a noble family – is
envisioned on a mass scale; and just as bloodline functioned in social hierarchies, the
Kantian races form a distinct order, where the white European (a hereditary ‘super-
human’, so to speak) takes the place of the elite, and the black African (hereditary ‘sub-
human’) becomes manifestly equated with the servile ranks. For Forster, interestingly, the
links between anatomy and social rank stand as a safeguard against this same imposition of
hereditary race templates: if the body is a reflection of European civilisation, then the body
is necessarily a reflection of inequality. By pushing forth the doctrine of polygenesis, if
only in order to undermine the doctrine of monogenesis, Forster is above all discrediting
the status quo of Western racialised hierarchy. Rather than look for a theory of race to fit the profound inequalities that underlie both colonial exploitation and domestic rank disparities, Forster looks at these inequalities as the persistent cause of anatomical difference. Race, in his Jacobin rhetoric, is decried for its inherent inequalities both in the older and newer sense of the word; that is, in the hereditary privileges of elite families whose pampered bodies reflect the meagre frames of the poor, and in the hereditary privilege of a European ‘white’ identity, which presents itself as a superior bloodline to its subordinate neighbours, whom it likewise maintains in ignorance and poverty. This, combined with Forster’s truly Revolutionary denunciation of the Christian reasoning which continued to exist at the core of empirical science, makes Noch etwas a fascinating exposition of a radical anti-race sentiment that is at the same time a radical anti-hierarchy sentiment. It denounces the construction of hereditary human groups on the very same terms as it denounces the maintenance of hereditarily based social hierarchies – both of which are expressed through the human body in a scale from black to white. It is a denunciation, it might even be said, of race thinking as well as race, while existing, paradoxically in a discourse wherein the physical bodies of racialised groups are, more than ever, considered from a ‘biological’ point of view.

3.1.2: The Burke and Paine Debate: Symbols of Hereditary Privilege in Revolutionary Discourse

“But the age of chivalry is gone” – Edmund Burke’s famous pronouncement from the Reflections on the Revolution in France (1789) remains one of the eighteenth century’s most emblematic defences of British nobility, establishing a heated “dialogue about aristocracy” as one of the mainstays of Revolutionary debate in the 1790s (331; Goodrich
In lieu of former ‘chivalric’ tradition, Burke’s *Reflections* paints a vivid image of disorder and dismay in Revolutionary France, where the beneficent clergy have been driven into exile, where the barbaric mob feverishly drive a hundred bayonets into the queen’s royal bed, and where the self-proclaimed National Assembly is no better than “a gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage, to be pardoned for [their] abuse of the liberty to which [they] were not accustomed, and were ill fitted” (278). Burke’s vision of nobility, in particular, as “a graceful ornament to the civil order … the Corinthian capital of polished society” has become one of the most enduring images of the noble apology in British Revolutionary discourse – yet, it is a vision that does not always do justice to this writer’s rather more nuanced (and often contradictory) understandings of nobility’s role in society (416). Indeed, while the nostalgic, sensationalist aspects of Burke’s *Reflections* consolidated an image of the peerage as an English ancien régime, the work also bolsters a very real socio-economic model of hereditary property transfer – for which noble blood and privilege becomes the expositional template for the nation at large.

The *Vindication of Natural Society; or, A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind from every Species of Artificial Society* (1756), one of Burke’s earliest and most notable pieces of political criticism, might at first glance seem to argue against the institutions of nobility, but is actually a piece of subtle satire. Lambasting the “Cartesian rationalism and religious deism” of Bolingbroke’s recently published *Philosophical Works* (1754), the anonymous *Vindications* sardonically praised the state of nature over any form of civil society, be it ‘despotic’, ‘aristocratic’, ‘democratic’ or ‘mixed’, all in a stylistic imitation of Bolingbroke so approximate that it was thought by many to be authored by the viscount himself (Canavan 166; Macpherson 10). Even within the context of this *reductio ad absurdum* argument, however, notes C. B. Macpherson, Burke demonstrates that he is
well aware of “the case that can be made against the political, legal, economic and moral order of eighteenth-century advanced societies” (18). In his denunciation of purely ‘aristocratic’ forms of government (the terms ‘aristocratic’, ‘aristocrat’, and ‘aristocracy’, it will be remembered, referred at this time to any oligarchical ruling body, noble or otherwise\(^{141}\)), Burke identifies opulence and wealth as inevitable sources of fear and envy amidst oligarchic groups, which is necessarily expressed through a fearful and envious mode of governance (61). Furthermore, he explicitly develops the argument that aristocratic excess not only imprints itself on the body politic, but on the physical bodies of the rich and poor alike. An excess of luxury and effeminacy in the elite, he states,

produces a weak valetudinary state of body, attended by all those horrid disorders, and yet more horrid methods of cure … the mind has its share of the misfortune; it grows lazy and enervate, unwilling and unable to search for truth … the poor by their excessive labour, and the rich by their enormous luxury, are set upon a level, and rendered equally ignorant of any knowledge which might conduce to their happiness (61).

Indeed, even though ironic, such statements are not particularly at variance with some of Burke’s later criticisms of privileged elites – most notably those of the ‘aristocratic’ body of Protestant Ascendancy in his native Dublin, which (as discussed in chapter 2.3.1) he considered to be more of a ‘dead-weight’ than a ‘Corinthian capital’. In fact, Burke could, at times, be plainly disrespectful toward the idea of noble rank, and did not always make use of the veil of irony to do so. When the Duke of Bedford criticised him at parliament in 1796, Burke made it quite clear in his Letter to a Noble Lord on the Attack made on Mr Burke and his Pension, in the House of Lords (1796) that the Duke owed his dukedom, in large part, to the success of the Reflections. “I have supported with very great zeal, and I

\(^{141}\) The reason for this, explains Amanda Goodrich (and as previously mentioned in this study’s introduction), is that ‘aristocracy’ described a “system of government” rather than a “body of men”. The terms only began to gain a degree of synonymity during the Revolutionary debates of the 1790s, when aristocrate became a popular (and derogatory) term to describe a member of the French noblesse, primarily entering English-language discourse through the writings of Thomas Paine, as discussed below (17).
am told some degree of success … those old prejudices which buoy up the ponderous mass of [his Grace’s] nobility, wealth, and titles …” Burke remarks scathingly,

I have done all I could to discountenance [the French faction’s] inquiries into the fortunes of those who hold large portions of wealth without any apparent merit of their own. I have strained every nerve to keep the Duke of Bedford in that situation which alone makes him my superior (197).

In fact, perhaps the most representative statement Burke made about the nobility is to be found in his 1781 Speech on Mr Fox’s Bill on the Repeal of the Marriage Act: “If by aristocracy they mean the peers …”, he proclaimed, “I hold them to be of an absolute necessity in the constitution; but I think they are only good when kept within proper bounds” (qtd in Goodrich 32).

Quite apart from the chivalric mystique of noble title and honour, Burke’s particular insistence on the importance of nobility as part of the established hierarchical order largely stems from the fact that it definitively represented the pre-eminence and security of hereditary institutions, which were, in turn, intimately bound up with the hereditary transmission of property. “The power of perpetuating our property in our families” he states in the Reflections,

is one of the most valuable and interesting circumstances belonging to it, and that which tends the most of the perpetuation of society itself … the House of Peers is formed upon this principle … Some decent, regulated pre-eminence, some preference (not exclusive appropriation) given to birth, is neither unnatural, nor unjust, nor impolitic (298-9).

The main force of Burke’s argument in both the Vindication and the Reflections, in fact, might best be understood in direct contrast to another immensely influential work, which had been published near-simultaneously with Bolingbroke’s Philosophical Works: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes (1754) (Canavan 166). While Rousseau had famously declared that “Le premier
for Burke, the very opposition between natural and civil society was a false premise, instead seeing civil society as a dimension of the natural state in itself – a “moral necessity” of natural law (Rousseau 94; Stanis 229). Burke, notes C.B. Macpherson, essentially harboured a Hobbesian understanding of civil society – that is, he held that ‘natural rights’ were necessarily renounced on entering a community, wherein they would be regimented and redistributed according to the force of natural law (42). Traditional institutions as they stood, then, were anything but arbitrary – on the contrary, they had been moulded and refined since time immemorial by the natural laws by which men asserted their dignity; they were shaped by the specific context of the community, by the precise character of the nation. Moreover, they provided a model by which the people had come to understand what their rights were, and how community worked. It was a “state of habitual social discipline,” Burke explained in his *An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), “in which the wiser, the more expert, and the more opulent conduct, and by conducting enlighten and protect the weaker, the less knowing, and the less provided with the goods of fortune” (107). Without this discipline on which the proper functioning of society had become dependant, “the multitude … *can scarcely be said to be in civil society*” (emphasis added, 107). This continuance of traditional institutions and the civil framework of natural law, then, in itself constituted a sort of inherited privilege – a legacy which was to be equally valued as an asset conferred by past generations, as it was to be conserved and refined for generations to come. “Society is, indeed, a contract …” Burke proclaimed in the *Reflections*, and it is furthermore

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142 “The first person who, having fenced off a plot of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine* and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society” (Masters et al. trans. 43).
a partnership not only between those who are living, but those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born … according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and moral natures, each in their appointed place (359).

The inheritance of traditional social structures (which included the inheritance of hereditary privilege and property transfer) was in essence the inheritance of civil liberty itself (Stanlis 232). Therefore, every structure of inheritance within that greater structure of hereditary liberty could thus be seen as a symbol and instrument of liberty and its preservation:

it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity … we have an inheritable crown, an inheritable peerage, and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises and liberties from a long line of ancestors … in this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood … (274-5).

For Hannah Arendt, Burke’s idea of an inherited civil liberty in Britain showcased a decisive moment in the development of a particularly English brand of race thinking. For Arendt (as previously touched upon in chapter 2.1.3), Burke had rejected the ‘Rights of Man’ – that is, the right of the (Rousseauian) naked, unsocialised, unhistoricised, human body – in favour of the ‘Rights of Englishmen’ – which understood humanity in terms of the “entailed inheritance” of a nation’s past. “A man who is nothing but a man”, according to this reasoning, claims Arendt, “has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man” (300). It is not by virtue of possessing a human anatomy, then, but by assuming, maintaining and transferring the tenets of civil society that humanity and thus human rights are established. Essentially, Burke was portraying all civil liberty in terms of the inherited privileges of (feudal) noble tradition; like a nobleman, an Englishman inherited his place in society, his legal rights, his title and his property, all of which characterised his natural right as an Englishman. Indeed, in the Reflections, the
English resistance to “a swinish multitude” trampling their over “natural protectors” is posited as part of the (inherited) English national character, which is not only inherently opposed to Revolutionary egalitarianism, but would itself be negated by it:

Thanks to our sullen resistance to innovation, thanks to the cold sluggishness of our national character, we still bear the stamp of our forefathers. We have not as yet subtilized ourselves into savages. We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire … atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers” (344-5).

In this, claims Arendt, Burke’s vision of social liberty is remarkable in that it perfectly protects the status quo of the arbitrarily privileged upper orders, and at the same time “enlarged the principle of these privileges to include the whole English people, establishing them as a kind of nobility among nations” (176). In Britain then, right up until the end of the nineteenth century, she claims, nationalism thus developed as a nationalism of the British ‘stock’, who inherited their rights and liberty along with their property, and indeed the particularities of their physical bodies.

Conversely, the racialisation of English liberty had implicitly negative repercussions for those nations that did not manifest the same model of inherited social polish as Britain, or indeed whose own cultural legacy had fallen victim to British colonial ventures. Indeed, for all Burke had campaigned for the rights of the persecuted Irish Catholics, he did not support the outright abolition of the slave trade, considering the calls to ban the industry to be emotionally, rather than intellectually motivated, and abolitionists to have not given sufficient thought to abolition’s potential consequences. “I am fully convinced” he wrote in a Letter to the Right Honourable Henry Dundas with the Sketch of a Negro Code of 1792, “that the cause of humanity would be far more benefited by the continuance of the trade and servitude, regulated and reformed, than by the total destruction of both or either” (261). It is fitting, indeed, that the idea of slavery should
figure so prominently in Thomas Paine’s iconic reply to Burke’s noble apologies – the *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke’s Attack on the French Revolution* of 1790. For Paine, who, incidentally, had since 1775 been a member of the very first anti-slavery society in America, Burke’s idea of inherited civil liberties was a form of slavery in itself. To inherit a government, he asserted, was to inherit control over other people – to transmit the rights of others from father to son “as if they were flocks and herds” (2.559). This was made all the worse, indeed, when even the original ancestral claims to hereditary right had been made by conquest – establishing the ruling orders not as beacons of civilisation, but constant springs of barbarity at the summit of society. Born of “family tyranny and injustice”, hereditary legislators were, in Paine’s famous words, as ridiculous as hereditary mathematicians, and served only to further “the uncivilised principle of governments founded in conquest, and the base idea of man having property in man, and governing him by personal right” (2.480).

The nostalgic, melodramatic language that Burke used to describe royalty and nobility in the *Reflections* accordingly provided rich fodder for Paine’s *Rights of Man*, in which he inverts the signifiers of noble honour to represent the upper orders in their worst possible light. His damning portrayal of the nobility, indeed, often provides an even greater insight into contemporary noble hegemony than the *Reflections*. His particularly derisive passage on noble titles, for instance, signals the continuing importance of military virility and chivalric masculinity in peerage tradition by mocking honorific titles as the capricious “nicknames” of women and children. A peerage title, claims Paine, “talks about its fine *blue ribbon* like a girl, and shews its new *garter* like a child … [France] has outgrown the baby-cloaths of *Count* and *Duke*, and breeched itself in manhood … it has put down the dwarf and set up the man” (1.477). Of course, there is more to the idea of nobility ‘breeching itself in manhood’ than simply asserting a masculine gender role. For, the place
of noblemen in Burke’s civil society is structurally patriarchal, they are figureheads of hereditary bloodlines that also represent the higher reaches of natural order, and thus the basis of institutional constructs that underpin the natural law of Man and Englishmen. By portraying nobility in terms of childishness and femininity, Paine is requisitioning its authority over a patriarchal vision of humanity (being the humanity of Englishmen), and instead assigns it to the ‘natural’ man – a figure not only devoid of inherited civil liberties, but who claims the infinitely more ancient and more authoritative liberty of nature itself. By assuming the masculine role of patriarch, the natural noble is implicitly assuming the traditionally noble position of ‘super-human’: “[t]he artificial NOBLE shrinks into a dwarf before the NOBLE of nature;” Paine declares, “and in the few instances … in whom nature, as by a miracle, has survived in the aristocracy, THOSE MEN DESPISE IT” (1.480).

In fact, Paine’s dismissal of noble titles not only interrogates the spiritual and patriarchal legitimacy of noble bloodline, but also questions whether titles can ever hold semiotic value. Rather than employing the ancient argument that noble rank and title are empty and dishonourable privileges without the inner virtue they represent, Paine argues that titles mean nothing at all – that they are baseless signifiers for something that does not exist. “What are they?” he asks,

What is their worth [?] … when we think or speak of a Judge or General, we associate it with the ideas of office and character; we think of gravity in the one, and bravery in the other: but when we use a word merely as a title, no ideas associate with it … through all the vocabulary of Adam, there is not such an animal as a Duke or a Count; neither can we connect any certain idea to the words … What respect can be paid to that which describes nothing? (477).

The question of whether titles mean anything, rather than the question of whether those who hold them have lived up to their values, makes for an especially powerful interrogation of the entire noble tradition. As will be remembered from chapter 1.3.3, the idea that a title not only represented something, but also represented something different
from other titles was a fundamental component of the eighteenth-century nobility construct. Francis Nichols’s carefully individualised portraits of dukes and earls and barons in the British and Irish Compendiums of 1725-7, for instance, each displaying the meticulously exact heraldry of each noble station, was part of a noble discourse which relied on the constant reinforcement of dukeness and earliness – states of being which one could live up to or not, but which existed all the same as metaphysical entities. Paine has, indeed, therein targeted one of the most vulnerable aspects of noble tradition: its reliance on abstract concepts that must constantly be performed, but whose very inconstancy of performance makes their nature impossible to define. This, in fact, partly explains why the term ‘aristocracy’, in Paine’s Rights of Man, became derogatorily synonymous with the term ‘nobility’. Paine directly and deliberately compares noble ranks with non-noble oligarchical governments (i.e. aristocracies) so as to show that the moral pretensions of the former are meaningless: “The French constitution says,” he writes, “there shall be no titles; and of consequence, all that class of equivocal generation, in which some countries is called ‘aristocracy’, and in others ‘nobility’ is done away, and the peer is exalted into MAN” (476). The idea of the peerage as a ‘British aristocracy’ notes Amanda Goodrich, directly countered the image they had built for themselves following the Glorious Revolution as an integral part of ‘mixed government’, pitting them instead as enemies of the people (167).

Even more interestingly, Paine consolidates his dichotomy of ‘super-human’ natural man, and ‘sub-human’ aristocrat-nobles by explicitly focusing on the physical degeneration of the noble body – identifying the ‘breeding’ systems of a noble race with the inbreeding of animal races. Such an image might be best understood in relation to Burke’s disquisition on the importance of cosmic superiority in the social elite. In the
Reflections, Burke had justified the violent historical rise of the ruling orders as a cosmic resolution of spiritual order; the great conquerors of history, he writes,

were not so much like men usurping power, as asserting their natural place in society. Their rising was to illuminate and beautify the world. Their conquest over their competitors was by outshining them (294).

Yet the opposite of this exalted state – the debasement of a person once “actuated by a principle of honour” who has become, like the French nobility, “disgraced and degraded” – is compared, and even aligned in the Reflections with a state of racialised inferiority. The next generation of nobles in France, Burke declares, a rank which had once maintained “a conscious dignity, a noble pride, a generous sense of glory and emulation” would now be no better than the “artificers and clowns, and money-jobbers, usurers, and Jews, who will always be their fellows, sometimes their masters” (295). The analogy is an interesting one, because Burke is inverting the social status of two hereditarily defined and considerably racialised groups – the nobility and the Jews – in order to demonstrate the inversion of social order when the relative powers attributed to different hereditary lines are subverted. Both nobility and Judaism, that is, are hereditary constituents of a hereditary system of civil liberties, in which one hereditary line is always superior to the other. It is by the very same dynamic, of course, that Paine can identify the privileged aristocracy as no better than the Jews in his Rights of Man: “Aristocracy has a tendency to degenerate the human species”, he proclaims,

– by the universal œconomy of nature it is known, and by the instance of the Jews it is proved, that the human species has a tendency to degenerate, in any small number of persons, when separated from the general stock of society, and intermarrying constantly with each other. It defeats even its pretended end, and becomes in time the opposite of what is noble in man (1.480).
The “opposite of what is noble in man”, then, is imagined in both Burke and Paine’s accounts as the racially degenerate human body, though Burke applies this only to the Jews while Paine applies it to Jews and nobles alike. Of course, each theorist is also employing a very different perspective: Burke’s racialised view of hereditary groups relies on a traditional, Augustinian ‘Chain of Being’ reasoning – highlighting the natural supremacy of nobles (and elites in general) as primarily providential. Paine, on the other hand, uses a reasoning that is much more redolent of human variety theory; his understanding of noble difference from other human beings is first and foremost a physiological understanding – which is enshrined in the noble tradition of genealogical race that had, at this stage, thoroughly infiltrated naturalist discourse. It is, indeed, easy to portray the nobility as a degenerate race, precisely because race followed the template of noble tradition; likewise, since noble blood had provided a discourse wherein human social rank could be thought of in the same terms of animal breeding practices, it was equally easy to point out that nobility evidently followed bad husbandry techniques, ‘interbreeding’ rather than actively assimilating superior stock. In the latter years of the eighteenth century, in short, it had become increasingly logical to extrapolate (as will be remembered from the previous discussion of Erasmus Darwin in chapter 2.1.2) that the noble body – following the template of race established by noble tradition itself – was a degenerate body.

This intense and indeed unprecedentedly physiological understanding of noble rank and race is perhaps one of the most interesting facets of the ‘noble question’ in late-century Revolutionary debates. The countless pamphlets that were published in response to Burke’s Reflections and Paine’s Rights of Man recurrently engage with the question of nobility’s anatomical condition; how the historical blood isolation of a lineal race could be, or should be, considered in terms of anatomical superiority or inferiority, as physical
‘super-humans’ or ‘sub-humans’. The anonymous author of *Considerations on Mr Paine’s Pamphlet on the Rights of Man* (1791), for instance, is worth quoting at length:

In an attempt to prove the nobility … a degenerate race, he [Paine] says, it is proved by the example of the Jews (a whole nation) that any small stock of men separated from the general stock of society, and intermarrying with one another, certainly produce a degenerate race. … Was the proof admitted, however, it would prove rather too much: it would prove, that the famous breed of Arabian horses, which is never suffered to mix with others, is the most degenerate race of horses. It would also prove, that the Greeks in the more advanced state of their republics, the Spartans for instance, in the time of Agesilaus, by constantly intermarrying in the small circle of free citizens, were become the most degenerate race of man: yet the Spartans were esteemed the bravest, the handsomest, the most virtuous men in the world, and their women the most beautiful. Does Mr. Paine seriously believe that the gallant noblesse of France is inferior either in moral or physical qualities to the mixed breed of his American countrymen; if he does, his faith might remove mountains (Claeys ed. 1995, 5.96).

Here, of course, the pamphleteer is arguing directly against Paine, yet he nonetheless remains firmly rooted in a discourse of *physiological race*. His argument, indeed, fully recognises that the controlled breeding practices of the nobility have made them corporeally distinct from other people, only that, in his opinion, this is a superior rather than inferior distinction. More than this, while the nobility are openly compared to thoroughbred horses, the political brilliance of the Greeks and the physical beauty of the Spartans are likewise attributed to the controlled breeding of a pure-blood human ‘race’ – the artificial propagation of a superior strain of humanity. In another anonymous response to Paine, the *Defence of the Constitution of England* (1791), the author asserts that the Bible made it clear that early humans had immediately clustered “into families; some deservedly and honourably distinguished, and some reprobated and degraded”, and it was the hierarchy of “good” to “bad” families that had established ranks among men (Claeys ed. 5.11-2). The pamphleteer knew of one distinguished nobleman, he recounts, who made the mistake of marrying a common “soldier’s trull”: 
The family will be infested for generations with the low and abominable vices, which are transmitted from such a wretch to her unfortunate children; and through them to future ages. In this and in such cases, the privileges of Nobility are not only lost, but turned against the public interest, and by being made the nurseries of vice instead of those of virtue, they are justly subjected to censure and indignation (Claeys ed. 5.13).

Pureblood noble race here, by harbouring the virtues of past generations, is identified as a function of noble rank in society, while its contamination with base blood is injurious for the community as a whole by denying the people the governance of a ‘super-human’ caste. For this author, the division of bloodline was definite and permanent – he recounts the story of one wealthy American family who attempted to retrace their genealogy, but try as they might their family lines always led back to Newgate (5.11). Yet another pamphlet, from 1792, the Letter to the Farmers and Manufactures in Great Britain and Ireland, claimed that the debasement of nobility by the commonality had inspired black slaves to rise up in a similar manner against their owners:

The Negroes, adopting the EQUITABLE maxims of the great law givers in France … have set fire to the plantations of their benevolent masters… the planters are plunged from a state of splendor to want even the common necessities of life; beggary is entailed on their helpless posterity, and an island, equal in extent almost to that of England, is in a state of anarchy and confusion … (5.134).

In the works of both Burke and Paine, then, nobility ultimately stands as a representative correlative for the very idea of heredity in society, and as the basis of hereditary ‘race’ as a model of human hierarchy. What is interesting is that the idea of nobility is equally racialised in both texts – though in different ways and to different ends. In Burke’s Reflections, noble families represent providentially ordained superior bloodlines, and an idea of pureblood race that is essential to a greater scheme of hereditary institutions, hereditary rights, and hereditary hierarchies. In Paine’s Rights of Man, this same idea of pureblood race is used to assess the rank in terms of anatomical hierarchy, condemning
them on account of their racialised difference from other people, which can be defined by their genealogical history. Both these texts and the pamphlets that reflect their reception in Britain of 1790s hold special significance for the idea of ‘noble race’ precisely because they approach nobility in a moment of political and racial crisis. That is to say, it is undergoing a political crisis in that the doctrines of equality and republicanism are working to denounce its role in government; it is undergoing a ‘racial’ crisis in that the shift from a fundamentally spiritual form of race thinking to a fundamentally physiological one has changed the very nature of how ‘noble race’ can be justified and criticised. The noble tradition of pureblood race – having entered the discourse of human variety theory and become an elemental component in naturalist assertions of anatomical hierarchy – has here transformed noble race into a human-variety-in-miniature. While once their ‘race’ had served to distinguish their providentially ordained rank, it is now being discussed, even by their supporters, as something which has a direct influence on their bodies and minds. Just like human varieties, the nobility are now being imagined in terms of generation and degeneration – with the external influences of breeding and education echoing those of climate and civilisation, and the internal influences of bloodline and ancestry directly correlating with racialised descent and separation. It might even be said that the great crisis of the British nobility in the 1790s, on the fall of their counterparts in France, was that they were recognised as a race not only in the traditional, but the modern sense of the word: as a biological entity, whose assumptions of blood-right superiority had become dangerous by becoming too bound up with a hierarchy of the human body, and thus, for the nobility’s own survival, could never exist again in exactly the same way.
3.1.3: Revolution and the Noble Body in Sydney Owenson’s *Wild Irish Girl* (1806) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui* (1809)

In the summer of 1798, Ireland erupted into one of the bloodiest and most devastating rebellions the island had ever seen. By autumn of the same year, over 30,000 people had died in the fighting – more, notes Susan Egenolf, than in the French Reign of Terror, and with 90% of losses on the losing rebel side (49). The rebellion had been born from a combination of sectarian oppression, nationalist fervour, and deeply held resentments in every quarter of Ireland’s extremely fragmented society, all set in motion by the prospect of military support from Revolutionary France. Indeed, among the many cultural implosions precipitated by the rebellion was the complete breakdown of the island’s sectarian order. Though the British establishment went to great lengths to portray the uprising as a purely Catholic phenomenon, it had actually derived its greatest impetus from Dissenting radicals in the North (primarily through the ‘Ulster Volunteers’), and a conglomeration of Dissenter and Anglican republicans in Ascendancy Dublin (who had formed the ‘Society of United Irishmen’ in 1791) – with both groups eventually calling upon the Catholic majority for support in a spirit of secular nationalism (Bartlett *et al.* 1998, 18). 143 “If the odious distinction of Protestant and Presbyterian and Catholic were abolished,” Theobald Wolfe Tone, leader of the United Irishmen, had proclaimed in 1791 and the three great sects blended together under the common and sacred title of Irishman, what interest could a Catholic member of parliament have distinct from his Protestant brother [?] ... When I contrast the National Assembly of Frenchmen and Catholics with other great bodies which I could name, I confess I feel little propensity to boast that I have the honour to be an Irishman and a Protestant (111-125).

143 Post-rebellion propaganda characterising the rebels as Catholic cannibals has already been touched upon in chapter 2.3.1. Stuart Andrews has noted, for instance, that Richard Musgrave devoted only 3% of his 1802 account of the rebellion to the Protestant counties of Antrim and Down, where some of the bloodiest fighting had occurred (24). For more on the sectarian dynamics of the rebellion, see Timothy Mc Inerney, ‘Ascendancy and the 1798 Rebellion in Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1798) and *Ennui* (1809)’, *RSEAA XVII-XVIII* 70, 2014.
One of the most divisive elements of the 1798 rebellion, however, was the fact that its military architect and symbolic champion was a nobleman – an Anglican nobleman at that, who had not only denounced the institution of peerage, but, in doing so, had paradoxically fulfilled the nationalist fantasy of a pureblood, Old English scion leading his people against a colonial oligarchy of usurpers and tyrants. This subchapter builds on the subject of Ireland’s uniquely contradictory sense of nobility, previously analysed in chapter 2.3.1, examining how the ‘race’ of ‘authentic’ noble families – though divorced from their governmental role – could represent the Irish race itself, ostensibly faced against a genealogically illegitimate rival nobility. To do so, we will consider two novels published in the 1800s – Sydney Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui* (1809) – both of which were fundamentally informed by the rebellion and its aftermath, and both of which envisioned, in very different ways, the role of ‘pure’ Irish nobility in the national identity of the past, and the continued governance of the future.

Lord Edward Fitzgerald was a ‘Geraldine’, fifth son of Ireland’s oldest and highest-ranking noble family, whose ancestors included some of the country’s most iconic figures of armed resistance.144 In fact, for centuries the Geraldines (or Gearaltaigh) had stood as prime exemplars of Hiberno-Norman Gaelicisation (a phenomenon which will be remembered from chapter 2.3.1), not only embracing the Irish language and culture, but actively associating themselves with local myths and legends in order to reinforce their image as rightful claimants over the land. The fourteenth-century Earl of Desmond, or *Gearóid iarla Mac Gearailt* (Gerald the Earl, son of the Geraldines), for instance, had explicitly claimed

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144 Most notably the lords deputy Gearóid Mór (Gerald the Elder) and his son Gearóid Óg (Gerald the Younger) Mac Gearailt, both of whom were sent to the Tower as traitors in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and ‘Silken Thomas’ Fitzgerald, who had denounced allegiance to Henry VIII and his Church, leading a full-scale revolt on Dublin Castle in 1534.
the patronage of Áine, the Celtic sovereignty goddess of Munster, dubbing his late father ‘the King of Áine’, and himself the ‘Son of the cavalier of bright Áine’ (Ó hÓgáin 8). In 1844, the leader of the ‘Young Ireland’ movement, Thomas Davis, would commemorate the resolute Irishness of the Geraldine dynasty in verse:

These Geraldines! These Geraldines!—not long our air they breathed;

... When from their full and genial hearts an Irish feeling burst!
The English monarchs strove in vain, by law, and force, and bribe,
To win from Irish thoughts and ways this ‘more than Irish’ tribe;
For still they clung to fosterage, to breitheamh, cloak, and bard:
What king dare say to Geraldine, ‘Your Irish wife discard’? (307).

Lord Edward’s father, James Fitzgerald, was the premier peer of Ireland, titled Duke of Leinster in 1766, while also maintaining an esteemed English peerage as Viscount Leinster of Taplow. Continuing in the Geraldine tradition, the elder Fitzgerald had remained loyal to the Dublin parliament where he stood as leader of the nationalist Patriot Party. In fact, following a notorious memorial of 1753, demanding that George II withdraw his viceroy from Dublin, he was “feted in Ireland as a patriot icon” while at the same time becoming “despised in much of the political world in London” (Magennis §2; Tillyard 8-9). The young, handsome Lord Edward, however – who had been educated in the doctrines of Rousseau, according to the wishes of his mother the Duchess of Leinster – was outcast from the family when he became involved with radical Revolutionary politics. Renouncing his peerage title for the epithet ‘citizen’ (an act which saw him expelled from the army), he became a notorious figure on the streets of Dublin, abandoning his horse and carriage in favour of walking the streets with a tricolour cravat and his hair cropped short in Revolutionary style, and attending Ascendancy functions uninvited, only to hiss at ‘God

145 The Gaelic legal system, named for the Brehons, a class of judges who had undergone secular juridical training, banned in 1366.
146 In reaction to Gaelicisation of English colonists, the Statutes of Kilkenny were established in 1366 – outlawing Gaelic language, traditions (such as fosterage), clothing, bardic poetry, and the intermarriage of settlers with the ‘native’ Irish.
save the King’ (Bartlett *et al.* 1998, 91-3; Tillyard 205-66). All of this, indeed, made him an ideal figurehead for the Irish nationalist movement: with his bloodline inescapably linking him to the highest nobility of Ireland, he represented open and high-profile defection from the colonial establishment, all the while lending the United Irishmen “a glamour and an instant pedigree of centuries of Geraldine resistance” (Tillyard 205). Furthermore, the rejection of the *Irish peerage* by a quintessentially (even superlatively) *Irish nobleman* made for a profound validation of an Irish identity that was definitively opposed to the ‘Irish Nation’.\(^{147}\) For, the promised leadership of a pureblood Irish nobleman – albeit stripped of his title and privilege, and albeit promoting the establishment of a *republic* with neither peerage nor House of Lords – reinforced the idea that Irish nobility existed *in spite* of the colonial hierarchy, not only independent of colonial order, but an inherent and eternal element of the ‘Irish race’.

Long after the disastrous defeat of Fitzgerald, Wolfe Tone, and the United Irishmen, and the subsequent induction of the Irish parliament and peerage into the United Kingdom in 1801, this notion of inherent Irish nobility – along with its various (and variable) associations with Old English dynasties – continued to remain central to Irish nationalist tradition. Indeed, in both Owenson’s *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) and Edgeworth’s *Ennui* (1809), the conceptual differentiation between *colonial* ‘Irish nobility’ and a *native Irish* ‘Irish nobility’ is a primary concern. Both novels directly contrast the inherent character and sensibilities of blood-born Irish nobles with English holders of Irish peerage titles – delineating two distinct and mutually exclusive forms of nobility, which, for Owenson, are of equal esteem and import, and for Edgeworth, are equally self-indulgent and capricious. Most importantly for this study, in both novels, the

\(^{147}\) Interestingly, notes S.J. Connolly, it was only during the last decades of the eighteenth century that the term *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis* became a mainstay piece of terminology in Irish historiography, “smoothing over what would otherwise have been awkward discontinuities in the making of “the Irish race”” (35).
Irish nobility defines itself against its colonial counterpart by its membership of the Irish race, and, moreover, as that race’s ‘most’ noble bloodline.

Sydney Owenson, later Lady Morgan, enjoyed immense success with her *Wild Irish Girl*, becoming known amongst the Dublin quality by the name of her main character, Glorvina, and inspiring a new wave of Celtic-inspired fashion trends for golden bodkins and stylised brooches (Campbell 71). Her success, however, also made her the object of suspicion in the loyalist headquarters at Dublin castle, for whom the championing of a covert Irish blood-elite only eight years after the rebellion – albeit through the medium of a romantic novel – was highly contentious. “At the time when The Wild Irish Girl was published,” the author noted some decades later in a preface to the novel’s 1836 edition,

it was dangerous to write on Ireland, hazardous to praise her, and difficult to find a publisher for an Irish tale which had a political tendency … for even ballads sung in the streets of Dublin had been denounced by government spies and hushed by Castle ‘sbirri’ because the old Irish refrains of *Erin go bragh*148 awakened the cheers of the ragged, starving audience (qtd in Campbell 3).

Certainly, the novel’s political message is anything but subtle, reflected at every step by its melodramatic romance between an English peer and a Gaelic princess. Lord Horatio Mortimer, English-born heir to the Earldom of M— in County Mayo, describes his voyage to his father’s ancestral seat in a series of letters, detailing his discovery of an ancient family of Irish royalty inhabiting the last vestiges of their kingdom on the outskirts of his (Cromwellian) estate. Horatio, indeed, launches the narrative by immediately addressing the anti-Irish prejudice that he has learned in England. Ever since he had read the “travels of *Moryson*”149, he owns, he had imagined the Irish as “an *Esquimaux* group circling round the fire blazing to dress a dinner or broil an enemy” (1). The correction of such

148 i.e. Éireann go Brách, meaning ‘Ireland forever’.
149 That is, Fynes Moryson’s *Itinerary* of 1603, previously cited in chapter 2.3.1. It will also be remembered that Moryson had claimed Irish women underwent painless childbirth and perfect physical health almost immediately after delivery.
preconceptions, of course, is the main didactic goal of the novel – informing its very title: Glorvina is a ‘wild’ Irish girl in the sense that she is wont to be spied “at dawn, running like a doe about the rocks; her fine yellow hair streaming in the wind, for all the world like a mermaid”, but she is also a ‘Wild Irish’ girl, in the sense that she belongs to a native Irish race, that has for centuries been reviled and feared by the British observer and the Anglo-Irish colonist (31). This nationalist ‘education’, moreover, is supplemented with “the learned glosses” of a fictional editor (Egenolf 106). Nevertheless, Owenson’s ‘accurate’ portrayal of the native Irish is no less fantastical than the ‘monstrous race’ image she wishes to controvert. Glorvina and her family ultimately present an ‘Ossianic’ vision of Celtic romance (Macpherson’s works are defended at numerous points throughout the novel), appearing to have been transported from the annals of ancient mythology into a set of castle ruins in eighteenth-century Mayo. While Glorvina turns herself out in embroidered silk and golden diadems, her father is almost farcically equipped with the full regalia of an Iron-age Celtic warrior. The Prince of Inismore,\(^{150}\) explains Horatio, was:

- gigantic in stature [with] limbs of Herculean mould … The drapery [was] strictly conformable to the ancient costume of the Irish nobles [with] an ancient Irish truis, [including a] pantaloon and … a kind of buskin, not dissimilar to the Roman perones. A triangular mantle of bright scarlet cloth … fell from his shoulders to the ground, and was fastened at the breast with a large circular golden broach … round his neck hung a golden collar, which seemed to denote the wearer of some order of knighthood, probably hereditary in his family; a dagger, called a skiene … was sheathed in his girdle … [H]e removed from his venerable head a cap, or berrad, of the same form as that I had noticed with my guide, but made of velvet, richly embroidered (38).

No more than the beautiful form of Glorvina – whose blond hair, blue eyes, and proud character perfectly accord with Macpherson’s image of an ancient Celtic woman – her

\(^{150}\) Mary Campbell has noted that the ‘Prince of Inismore’ was probably based on the very real ‘Prince of Coolavin’, Myles MacDermot, with whom Owenson was personally acquainted, and who still asserted the royal blood of his ancestors (the Kings of Magh Luirc), despite their land having been confiscated in the sixteenth century (65). Coolavin’s descendants, incidentally, continue to assert their royal titles today. Their estate, in the western county of Sligo (immediately north of Mayo) contains the stone ruins of an Iron-age ring fort, not far from a lake island named ‘Inch’, or Inis.
father’s ancient dress stands in for a proudly *independent* form of elitism, the endurance of an ancient and eternal hereditary nobility. Even Horatio is moved to comment that the Inismore’s decidedly incongruous outfit is “singularly appropriate” for a Prince (38). Just as importantly, this ancient chieftain, though ‘gigantic’ and ‘Herculean’ has been politically neutralised by the fact that he has become physically infirm, requiring his daughter’s assistance even to walk; he presents, as Susan B. Egenolf has noted, a glorious vision of Irish nationalism that is nonetheless removed from the any tangible threat of violent insurgence (122). Reflected in the ruined castle that serves as a backdrop for much of the novel, the proud but impotent royal dynasty invite the reader to understand, rather than to fear, the greatness of their ancient legacy.

The Prince and Princess of Inismore present a classic vision of ‘eugenic’ nobility: they live an impoverished life, with neither title nor land, and, it must be assumed, as Catholics they have been denied access to many of their basic civil and proprietary rights; yet, they are nonetheless presented as more legitimately ‘noble’ than Horatio (whose family have laid claim to the land for over a century, whose peerage title has been validated by the sitting monarch and established church, and whose financial security, highborn education, and social esteem fulfill all the requirements of noble character) – simply because they are pureblood members of the Irish race, and untainted descendants of *Irish* nobility. In short, their *eugeneia* – the racialised blood-purity which protects the integrity of their nobility from usurpers like the Earls of M—, – is an intensification, even a representative microcosm of the *eugeneia* of the Irish race. The Prince of Inismore’s own title at once evokes the Connemara island of *Inis mór* (a symbolic bastion of Gaelic culture, translating simply to ‘Great Island’), as well as implicitly proclaiming him Prince of the ‘Great Island’ of Ireland itself. Indeed, the first piece of information Horatio is told about the Prince and his family, imparted by an old servant of the estate, is that they are
“true Milesians bred and born … not a drop of Strongbowian blood flowed in their Irish veins agrah!” (28). Here, echoing the sentiments of Mr. O’Dogherty in Macklin’s True Born Irishman (cited in chapter 2.3.1)\(^{151}\), ‘Strongbowian’ blood – though it encompasses the ‘Old’ and ‘New’ colonial populations that had lived in Ireland for over five hundred years – is placed in direct opposition to ‘the Irish’, which describes only those of uncorrupted Gaelic lineage. The Dissenters of the north are likewise excluded from this thoroughly racialised idea of Irishness: when Horatio accompanies the ‘royal’ retinue across the border between Connaught and Ulster, the family priest warns him that:

as we now advance northwards, we shall gradually lose sight of the genuine Irish character, and those ancient manners, modes, customs, and language … this part of Ireland may in some respects be considered as a Scotch colony … you will find in the Northerns of this island much to admire and esteem; but on the heart they make little claim (198).

Horatio subsequently suggests that, this being the case, they should hurry back to Connaught as soon as possible – and the priest wholeheartedly agrees.

Perhaps most controversially for the ‘sbirri’ of Dublin Castle, Horatio steadily begins to agree with the Inismore dynasty that their nobility is truly more legitimate than (or at least as legitimate as) his own family’s Irish peerage. “It is absurd;” he eventually admits, “but I cannot divest myself of a feeling of inferiority in her [Glorvina’s] presence, as though I were actually that poor, wandering, unconnected being I have feigned myself; and she, as lingo has it, a real Princess” (60). In fact, Horatio comes to recognise that Glorvina’s nobility as an observable feature of her body and mind; in one of his many moments of voyeuristic enchantment, he notices that the young princess is possessed of a “latent ambition, which sometimes breathing in the elevation of her sentiments, and

\(^{151}\) Campbell has noted that Owenson’s father, who was born Robert MacOwen, made a name for himself on the Dublin and London stages specialising in the role of stage Irishman, almost certainly including Macklin’s famous characters (24). During his acting career, interestingly, he had also worked alongside the young Theobald Wolf Tone in 1783, then a student at Trinity College (28).
sometimes flashing in the haughtiness of her eye, seems to say “I was born to rule!” (77). Glorvina herself is quietly confident in the inherent legitimacy of her nobility: if the Inismore family are visibly superior beings, she holds, it is because the glories of her illustrious ancestors have long since become hereditary in their bloodline:

I have a very high idea of the virtues which exalted birth does or ought to bring with it … it is natural to suppose that those superior talents or virtues which in the early stages of society are the purchase of worldly elevation, become hereditary, and that the noble principles of our ancestors should descend to us with our titles and estates (111).

Eventually, Horatio and Glorvina’s love brings their feuding families together, with the Prince of Inismore using his dying breath to unite Irish with English, and Catholic with Protestant, through the blessing of their marriage.¹⁵² In many ways, their union evokes the submission of a proudly ‘Celtic’ Ireland to the authority of its colonial masters, and indeed hints at the Act of Union itself, which had so recently dashed the hopes of Irish Home Rule. On the other hand, however, it is only through marriage that Glorvina’s noble blood can finally validate Horatio’s peerage, which has theretofore been portrayed as an empty legacy of Cromwellian despotism. The novel, indeed, embraces Ascendancy nobility as a permanent and unvanquishable feature of the Irish political landscape – yet only grants it full legitimacy on its assimilation into a pureblood noble race, which, by extension, is assumed to represent the pureblood Irish. Glorvina’s accession to the title of ‘Lady M—’ is no more than the elevation of her inherent nobility to its rightful position of rulership; concordantly, Horatio’s marriage into the blood of the Inismores reunites his noble title with the hereditary essence of illustrious ancestry that it should rightfully denote. Both actions are fundamentally racialised, not only reinforcing the idea of superior body, mind and blood in the nobility, but also directly linking this purity of blood with a

¹⁵² Religion is notably downplayed in the novel, though Horatio regularly praises the religious tolerance of this Catholic family and their priest. Owenson herself came from a mixed-faith background, with an Irish Catholic father and an English Anglican mother (Campbell 17).
vision of untainted Irishness. Though Horatio represents the continued dominance of the colonial Irish elite, the nation that Glorvina would have him govern does not consist of the Irish people, but the Irish race – an entity primarily understood in terms of genealogy, and which excludes low-blooded usurpers and ‘Scotch colonists’ alike. Owenson, in short, presents a vision of the colonial elite paying homage to, and eventually entering into, a purely Irish form of nobility that sits at the summit of a purely ‘Irish’ nation.

Maria Edgeworth’s Ennui, published three years after the appearance of The Wild Irish Girl, follows a similar storyline to Owenson’s novel: it is narrated by the young Earl of Glenthorn who crosses the Irish Sea for the first time since his infancy to visit his ancestral estate, where he will encounter and attempt to understand Irish culture. Edgeworth’s novel, however, addresses the state of post-rebellion Ireland in a radically different way from that of her predecessor. Whereas Owenson had attempted to neutralise the Irish cause by identifying it with Ossianic aesthetics, Edgeworth presents a landscape saturated with the violence and paranoia of the recent uprising, all the more unsettling in that it remains just beneath the surface of the narrative – always obscured, only partially explained, and never entirely trustworthy. In fact, Edgeworth often employs tropes that seem to directly echo Owenson’s novel, only to reveal them as rather more unnerving than enchanting. At the beginning of The Wild Irish Girl, for instance, Horatio is so entranced with the music of Glorvina’s harp, that he loses his footing, incurring an injury that leads to his encounter with the Prince of Inismore; at the start of Edgeworth’s Ennui, on the other hand, Earl Glenthorn is so reviled by the sudden sight of his haggard old nurse Ellinor, that he is thrown off his horse – the keening, wailing Ellinor, furthermore, will eventually transpire to be his own mother. In this particular instance, both Glorvina and
Ellinor seem to make reference to the conventions of the *aisling* (‘vision’) – a highly politicised genre of eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry, in which a *spéirbhean* (‘heaven-woman’), who can take the shape of either maiden or crone, incites the poet to take up arms against the British enemy.\(^{153}\) Edgeworth’s choice of Ellinor’s ‘crone’ over Glorvina’s ‘maiden’, in itself, makes for a considerable interrogation of nationalist iconography, asserting this dishevelled and impoverished vision of ‘native Ireland’ as the nurse and mother of the novel’s absentee peer. Indeed, in place of the Celtic romance of Inismore Castle, Edgeworth’s Glenthorn finds himself trapped in a nightmare world of miserable, manipulative tenants, treacherous servants, and rebel spies – in a country where even the ‘local colour’ of peasant myths and legends is tainted with the threat of vicious insurgency.

Some of the strongest echoes of Owenson’s novel in *Ennui*, however, are to be found in the character of “Lady Geraldine —”, a young, proud, and beautiful Irish noblewoman who immediately captivates the interest of Earl Glenthorn. Like Glorvina, Lady Geraldine embodies an Irish nobility which is fundamentally different from that of Glenthorn – though, as her name suggests, rather than representing pureblood Gaelic chieftains, she evokes the ‘Old English’ tradition of cultural and racial assimilation. In direct contrast to Horatio, Glenthorn never truly comes to understand the significance of Lady Geraldine and her caste, nor does it seem that she is particularly interested in explaining it to him. In fact, Glenthorn is so baffled by her exotic form of nobility that he struggles even to find adequate vocabulary to describe her. For him, *he* is the definition of an Irish nobleman – based in England, with an English accent and an English education, knowing nothing about Ireland, and visiting his ancestral estate only on rare and

\(^{153}\) David Pierce notes that *aislings* were so prevalent among Gaelic language poets in the eighteenth century that they were often presented from one poet to another as a gauge of the author’s talent. Geoffrey Keating, who, it will be remembered from chapter 2.3.1, largely delineated the early-modern Catholic Irish identity, had been a pioneer of the *aisling* genre, linking it with the Stuart dynasty. In the eighteenth century, it was often used to bewail the exile of the Young Pretender, and continued to feature strongly in nationalist literature into the twentieth century (consider, for instance, Yeats’s *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*) (290).
unavoidable occasions. It is as difficult for him to comprehend an Irish nobility which exists outside the norms of British high society as it is to imagine an Irish person who exists outside the bounds of monstrous peasantry. “Her voice was agreeable,” he says in confusion,

she did not speak with the Irish accent; but, when I listened maliciously, I detected certain Hibernian inflections ... something that was more interrogative, more exclamatory, and perhaps more rhetorical, than the common language of English ladies ..., peculiar, unusual, but not affected ... [s]he was uncommonly eloquent, and yet, without action, her words were sufficiently rapid to express her ideas. Her manners appeared foreign, but it was not quite French ... I should however, have pronounced it more French than English (202-3).

Here, of course, Edgeworth is making a blatant and somewhat macabre joke at the expense of her ‘ignorant readers’; the fact that Geraldine seems somehow “more French than English” does not just reference her Old English (i.e. French-speaking Norman) lineage, it plays on the blatant connotations her first name and the quietly sardonic suppression of her surname; it evokes the Rousseauian education favoured by a certain ‘Geraldine’ duchess, the Revolutionary zealotry of a certain ‘Geraldine’ lord, and the indiscriminate slaughter brought on by the promise of certain French warships so very recently. In fact, Lady Geraldine’s very presence in the narrative is one of the novel’s greatest ironies: while Glenthorn has been skulking, paranoid, around his gothic estate, where peasant rebels hide in sea caves and treacherous servants roam the hallways, the narrative’s most significant symbol of the 1798 Rebellion is a landed noblewoman. Geraldine represents a central component to Irish revolutionary rhetoric that was being wilfully overlooked by the British establishment: the assertion of an alternative Irish nobility, whose noble race not only trumped the political titles of the colonial elite, but had special resonance for an increasingly racialised sense of Irishness.
Like Glorvina, Lady Geraldine represents an Irish Irish nobility – possessing an impenetrable affinity with the native population that a ‘non-Irish’ Irish noble like Glenthorn can never attain; she knows her tenants’ manipulations and tricks as well as they do, for, as an Irishwoman, they are her own. For Edgeworth, however, Geraldine’s sense of consanguinity (symbolic and literal) with an ‘Irish race’ that finds its identity in its very unEnglishness, stands as an insurmountable flaw rather than an ancestral virtue. Faced with relentless condescension and cultural dismissiveness on the part of her English visitors, Geraldine maintains the dignity of her rank by resorting to mockery and disdain; in doing so, however, she presents an Irish identity which is deeply reactive, rather than active – which, no more than in the actions of Glenthorn’s tenants, has so internalised its own oppression that it has become mired in a cycle of guile and scheming whose only real victim, paradoxically, is Ireland itself. Just as Glenthorn’s tenants use deceit and manipulation to extort all they can from their English landlords, all the while remaining in a perpetual state of misery and destitution, Lady Geraldine uses the same deceit and manipulation to fuel the dying embers of her own cultural pride, all the while limiting her caste’s potential for effective leadership. When the gullible and patronising English Lord Craiglethorpe requests Geraldine’s assistance in compiling an Irish travel account for publication in England, she not only delights in feeding him fantastically false information, but relishes the idea that the peasantry are almost certainly doing the same: “There is not a man, woman, or child in any cabin in Ireland,” she explains to Glenthorn, adopting the peasant voice for herself, “who would not have wit and cuteness enough to make my lard believe just what they please” (211). This, indeed, is a major theme of Edgeworth’s novel: that British stereotypes about Ireland are an essential element of the island’s mismanagement, indulged and exploited by the Irish themselves in order to exercise a strange manner of control over their colonisers, all of which is ultimately detrimental for
the nation as a whole. It is a perverse cycle of oppression, retribution, and resentment, the novel suggests, that has not only infected the destitute lower orders, but the haughty noble races that assume to be their natural leaders.

Indeed, while Geraldine’s intimate understanding of Irish culture stands in stark contrast to Glenthorn’s total ignorance, the young earl gradually comes to understand that her sense of entitlement – again echoing Glorvina’s conviction of her family’s “exalted birth” – renders her Irish nobility no less arbitrary than his ‘non-Irish’ peerage. In fact, the sheer confidence she has in her inherent legitimacy as an Irish noblewoman arguably makes her even more despotic than Glenthorn. “High born and high bred”, he observes of her,

frank, candid and affable, yet opinionated, insolent and an egoist ... an only daughter, and the representative of an ancient house. Confident of her talents, conscious of her charms, and secure of her station, Lady Geraldine gave free scope to her high spirits, her fancy, and her turn for ridicule. She looked, spoke and acted, like a person privileged to think, say, and do what she pleased. Her raillery, like the raillery of a princess, was without fear of retort (205).

When Glenthorn eventually meets his future wife, Cecilia Delamere, who represents a life of hard work, professional virtues, and the pragmatism of a modern gentry, he directly contrasts her rather ‘softer’ qualities with Lady Geraldine’s querulous passions:

Cecilia Delamere was not so entertaining, but she was more interesting than Lady Geraldine … Lady Geraldine had much pride, and it often gave offence; Cecilia, perhaps, had more pride, but it never appeared, except upon the defensive: without having less candour, she had less occasion for it than Lady Geraldine seemed to have … I admired Lady Geraldine long before I loved her; I loved Cecilia long before I admired her (302).

Interestingly, it is one of Lady Geraldine’s mean-spirited pranks that most clearly foreshadows the remarkable ‘switched-at-birth’ scenario that marks the narrative turning-point of *Ennui*, and indeed stands as one of the novel’s most cutting criticisms of
hereditary privilege. As a practical joke, Lady Geraldine arranges for Lord Craiglethorpe and his surveyor to temporarily switch identities, luring her gullible companion Miss Tracey to court the wrong man in the mistaken belief that he is a peer. For her, the joke rests on the preposterousness of a gentlewoman not being able to immediately tell the difference between a nobleman and a commoner from their respective anatomies – “Of course your Lordship will know which is the real lord at first sight,” she reassures Glenthorn, “He is a full head taller than Gabbit” (209). Geraldine’s comment, of course, not only evokes Owenson’s “gigantic” Prince of Inismore and his “Herculean” limbs, but also Glorvina’s unquestioning belief in her own physical nobility. Geraldine’s assumption that titled peers are literally heads taller than common gentlemen, exposes her naïve faith in the reality of hereditary privilege; more than this, however, it marks out her understanding of social hierarchy as profoundly hypocritical: little does Geraldine realise that the man she is talking to is an impostor nobleman himself.

Far from being the rightful heir to a magnificent earldom, Glenthorn is no more than the child of the Irish nursemaid Ellinor. Meanwhile, it is Christy Noonan – who has spent his life as Ellinor’s son, cutting turf and possibly colluding with rebel insurgents – who is the ‘real’ Earl of Glenthorn. On discovering the truth about his parentage, Glenthorn is so appalled at the rank-disorder he has engendered that he immediately signs his entire estate over to Christy as its born heir – a swap which makes for a brutal commentary on both characters. Glenthorn’s noble upbringing has left him as defenceless as a child; only when he renounces his estate does he realise that he is unable to perform even the most basic tasks for himself. “It was new and rather strange for me to be without attendants;” he notes, “but I found that, when I was forced to it, I could do things admirably well for myself, that I had never suspected I could perform without assistance” (292). Christy is equally blinded by his strict adherence to noble ideology; he is reluctant
to accept the position that Glenthorn offers him, since “I always thought and knew I was best as I am ... because if I was to be born a jantleman at all, I’d wish to be of a ra-al good ould family born” (281). Of course, this is exactly what Christy is – a born, titled nobleman, but unlike the Inismore dynasty whose nobility has persisted through generations of poverty and exile, he feels no natural affinity with his hereditary birthright. In a glib parody of Ascendancy mismanagement in Ireland, and indeed of Owenson’s idealised vision of Gaelic royalty, Glenthorn’s castle falls into ruin under Christy’s supervision, with him and his wife using it for little else but their own enjoyment. Within the year, Glenthorn discovers that the estate had become:

a scene of riotous living, and of the most wasteful vulgar extravagance ... [Christy’s] wife filled the castle with tribes of her vagabond relations; she chose to be descended from one of the kings of Ireland; and whoever would acknowledge her high descent ... were welcome to live in all the barbaric magnificence of Glenthorn Castle (309).

The discovery of Glethorn’s true parentage, however, also casts a fascinating light on his primary narrative motivation: the medicalised condition of ennui itself. The hedonistic dissipation of Glenthorn Castle at the end of the novel is posited as a foil to the self-destructive spiral of nervous depression that had plagued Glenthorn in the opening chapter. “Whilst yet a boy” he had attested in the novel’s first pages,

I began to feel the dreadful symptoms of that mental malady which baffles the skill of medicine. For this complaint, there is no precise English name; but alas the foreign term is now naturalised in English! . “Among the higher classes, whether in the wealthy or the fashionable world, who is unacquainted with ennui? (144).

In fact, the description of Glenthorn’s ennui occupies a significant proportion of the novel – framing a mini-narrative of its own before the novel’s primary action even begins. The young earl’s splenetic depression, of course, reads like a catalogue of abuses typically
attributed to noble tradition: first, he embarks on a superficial, lacklustre tour around Europe, before moving on to fashionable spa resorts, engaging in excessive conspicuous consumption, following on to high-stake gambling, falling into a loveless, financially based marriage, indulging in immense gluttony, riding horses to their death for sport, collecting rare Egyptian artefacts, and finally, the day before he encounters the wailing figure of Ellinor, setting out with a loaded pistol to take his own life. For the modern reader, the irony of Glenthorn’s illness seems rather straightforward – he is, the narrative explains, driven to excessive action simply because he has nothing to do: “the symptoms were sufficiently marked” he records, “I was afflicted with frequent fits of fidgeting, yawning and stretching … I had an utter abhorrence and an incapacity of voluntary exertion” (144). When the novel was written, however, even the most ‘ironic’ of these symptoms could also have been understood as perfectly sincere expressions of a very real medical disorder, particularly characteristic of the hereditary elite. The state of ennui, was, in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century medical literature, closely linked with George Cheyne’s ‘English Malady’ – which it had largely replaced as the fashionable nervous complaint of the upper orders. In his Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide (1790), the rector Charles Moore had identified the very same ‘symptoms’ Glenthorn bemoans as typical of the disorder:

once attacked by these (as Cheyne calls them) ‘sinking, suffocating, and strangling’ nervous affections [patients] are thrown at once into inevitable dejection, and the blackness of horror and despair … this lunacy and propensity to suicide, like many other disorders, is not confined to the unhappy object in the first instance, but by attacking successive generations of the same family proves itself to be hereditary” (1.368).
As late as 1820, Charles Caleb Colton’s *Lacon, or Many Things in Few Words addressed to Those who Think* characterised *ennui* as the mental companion to gout, and felt assured that only those at the very summit of society need worry about its onset:

> as the gout seems privileged to attack the bodies of the wealthy, so *ennui* seems to exert a similar prerogative over their minds. I should consider the middle and lower classes of this country exempt from the latter malady of the mind (130).

At the same time, however, contemporary medical literature – no more than the descriptions of the disorder in Edgeworth’s novel – was often remarkably ambiguous about its *nature*, blurring the lines between the disease, its causative factors, its symptoms, and the point at which it could be distinguished from the laziness and boredom which apparently ushered it on. At one point, for instance, Moore’s 1790 description claims that the disorder arises from “certain qualities in the Englishman’s character” which is “remarkable beyond most nations for a certain listlessness”, yet only a few pages later Moore denounces the disease as “the offspring of pure idleness … a canker that corrodes the springs of health and strength … [of those] who are born in the lap of good fortune [and] have nothing to do but go through the same round of unmanly and effeminate pleasures” (1.371, 1.374, 1.376).

The uncovering of Glenthorn’s true parentage would appear to make Edgeworth’s sentiments toward the disorder quite clear; it is, somewhat unequivocally, a disease of nurture rather than nature. And yet, Glenthorn’s very *conviction* that nature had played a role, his very idea that the inherent quality of his noble blood is guiding his destiny, underlines one of the novel’s central themes. From the very first sentence of the text, Glenthorn identifies his depression with his supposed blood-born nobility, and the mode of life that comes with it: “Bred up in luxurious indolence … I was confirmed in the pride of helplessness by being continually reminded that I was the only son and heir of the Earl of
Glenthorn” (143). His fallacious belief in his own noble blood, in other words, is responsible for his equally fallacious belief that his disease is an inevitable expression of his high birth, rather than being a direct result of his personal agency: “the habit of ennui was stronger than all my passions put together … ” he declares, “I thank God I was not born an emperor or I might have become a monster” (151, 153). Of course, the fact that Glenthorn is actually of peasant stock makes nonsense of the idea that he may have inherited his disorder, like ‘the gout’, from his ancient family line; likewise, his Irish blood undermines the associations of this ‘English malady’ with the English national character, and indeed the nationalistic expression of this character that was inherent in the idea of English noble blood. In fact, Glenthorn’s capitulation to his ennui is revisited over and over again in the novel, through characters who blindly assume their identities and their limitations according to rank and tradition, rather than trusting in their personal merits. Just as Glenthorn has allowed his life to be dictated by ennui (and thus, in effect, by his social rank), Christy Noonan is almost incapable of fully adopting the role of a landed proprietor because he has been ‘bred’ into a life of servitude; likewise, Lady Geraldine does not think of co-operating with her English counterparts because she has been born into a caste that defines itself against them. In fact, the only people in the novel who seem to have taken their destiny into their own hands (excepting, perhaps, Cecilia Delamere, who eventually inducts Glenthorn into his new life of industrious gentility) are the secret insurgents of the United Irishmen – framing the recent rebellion against a passive, static society ruled by farcical notions of rank and precedent that have ultimately led to its downfall.

Unlike the crumbling castle of the Princes of Inismore, which, having survived in the ‘soul’ of Ireland, is restored to greatness by the rightful elevation of Glorvina to a state of
nobility, Castle Glenthorn is burnt to the ground by the end of *Ennui* – a victim of its heir’s falling victim “to drink, which he fell into from getting too much money, and nothing to do” (322). The union between Glenthorn and Cecilia Delamere, likewise, is not only reliant on the loss of the former’s title, but the extinction of the Glenthorn dynasty altogether, which ultimately allows him to re-appropriate his riches as an active, hard-working, and conscientious member of the Irish elite. In both novels, however, the idea of Irish nobility is not merely posited as a representative aspect of Irish identity – it is recognised as a very real battleground of racialised supremacy. In both novels, indeed, the intensely racialised character of noble tradition *speaks the history* and *speaks the future* of a racialised Irish people – whether this progression is a case of the romanticised, Celtic, Catholic virtues of Gaelic royalty, a case of the endemic absenteeism, corruption, and usurpation in the Protestant Ascendancy, or a case of dynastic self-importance and overweening national pride among the Old English elite. The different genealogies of the different Irish nobilities variously validate and invalidate different racialised identities on the island, and competing versions of what Irishness actually is. The essence of the Irish nobility’s social superiority – the perceived legitimacy of their *eugeneia* – is, in a time of revolution and cultural implosion, a highly charged template for the social superiority of one Irish race over another, for the vindication of one bloodline over another, and indeed for the declaration of one bloodline as *purer*. For both novels, of course, the solution lies in cultural and sanguine hybridity, a spiritual as well as political union between the two peoples who lay claim to the country. Even in championing a ‘union’ between factions as the only possible escape from Ireland’s bloody history, however, both novels ultimately recognise the deeply problematic nature of Ireland’s culture war, exemplified most intensely by its competing nobilities – namely, as Foucault has suggested, that the “*guerre des nations*” had been transformed into the “*guerre des races*” (213).
3.2: Elite Bodies: Corporeal Superiority in Eighteenth-Century Race Thinking

3.2.1: A Nobility of Horses: Houyhnhnms and the Idea of the Thoroughbred

The iconography of the horse has been intimately linked with Western traditions of hereditary privilege for centuries, not only representing landed wealth and military glory, but also connoting the physical attributes of ‘super-humanity’ – grandeur, beauty, grace, excellence, and above all, pure, superior blood. It is an associative relationship that maintains considerable suggestive power even today. In the domain of luxury brands whose marketing strategies are based on ‘exclusive’ symbols (themselves, arguably a commodified expression of heraldry tradition), horse iconography is ubiquitous – evoking an idea of authentic, ‘old’ elitism which, like the physical body of a horse, presents itself as naturally, providentially superior. In 2008, Yves Piaget, chairman of the eponymous watch brand and vice-chairman of the Swiss Equestrian Federation, proudly asserted that he had “always found a great many similarities between the nobility of the horse and that of our products” (qtd in Hoffman and Manière 187). The ‘nobility’ of Mr Piaget’s products, presumably, does not simply reference its marketing brand as an ‘elite’ commodity, but also the ostensibly timeless excellence of the watches’ form – their superior quality of substance.

Expensive to acquire, and even more expensive to maintain in good condition, horses stood as an obvious indicator of wealth from the earliest days of Western

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154 Horse iconography appears, for instance, in the trademark logos of luxury brands such as Ferrari, Piaget, Hermès, Burberry, Longchamp, Ralph Lauren, and Gucci. Interestingly, Jean-Noël Kapferer suggests that the Western tradition of luxury cars as class symbols is a direct legacy of equestrian display: “the luxury car can therefore be divided into two types of object: gilded carriages and thoroughbreds. Each carries a patent of nobility: a renowned brand, a myth incarnated in a brand” (53).
agricultural society; concordantly, the land required to breed and care for horses quickly forged strong links between the equestrian world and the property-owning elite. In Ancient Athens, as will be remembered from chapter 1.1.1, the capacity to breed horses in the largely arid terrain of southern Greece was an elemental aspect of aristoi culture, while in Rome, the ordo equester, or equestrian rank, marked a highly symbolic property threshold required for admission to certain public offices (Cartledge 51; Bowman et al. 325). From the Middle Ages onward, of course, horsemanship was inscribed into the very terminology of the chevalier and chivalric code, with equine mastery standing as a very real factor in one’s military success. It is hardly surprising, then, that ‘excellent horsemanship’ continued to maintain its symbolic importance in the courtly societies of Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The emergence of equine dressage at the beginning of the seventeenth century, notes Kate Van Orden, can indeed be understood in the context of Norbert Elias’s civilising process – with the “external coordination” demonstrated by the horseman being understood as a “sign of a well-balanced inner soul and the emotional restraint that defined true nobility” (205). The haute école style of horse training, as developed in Paris by Antoine de Pluvinel from 1594, emulated the manly vertu of military tradition through the performance of stylised jumps and airborne turns such as courbettes and caprioles, stunts that were “spectacular and dramatic as well as difficult and dangerous … an excellent showcase for the rider’s grace and sprezzatura” (Tucker 290). For Renaissance courtiers like Sir Philip Sidney, this new form of horsemanship had become an indispensable attribute of the cultivated elite. Introduced to the equine arts by John Pietro Pugliano (stable-master to the Habsburg Emperor Maximillian II), Sidney gently mocked this new vogue for the ‘noble’ horse in his Apologie for Poetrie of 1595; for Pugliano, he claimed, horses
were the masters of war and ornaments of peace … no earthly thing bred such a wonder to a prince as to be a good horseman … what a peerless beast the horse was, the only serviceable courtier without flattery, the beast of most beauty, faithfulness, courage… If I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse (81).

In seventeenth-century Britain, lighter and more agile horses were regularly imported from North Africa and the Middle East in order to bolster the cumbersome, diminutive native stock which was rather less suitable for racing and hunting (Nash 248). The exchange, which was diplomatically as well as financially important for both parties, helped to consolidate Britain’s international reputation as a “breeding ground of equine purity and nobility” throughout the century (Landry 18). Perhaps the most renowned of England’s horse-breeders was William Cavendish, First Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who published one of the best-known equine care manuals in early modern Britain, first printed in French as La méthode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux par le très-noble, haut, et très-puissant prince Guillaume marquis et comte de Newcastle in 1658, with the first English translation appearing in 1672 under the title of A New Method and Extraordinary Invention of Dressing Horses, and a second, posthumously, as A General System of Horsemanship in all its Branches in 1743. Cavendish was a Knight of the Bath, a resolute royalist, and one of the wealthiest men in England, and in many ways his work was presented as the Protestant, English counterpoint to French haute école tradition, pioneering a peculiarly nationalistic equine culture in which, paradoxically, foreign-sourced horses were paramount (Raber 233-4).

For Cavendish, the ‘blood’ of the horse, though important, was only one element of a successful training regime; the animal’s excellence rested on attentive, patient, and light-handed training, as opposed to the whip-training that was so central to haute école methods. Furthermore, an essential feature of the Cavendish method was to recognise the unique characters of horses bred in different nations: Turkish horses, for instance were
“swift, strong, and good winded” but “seldom have a good mouth”; Neapolitan horses are “ill-shaped, though strong and vigorous”; Spanish horses are “fit for a king to mount on a publick occasion”; and Barbary horses, who Cavendish confesses to be his favourites “are said to never grow old, because they always retain their original natural strength and vigour” (1743, 1.21). Interestingly, notes Karen Raber, Cavendish’s understanding of equine national character implicitly reflected the national character of the horses’ human counterparts. “The Turks are the most curious in keeping their horses of any nation,” he remarks in the New Method, since they value them, and esteem them the most: they have all ways of dressing them, and keeping them clean, that can be imagined. They cloath them first with a fine linen cloth and hood next their skin; then a haircloth and hood … there cannot be a better way than this for their clothing (82).

Such ideas were certainly not unique to Cavendish; the sixteenth-century Flemish Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, had made a similar observation about Turkish grooms, printed and widely disseminated in English translation in 1744: “There is no creature so gentle as a Turkish Horse,” Busbecq reported, nor more respectful to his master … the reason is, because they treat their horses with great lenity … they bring their [colts] into their parlours and almost to their tables, and use them even like children… they will take up a staff or club on the road, which their rider hath let fall, with their teeth, and hold it up to him again … for their credit they have rings of silver hung on their nostrils, as a badge of honour … (qtd in Landry 132-4).

No more than in human varietates, a horse’s exposure to ‘civility’ was difficult to separate from his ‘blood’: each country’s traditional mode of horse-breeding was understood to have moulded that horse’s physical and mental attributes; the horse’s physical and mental attributes, in turn, were best suited to a certain brand of training. By claiming to master and indeed improve the inherent strengths of foreign horses by using English methods, then,
notes Raber, Cavendish was enacting a sort of equine ‘colonisation’, assimilating the desirable attributes of Eastern nations into a uniquely British horse culture. This, she notes, is evident in the lavish plates that decorate his manuals. In one of the most striking of these, Cavendish depicts himself on a gilded chariot wearing his duke’s coronet and ancient Roman attire, while an admiring circle of anthropomorphised horses bow to him in unison (see fig. 12). In subsequent illustrations of the different equine national characters, each foreign horse is ostensibly accompanied by a groom from its nation of origin – not only representing the particular blood and anatomy of the horse, but the brand of civility that had engendered its particular nature (see figs 13 and 14). More than this, each groom and horse are portrayed against the backdrop of Cavendish’s stately mansion at Wellbeck, denoting the decidedly English (and indeed noble) appropriation of this foreign asset (Raber 238-40). The two ideas of ‘equine nobility’ and the English ‘colonisation’ of entire foreign horse breeds come together in yet another print, wherein Cavendish assumes the pose of Charles II (featured in an accompanying print), sitting aloft a rearing Barbary stallion on the battlefield, with a dutiful Moorish pageboy at his side (see fig 15). The strengths of the Moorish horse, being an extension of the strengths of the Moors themselves, are here symbolically harnessed by the English state and war machine, asserting colonised ‘blood’ as an essential element of nationalistic English glory.

Figs 13 and 14 (following page): portraits of Barb and Turk horse varieties, with corresponding grooms. The first image depicts the Cavendish mansion at Wellbeck, the second shows his stable buildings. *La méthode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux par le très-noble, haut, et très-puissant prince Guillaume marquis et comte de Newcastle*. Antwerp: Jacques Van Meyrs, 1658 (19, 26).
The curiously anthropomorphising effects of equine ‘nobility’ – be it in Cavendish’s courtly stallions or Busbecq’s ‘civilised’ Barbaries – as well as the colonial subtext in English horse-breeding discourse, may well have influenced one of the eighteenth century’s most famous literary equine portraits: the Houyhnhnms of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) (Landry 132). In Book IV of Swift’s text, Gulliver famously discovers an uncanny society peopled by an elite caste of highly civilised horses whom he eventually comes to respect more than his own species (mirrored in the undercaste of humanoid Yahoos). This most unsettling episode of the *Travels* is, of course, a many-layered satire on civility, rationalism, social hierarchy, and colonisation – all considered in terms of the “geopolitical and comparative-imperial discourse about the

superiority of Eastern bloodstock” (Landry 132). At its most basic level, the satire attacks the basic ‘logical’ notion of a human/animal divide, ostensibly referencing two stock phrases from contemporary logic textbooks: *homo est animal rationale* and *equus est animal hinnibile*\(^\text{155}\) (R.S. Crane 405). The traditional definition of ‘rational’ man, notes Alexis Tadié, frames the entire chapter as a kind of ‘ontological metaphor’; the superlatively rational Houyhnhnms, of course, are ultimately communicating their rationalism to (ostensibly rational) Gulliver through a series of (definitely irrational) ‘whinnies’; by the end of the chapter, indeed, Gulliver has ‘rationally’ concluded that the ‘whinnying horse’ is, in fact, *more* rational than ‘rational man’ (1996, 194). Gulliver’s admiration for the Houyhnhnms, furthermore, largely stems from the fact that they – like real horses – are a repository of Western ideals of civility and noble rank, entirely detached from the world of human fallibility and inconsistency wherein these ideals actually exist. The Houyhnhnms, accordingly, have no concept of, nor word for, a *lie* – an idea that, in Swift’s mottled framework of allegory, sarcasm, and dubious narration, stands as profoundly ironic.

The relationship between the rational Houyhnhnms, the irrational Yahoos, and Gulliver, who is something in between, is played out in a glib pastiche of travel literature discourse – with Gulliver’s observational gaze deciding and defining the limits of acceptable and unacceptable states of civilisation. Just as he had described the fantastical proportions of the Lilliputians and the Brobdingnagians (and just as the Lilliputians and Brobdignagians had analysed him), Gulliver systematically documents the physical features of the Yahoos – yet in this instance, he employs a language that was routinely used in very real anthropological descriptions. His vocabulary, notes Claude Rawson, showcases “a markedly specific idiom of ethnographic observation, a parody of field-

\(^{155}\) The word ‘Houyhnhnm’ is generally assumed to reference the sound of a horse’s ‘whinny’. Crane notes that these two Latin phrases, often placed in direct opposition, were particularly characteristic of Neoplatonist teachings, in particular Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (268-70 A.D.) (405).
observation, as it were, in no particular field” (97). Echoing contemporary descriptions of Hottentots and, indeed, the native Irish (who, it will be remembered from chapter 2.3.1, shared much of the Hottentot monstrous imagery), Gulliver reports that the Yahoos’ skin is of a “brown buff colour”, and that their “dugs hung between their fore feet, and often reached almost to the ground as they walked. The hair of both sexes was of several colours, brown, red, black, and yellow” (193). A few pages on, this language of observation is framed in a curious mise en abîme: the Houyhnhnms exhibit Gulliver alongside a Yahoo so they can compare their physical features, while Gulliver simultaneously attempts to reconcile the exotic features of his counterpart with received ideas of normal human anatomy. All the while, of course, the reader must make his own comparisons between what Gulliver observes in the Yahoo, and the ‘genuinely human’ form – being forced, just like Gulliver, to decide whether the Yahoo is human or not:

I observed in this abominable animal a perfect human figure; the face of it indeed was flat and broad, the nose depressed, the lips large, and the mouth wide: But these differences are common to all savage nations, where the lineaments of the countenance are distorted by the natives suffering their infants to lie grovelling on the earth, or by carrying them on their backs … (199).

The same critique of arbitrary rationality that inverted the forms of horse and Man is here deployed in the context of ‘polished’ and ‘unpolished’ human beings. It is supremely difficult, of course, to pinpoint the exact aspects of the Yahoos that negate their humanity.

It is mostly the defamiliarising language of anthropology, after all, that renders their features ‘inhuman’: for Gulliver, their hands are ‘fore-paws’; their breasts are ‘dugs’; their beards are like the ‘beards of goats’; and their pubic hair is an anomalous feature of their ‘pudenda’ (193). Furthermore, by describing such resolutely human features in animal

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156 John Ovington’s Voyage to Surat (1689), previously cited in chapter 2.2.1, provides a good example of the kind of descriptions Gulliver seems to echo: “[Hottentots are] the very reverse of human kind … if there’s any medium between a rational animal and a beast, the Hotantar lays the fairest claim to that species … stinking grease is their sweet oil, and the dust of the streets the powder of their hair … they are both nimble and swift of foot, and of courage to outface and worst a lion” (489-96).
terms, Gulliver undermines some of his more firmly ‘animalistic’ descriptions. How, for instance, is the reader to interpret the Yahoos’ “claws”? Or the pronounced “ridge of hair” that runs down their backs? Or their quintessentially ape-like behaviour, including a remarkable agility in the trees and the habit of throwing their own faeces in defence? Do these beings reference the humanoid ‘Orang-outangs’ or ‘wild men’ that would shortly come to feature in Linnaeus’s *homo ferus* and *homo monstruosus*? Or, is Gulliver’s subjective, observational gaze literally *metamorphosising* these human beings into animals? How much, indeed, do the Yahoos need to stray into the metaphysical realm of animals before finally relinquishing their humanity? When Gulliver is sexually assaulted by a young female Yahoo, notes Davidson, the narrative forces the reader to consider whether Yahoos and humans (like ‘Orang-outangs’ and humans, as will be explored in chapter 3.2.2) might successfully *copulate*, and thus meet one of the most basic criteria for traditional species definition (2009, 76). The Yahoos do not seem to speak, but then, Gulliver never attempts to learn their language – on the other hand, he learns to *whinny* in the precisely correct accent of his equine friends. And, though Gulliver quite smugly recognises that the Houyhnhnms set him apart because of the singular appearance of his clothes, he himself sees the Yahoos’ *nakedness* as an essential quality of their ‘otherness’. Indeed, just as the Houyhnhnms undermine the logical rationale of a human/animal distinction, notes Rawson, the comparison of Gulliver with the Yahoos engenders a “teasing slippage between what is true of savages and what is generic to humankind”; indeed, the very idea that ‘all savage nations look the same’, ostensibly due to their unpolished mode of life, intimates that Gulliver too could become like a Yahoo, and a Yahoo could become like Gulliver – that, indeed, all that separates them is a set of arbitrary notions of social polish and metaphysical hierarchy (97).
Ultimately, Gulliver animalises the physical body of the Yahoo in order to distance himself from the more primal aspects of his own humanity, instead embracing a humanity that, at times, better befits a horse than a human being. His civilised humanity must be constructed against a dehumanised human body – a process that, ironically, is exposed as deeply inhumane: Gulliver, of course, will ultimately sail away from the island of the Houyhnhnms in a boat he has made from the skin of Yahoo children: “il met le corps à distance et cherche en faire disparaître la réalité” (Tadié 1997, 34).

The ‘institutionalised’ racialisation in Houyhnhnms society is, of course, a crucial element of its equine nobility. The courtly horses that Gulliver encounters are, so to speak, intensely racist, in both their segregation from the Yahoos (including their continued distrust of Gulliver’s ‘Yahoo’ form) and their own social hierarchy – which, like noble rank, is based purely on bloodline. During a conversation between Gulliver and the Master horse about politics in their respective lands, the latter explains that, even though Houyhnhnms are infinitely superior to Yahoos, they themselves are not by any means born equal. “He made me observe”, notes Gulliver,

that … the White, the Sorrel, and the Iron-Grey, were not so exactly shaped as the Bay, the Dapple-grey, and the Black; not born with equal talents of mind, or a capacity to improve them; and therefore continued always in the condition of servants, without ever aspiring to match out of their own race, which in that country would be reckoned monstrous and unnatural” (223).

The gradation in equine hierarchy from top to bottom and white to black, here makes for a clear comparison between noble rank and racialised hierarchies of exotic populations – in fact, the Master horse assumes that Gulliver is of noble birth precisely because he “far exceeded in shape, colour, and cleanliness, all the Yahoos of [the Houyhnhnms] nation” (223). Yet, what is perhaps most striking of all, is the Master horse’s own confidence in the metaphysical reality of this hierarchy. In a world without lies, the Houyhnhnms necessarily
have complete trust in the ‘truth’ of noble rank, maintaining an unconditional, unquestioning confidence in their own authority and status quo. “The tyranny of the Houyhnhnm’s reason lies in its very structure,” notes Claire Colebrook, “it is unambiguous, pure, committed to absolute consensus, and devoid of any aspect of self-reflection. They have no word for pride precisely because they are unaware of the vanity and self-regard that allows their own discourse to take itself as definitive” (86).

Ironically, the noble Houyhnhnms – whose equine form has so long served as a correlative for human hereditary privilege – have outshone human nobility by realising those same metaphysical ideals: their social hierarchy has successfully established a distinct system of pure bloodlines, unequivocally aligned with concordant physical ‘types’, which are, in turn, identified with clear, unambiguous ranks. Gulliver’s counter-description of English nobility, on the other hand, presents a society for whom these ideals are simply a front, an excuse, a dazzling form of distraction; it is a society, in fact, whose very survival depends on these ideals being systematically inverted. “Our young noblemen”, Gulliver explains,

are bred from their childhood in idleness and luxury; that as soon as years will permit, they consume their vigour, and contract odious diseases among lewd females … the productions of [noble] marriages are generally scrophulous, rickety or deformed children; by which means the family seldom continues above three generations, unless the wife take care to provide a healthy farmer among her neighbours or domesticks, in order to improve and continue the breed. That a weak diseased body, a meagre countenance, and sallow complexion, are the true marks of noble blood; and a healthy robust appearance is so disgraceful in a man of quality, that the world concludes his real father to have been a groom or a coachman. The imperfections of his mind run parallel with those of his body; being a composition of spleen, dulness, ignorance, caprice, sensuality, and pride (223).

The passage, indeed, stands as one of the most overtly critical speeches in the text, appearing to reference Swift’s objection to the outcome of the 1719 Peerage Bill (discussed in chapter 1.3.1.) which had restricted the numbers and composition of the
House of Lords (F.P. Lock 38). In fact, it was considered so inflammatory by Benjamin Motte, the original publisher of the *Travels* in 1726, that he removed it entirely, and it was only restored in the 1735 edition by the subsequent editor, George Faulkner (Landry 146). Certainly, such a condemnation of the corporeal mechanics of nobility makes for a daring piece of criticism, not only vilifying the hereditary transmission of noble blood, but recasting it as the hereditary transmission of venereal disease. There is, however, a further dimension to Swift’s satire here. In its assertion that “a weak diseased body, a meagre countenance, and sallow complexion, are the true marks of *noble blood*”, Gulliver’s speech might be compared to Erasmus Darwin’s warning against the degenerative effects of noble ‘inbreeding’ in *The Temple of Nature* almost a hundred years later in 1804 (see chapter 2.2.2). Yet, Swift is not as much accusing the English nobility of ‘inbreeding’ as he is comparing them with the equine culture of *outbreeding* – specifically with foreign stallions, who are possibly represented in the passage by the “groom or the coachman”. Indeed, it would not be until the mid-eighteenth century that ‘inbreeding’ was fully perfected as a method of isolating desired strains of horse, with breeders instead preferring to ‘replenish’ their stocks by routinely inseminating their English mares with Arabian or Moorish sires. This is what forms the main thrust of Swift’s satire: if a genuinely pureblood noble family (like a genuinely pureblood line of horses) cannot survive for more than three generations without degenerating into scrophulous deformity, then it follows that the most ancient families of the kingdom had (like their horses) been supplementing their bloodlines with the untainted stock of the lower orders. Both pure blood and the superiority it represented, in other words, were fictitious – belonging to the realm of ‘equine nobility’, a world of ephemeral ideals and impossible ‘truths’. And yet, like the unquestioning authority of the Houyhnhnms, these illusionary concepts continued to underpin a very real system of arbitrary power and political privilege.
Concordantly, Swift’s satirical reference to horse-breeding culture comes at a moment when ‘noble’ systems of blood isolation – reflected in the narrative’s distinct Sorrels, Bays, and Dapple-Greys with their separate bloodline hierarchies – were becoming increasingly popular in the production of ever-more ‘noble’ races of horse. On discovering Houyhnhnmland, the reader learns that the word ‘Houyhnhnm’ means “perfection of nature” – at once evoking the Houyhnhnms’ world of rational ideals, and the very real attempts to ‘perfect’ the nature of certain equine bloodlines (Landry 145). “Houyhnhnmland reflects ironically upon a nation obsessed with horses,” notes Donna Landry, “but also one in which that obsession was increasingly on matters of breeding, with its overtones of race and imperial genetic mastery. Particular strains of horses were being glorified as superior to native sorrel nags, and even to the human masses” (145).

From the 1680s on, the outbreeding of English horses with foreign sires steadily developed into a sort of blood register, tracking and documenting the degree of Arabian or North African blood in each breeding horse. The word thoroughbred had been used since the beginning of the eighteenth century to describe ‘breeding’ and accomplishment, but in humans rather than horses; the OED cites a “thorough-bred soldier” in 1701, for instance, and a “thorough-bred gamester” in 1727 (OED ‘thoroughbred’ n. adj.). From the mid-century onward, however, this quintessentially ‘human’ descriptor was increasingly employed to describe the culture of pureblood horses, whose blood-integrity was charted with that most human, and indeed noble, of concepts: genealogy.¹⁵⁷ “[T]he thorough-bred horse,” claimed the breeder William Osmer in his Treatise on the Diseases and Lameness of Horses (1751), “when properly chosen, is, for every purpose, far superior to him that is half-bred” (267). Indeed, the very language of ‘blood’ and ‘breeding’ – that is to say, the language of noble ‘race’, as will be remembered from chapter 2.1.1 – firmly frames the

¹⁵⁷ Richard Nash identifies Osmer’s work as providing the earliest known instance of the term ‘thoroughbred’ in relation to horses; the OED does not cite any examples until 1796 (Nash 257; OED ‘thoroughbred’ n. adj.).
horse as an ‘elite’ animal; it was language, quite simply, that bore little or no relation to the human lower orders, primarily existing to accommodate the hereditary transfer of property and privilege. It was a language, indeed, that took on a rather preposterous air when used in relation to ‘lower’ animals: “I hope I may be allowed to talk of the blood of asses,” Osmer wrote in reaction to this curiously elite vocabulary, “without being thought absurd, as well as the jockeys to talk about the blood of these horses …” (1751, 258).

The founding myths of the thoroughbred further embellished this conceit of animal nobility. All modern thoroughbreds are supposedly descended from three ‘foundation sires’ that were brought to England between 1680 and 1729; namely, the Byerly Turk, the Darley Arabian (who is said to be the patrilineal ancestor of 95% of today’s race horses), and the Godolphin Arabian (Nash 250). The sultans of Aleppo, it was said, had been documenting the genealogy of their horses for centuries – and were so jealous of their finest breeds that it was illegal for a single specimen to be taken abroad, lest the coveted bloodline fall into the hands of enemy forces. “The Arabs take every precaution to keep [their horses] pure and unmixed,” noted Thomas Bewick in his *General History of Quadrupeds* (1792), “they preserve with the greatest care, and for an amazing length of time, the genealogies of their horses – Those of the first kind are called nobles, being ‘of a pure and ancient race, purer than milk’” (4). Nevertheless, a handful of pure Arabian stallions were rumoured to have found their way into Europe, the most famous of which was probably the Godolphin Arabian, supposedly given in tribute to Louis XV by the Husainid Bey of Tunis. The French king, however, according to legend, did not recognise the superior nature of the stallion, and a few years later the Arabian was forgotten and sold. It was only when a passing English gentleman, Edward Coke, recognised the form and stature of a true Arabian horse pulling a cart through the streets of Paris, that the Godolphin resurfaced. Coke supposedly bought it on the spot, and brought it
back to his stud farm in England. The lore, of course, notes Nash, is “a mixture of fantasy
and anxiety about potency, national identity, and the transgression of class boundaries. The
keen eye of the English horseman Coke, discerns what the French cannot find” (254).
More than this, it indulges the age-old trope of insuppressible noble essence: even while
pulling a cart through the thronged streets of the French capital, the superior quality of the
Godolphin’s blood shines through his humble surroundings, instantly recognisable as an
inherent elite.

The essence of the thoroughbred concept, however, did not as much depend on
the blood of these specific horses, as on the isolation and documentation of that blood –
eventually formalised in the General Stud Book of 1791, which traced the lineage of all
thoroughbred horses back to the late seventeenth century. The Stud Book (which continues
to be published today) contained a short biography of the most famous thoroughbred
stallions, including information about where portraits of them might be found, how well
they performed as breeders, and even the names of their favourite cats (433). The great
bulk of the text, however, is dedicated to the precise parentage and fraternity of every
horse of documented stock; concordantly, a parallel column identifies each horse’s breeder
– invariably elite figures whose own antiquity of blood and excellence of nobility, it might
be argued, was just as important to the idea of ‘thoroughbreds’ as that of the animal itself
(see fig. 16). The centrality of genealogy in thoroughbred cultivation precipitated a culture
of selective breeding based on purity of stock rather than on the tradition of matching pairs
according to their size and health. In fact, this new vogue for blood purity in horses –
which, it must be remembered, existed independently of ‘biological’ understandings of
heredity – often took pride of place over choice of specimen, with poorly shaped horses
regularly being preferred for their bloodline over better-shaped animals with less illustrious
genealogies. It was an inordinate obsession with blood which, according to breeder
William Osmer, was doing irreparable damage to English horse breeds. “I shall beg leave, to change the word HIGH BRED,” he declared in his *Dissertation on Horses* (1756), “and in its room substitute the word foreigner … the excellence we find in these horses depends totally on the mechanism of their parts, and not in their blood; and that all the particular distinctions and fashions thereof, depend also on the whim and caprice of mankind” (9). Osmer, indeed, posits a more traditional, environmentalist version of ‘breeding’: any animal which has been raised in luxury, he suggests, will give birth to offspring that is healthier and better formed. In Aleppo, he claims, “they all live together, men, horses, dogs, colts, women, and children. That these colts … are brought up by hand, and live as the children do” (36). And thus, the true reason for the superiority of foreign-sourced horse breed was that “the foreign horse has perhaps seldom or ever known what labour was …”,

let us suppose one bitch to have run in the pack, and the other by some accident not to have worked at all, it will be found that the offspring of her who has never worked, will be much superior to the offspring of her who has run in the pack. (57)

Regardless of any horse’s superior blood, then, it would eventually degenerate – it was far better, in Osmer’s opinion, to concentrate on the correct treatment and maintenance of the horse so that its qualities might be passed down for as long as possible.
Nevertheless, the fashion for genealogical breeding practices only grew more popular. During the 1760s and 1770s, Robert Bakewell used the “in-and-in breeding” method – that is, the method of carefully selecting breeding pairs from a single lineage, in order to develop striking new breeds of sheep, such as the Dishley, the New Leicester and the Lincoln Longwool, optimising body mass and wool production and thus dramatically improving annual yields (Ritvo 414). Bakewell’s methods, indeed, continued to dominate sheep and cattle breeding for decades after his death – forming the basis for modern selective breeding practices to this day (413). Indeed, what Bakewell had essentially done, notes Harriet Ritvo, was to ignore the conventional wisdom of stockbreeding, which was not only adverse to inbreeding, but particularly stressed “the predominance of such environmental factors as climate and diet” (416). Nevertheless, lineage became such an
important factor in Bakewell’s success that he jealously guarded his prime specimens from the reach of competitors; when his breeding animals had reached their prime, notes Ritvo, Bakewell first had them infected with rot, and then immediately sent them to the butcher, so as to avoid their being poached (415). Horse breeders, indeed, were increasingly of a similar mind. In his *Dissertation on the Breeding of Horses upon Philosophical and Experimental Principles* (1758), the stud farmer Richard Wall warned his readers that “there is one fundamental maxim which will always hold good … PROPERTIES DESCEND” (56). A well-bred sire and dam, he asserted, “ought to be the first and principle care” in the mind of any breeder, who should take “to be likewise partial to the merits of their ancestors through as many generations as possible!” (58).

In the eighteenth century, then, the noble template of genealogy was successfully employed to produce animals that looked and acted extremely differently from others of their species. Moreover, these ‘pureblood’ animals constructed a parallel genealogical hierarchy that still exists today – the arbitrary notion that purebred specimens are superior to the non-purebred, and that this superiority is expressed in the ‘perfection’ of their natural attributes. It was difficult, indeed, to know where new purebred animals stood in relation to others of their kind – could these strains of cattle, horses, sheep, and dogs, who were so markedly different from their impure counterparts, still be considered as the same species? Tellingly, notes Ritvo, in 1792 Thomas Bewick’s *General History of Quadrupeds* was presenting the ‘Race Horse’, the ‘Cart Horse’, the ‘Arabian’ and the ‘Black Horse’ with the same distinction and format as the ‘Zebra’ and the ‘Ass’. The emergence of genealogical reasoning in animal breeding is, of course, intimately linked to the contemporaneous emergence of genealogical reasoning in the domain of human variety theory; both phenomena, likewise, are fundamentally reliant on the concept of ‘noble race’
– the construct of an associative relationship between purity and superiority, between bloodline and hierarchy, and between rank and the physical body. Like the ranks of nobility and the various systems of human variety, the ‘thoroughbred’ showcases a primarily cultural concept, which seeks validation in the physical body, and – by ‘discovering’ itself in nature – creates a new ‘reality’ in the language of natural philosophy. Just like nobility, through the constructive authority of race thinking, thoroughbreds are neither entirely real nor entirely imaginary – “they operate”, notes Nash, “as ‘natural’ living metaphors for a particular set of cultural values that they thereby reify as innate” (246). Ultimately, in their continued legacy as the ‘nobility’ of animals, they stand as one of the most directly, ‘purely’ racialised concepts to emerge from Britain in the eighteenth century.

3.2.2: Nobility and Natural Selection: Corporeal Excellence and Monboddo’s ‘Orang-outang’

Recounting a dinnertime conversation with Samuel Johnson in 1769, James Boswell recalls that he attempted “to argue for the superior happiness of the savage life”. Immediately, his friend responded with ire: “No sir; you are not to talk such paradox … Lord Monboddo, one of your Scotch judges, talked a great deal of such nonsense. I suffered him; but I will not suffer you.” And when Boswell gently reminded his companion that Rousseau, too, had talked ‘such nonsense’, Johnson replied: “True sir, but Rousseau knows he is talking nonsense, and laughs at the world for staring at him … but I am afraid, (chuckling and laughing), that Monboddo does not know that he is talking nonsense” (Life 2.37-8). Few anecdotes, notes Richard Nash, have inflicted more damage on the reputation
of James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, than this one; “in particular”, he adds, “that parenthetical chuckle is hard to overcome” (2003 139). Yet, Lord Monboddo (who had been granted his title on being raised to the Scottish Court of Session in 1760) nonetheless seems to have thrived on his notoriety. The Scotsman’s theoretical studies were, no more than his behaviour, infamously eccentric – at times seeming deliberately designed to fluster and disquiet his more conventional peers: alongside his long-standing and public argument with Johnson (whose prose he condemned as garish), he also sparred with David Hume (whose philosophy he detested), with Lord Kames (who would remain his greatest rival in the Court of Session), and with Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who dedicated an entire paragraph of the *De generis* to denouncing this “renowned philosopher and downright caprice-monger Lord Monboddo” (Knight 26; Blumenbach 296). And yet, Monboddo was not as easily dismissed as many would have liked: at the Scottish assembly, where he scandalised his fellow judges with outlandish attire and bizarre behaviour (at one point spontaneously dancing a Dutch minuet dressed entirely in white velvet), nobody could deny that he had always been “an acute, learned, lawyer, ingenious and indefatigable” (Ramsay 352). His works, likewise, while constantly pushing the limits of credibility (and, indeed, sincerity), were remarkably erudite – replete with examples from both ancient texts and the latest scientific research. His two major publications, as the international criticism launched against him would suggest, were widely read – with the sensational *Origin and Progress of Language* appearing in 1774, and the six-volume *Ancient Metaphysics; or, the Science of Universals* published between 1779 and 1799. In fact, his most ‘nonsensical’ theory of all – the suggestion that great apes and humans belonged to a single genus, and indeed that the former could potentially *transform* into the latter – ensured that his legacy would outlive many of his more ‘serious’ contemporaries. For nineteenth-century evolutionists, if Monboddo had indeed *not known* he was ‘talking nonsense’, it was
because he was a visionary before his time; in 1875, the Scottish advocate Charles Neaves playfully celebrated the unrecognised insights of his compatriot in verse:

His vies, when forth at first they came,  
Appeared a little odd, O!  
But now we’ve notions much the same;  
We’re back to old Monboddo.  
…  
Though Darwin now proclaims the law,  
And spreads it far abroad, O!  
The man that first the secret saw  
Was honest old Monboddo (qtd in Knight 20).

For the last two hundred years, Monboddo has variously been seen as a prophet and a fantasist, as a thinker who managed to see beyond the received wisdoms of his generation, and a hack provocateur, who simply enjoyed toying with the established boundaries of reason and convention. The truth probably lies somewhere between these extremes. Despite the praises of his nineteenth-century admirers, it is not entirely fair to call Monboddo an ‘evolutionary’ or even ‘proto-evolutionary’ thinker: his reasoning is firmly grounded in a framework of Neoplatonic tradition and divine providence, rather than following any truly empirical inquiry into hereditary dynamics. He certainly “pursued a sound scientific method”, notes W. Forbes Gray, and his findings undeniably bore “curious points of affinity with Darwinism”, but ultimately his human/ape hypothesis – entirely unsupported by evidence and largely based on animals he had never seen alive (not to mention animals that simply did not exist) – “amounted to little more than a guess” (112). And yet, on the other hand, neither is it entirely fair to exclude Monboddo from the history of evolutionary thought: his theories appear to mirror those of proto-evolutionism precisely because both extrapolate (albeit in a different way) upon many of the same problematics – namely, the troubling ‘grey areas’ between species, races, and individuals; the ostensible links between comparable anatomy and comparable states of nature; and the
conviction that humanity is not as much degenerating from Edenic perfection as it is advancing in form and spirit towards a progressively superior humanity (Lovejoy 1948, 41-2). More than this, his admirers included one of the most notable proto-evolutionist thinkers of the eighteenth century – Erasmus Darwin, who praised Monboddo’s “learned work on the origin of language” in his Temple of Nature (11). Indeed, the very fact that his theories are so redolent of natural selection and generational evolution, while, at the same time, remaining within a traditional framework of universal ordo, is particularly interesting for this study. For, true to his ‘non-biological’ sense of reasoning, Monboddo’s idea of human development blurs the lines between social, civil, spiritual, and corporeal human qualities; his ‘humanity’ construct draws upon the dictates of Aristotle as much as it does upon contemporary anatomical discoveries, as much upon the traditional gradations of British social rank as upon the species gradations of Buffon. Indeed, at the heart of Monboddo’s peculiar claims lies the assumption of an animalistic sub-humanity and a super-human elite, both of which are thoroughly defined by the racialised body.

Just as the Hottentots and the Sami peoples existed in a semi-mythological discourse, much of it focusing on dehumanisation through association with animal behaviour and animal physique, the so-called ‘Orang-outang’ of the seventeenth and eighteenth century was conversely embellished with a range of fantastical attributes that linked it to human society. Between the most ‘debased’ specimens of humankind and the most ‘polished ’ specimens of the animal kingdom, there existed a significant degree of overlap – a locus of decided ambiguity that consistently troubled philosophers and scientists alike. “The ape or the Monkey that bears the greatest similitude to Man, is the next order of animals below him …”, wrote the English physician Richard Blackmore in The Lay Monastery (1713),
Nor is the disagreement between the basest individuals of our species and the ape or monkey so great, but that, were the latter endow’d with the faculty of speech, they might perhaps as justly claim the rank and dignity of the human race, as the savage Hotanto, or stupid native of Nova Zembla. … [The Orang-outang] has the greatest likeness [to humans], not only in his countenance, but in the structure of his body … his organs of speech, his ready apprehensions, and his gentle and tender passions (qtd in Lovejoy 1936, 234-5).

Like many human varieties, the Orang-outang functioned as an ideal correlative for Western anxieties about humanity precisely because so little was known about it. “The anthropoid ape”, note Bancel et al., “was one of Europe’s most discussed and least known animals” (39). In fact, Europeans had only begun to uncover the existence of larger primates in the 1650s, with most species remaining shrouded in mystery until the mid-nineteenth century; gorillas, for instance, were not officially understood as a species unto themselves until the 1840s, while bonobos were only distinguished from chimpanzees in 1933 (Corbey 16-17). These strange new creatures, furthermore, were fundamentally informed by the traditional catalogue of monstrous ape-men that they were steadily replacing – a catalogue in which they had been depicted as ‘degenerate humans’ rather than ‘humanoid animals’. In fact, the Malay term Orang-Hutan, meaning ‘Man of the Woods’, and popularised by the Dutch physician Jacobus Bontius in his Historiae naturalis et medicae Indiae orientalis (1658), literally referred to men who lived in the woods (that is, local jungle-dwellers), and not to the animal we now call an ‘orangutan’, for which the corresponding Malay word was mawas (Mahdi 171). Nevertheless, the term Orang-outang, and its Latin equivalent Homo sylvestris, soon became standard epithets for large primates in general and, it was not until 1782 that the Dutch physician Petrus Camper insisted that the word ‘Orang-outang’ be reserved for the Indonesian primate bearing the name today.¹⁵⁸ This indiscriminate conflation of specimens as different as chimpanzees,

¹⁵⁸ The dissections described in Camper’s Essay on the Natural History of the Ourang Utan and Other Simian Species (1782), incidentally, finally disproved long-standing theories of organ compatibility between humans and apes (Bancel et al. 40).
gorillas, and modern orangutans is partly explained by the fact that animals often arrived, and died, in Europe at a young age, while little was known about the differences that might be ascribed to sex; yet, it also demonstrates the extent to which the primates’ shared humanoid qualities outshone their own individual particularities (Meijer 42).

The Royal Society naturalist Edward Tyson’s landmark study of chimpanzee anatomy, published in 1699, not only set out to distinguish these new creatures from Mankind, but also from the traditional monstrous races (for which, the author suggests, primates had been the original inspiration) – a mission which is clearly announced in its extended title: *Orang-outang, sive Homo sylvestris: or, The Anatomy of a Pygmie Compared with That of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man. To which is added, A Philological Essay Concerning the Pygmies, the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and Sphinxes [sphinxes] of the Ancients. Wherein it will Appear that They are All Either Apes or Monkeys, and Not Men, as Formerly Pretended.* Even more interestingly, however, Tyson considers his Orang-outang’s precise degree of humanity as a direct reflection of its rank in the Great Chain of Being – a framework by which he also defines his own place in the universal order. The volume is dedicated to Lord Sommers, Baron of Evesham, and President of the Royal society, who Tyson curiously praises as one of the *highest beings in the moral order.* “The animal of which I have given the anatomy,” he explains to his patron, coming nearest to Mankind; seems the nexus of the animal and rational, as your Lordship and those of your high rank and order for knowledge, approaching nearest to that kind of beings which is next above us; connect the visible, and invisible world. If this performance shall promote the design of society, of which I have the honour to be a member, and which your lordship is pleased to preside over … I shall look upon my time and pains, well rewarded (iii).

In this remarkable statement, Edward Tyson is, quite simply, suggesting that Orang-Outangs are the highest of order of simians just as nobles are the highest of order of humans – that their proximity to humanity is analogous to the nobility’s proximity to the
divine. The statement, of course, must be primarily understood as rhetorical, merely following the effusive language of dedicatory tradition – yet Tyson’s choice of words nonetheless stands as a peculiar reminder that Orang-outangs, the author, and Lord Sommers are all part of the same universal order, and that he who placed Tyson above the chimpanzees had also placed the Baron of Evesham above Tyson. Furthermore, Tyson’s study proposes to identify the Orang-outang’s moral rank through a close examination of its anatomy: his exhaustive description of a chimpanzee dissection not only became the “first scientific study of the measurements of an anthropoid ape ever made, but also the first devoted to a systematic comparison of animals and human anatomy” (Meijer 42).

In the various editions of Linnaeus’s Systema Naturae – that most fundamental document of empirical humanity – great apes constantly weave in and out of different taxa, denoting varying degrees of humanity and animality along the way. The 1735 edition of the Systema, as will remembered from chapter 2.2.1, positioned the genus Simiae (counting baboons, drills and Diana monkeys) immediately below the genus Homo, yet it relegated the creatures that seemed rather too similar to humans to the monstrous taxon of Paradoxa, wherein they were represented by the Satyrus, a beast described as:

caudatus, hirsutus, barbatus, humanum referens corpus, gesticulationibus valde déditus, salacissimus. Simiae species est, si unquam alíquis visus fuit. Homines quo que caudati de quibus recentiores peregrinatores multa narrant ejusdem generis sunt (n.p. [10]).

By the 1758 edition, however, the great apes had been removed from the monstrous sphere, and were instead incorporated into the only species to share a genus with Man – the Homo troglodytes. One of the most puzzling taxa of the entire Linnaean tradition, H. troglodytes seems to at once comprise human qualities that are considered somehow ‘less

\[159\] “[T]ailed, hairy, bearded, with a humanoid body, a tendency to gesticulate, being extremely lascivious. It is a species of Simiae if ever one was seen. Those men with tails, much recounted by recent travellers, are of the same kind” (my trans.).
than human’ and animal qualities that are decidedly ‘more than animal’; it simultaneously exists within humanity (in the genus *homo*) and without humanity (being a non-*sapiens*). The entire taxon, indeed, mirrors the idea of human *varietas*, while remaining firmly at a remove from human-ness. What is more, Linnaeus does not simply use *H. troglodytes* to represent the great apes, but – in the spirit of *Paradoxa* – as a repository for a whole host of reported creatures that seemed to straddle the animal/human boundary. Though he directly identifies *H. troglodytes* with Jacobus Bontius’s “*homo sylvestris orang outang*”, he also characterises it as a *homo nocturnus* (as opposed to *H. sapiens*, which is a *homo diurnus*), characterised by white hair, albino skin, and beady, iridescent eyes, dwelling underground in the caves of Ethiopia and the island of Java (21). The *troglodytes* is transformed once again in the *Systema*’s posthumous thirteenth edition (1788-93), removed from the genus *Homo*, and placed in the *Simiae* category to represent the Angola monkey of central Africa. This same edition, incidentally, features a resurrected form of the species *Satyrus*, which now claims to describe ‘Orang-outangs’ as found on the island of Borneo (10).

Buffon, on the other hand, explicitly addressed – and purported to resolve – the apparent anatomical similarities between primates and humans. Men in a pure state of nature, he claimed in his *Nomenclature des singes* (1766), were more than likely physically indistinguishable from the higher apes – something which was no longer observable because the human physique had since been so refined by civil society. The only difference between the lowest possible humans and the highest possible animal, he concludes, is that the former is possessed of a soul, which is in turn expressed through thoughts, and subsequently speech: “*l'intervalle qui les sépare est immense, puisqu'à l'intérieur [l'Homme] est rempli par la pensée & au dehors par la parole*”¹⁶⁰ (*Œuvres* 390). This was,

¹⁶⁰ “The gap between them is immense, since [Man’s] interior is filled with thoughts, and his exterior is characterised by speech” (my trans.).
essentially, in line with John Locke’s ‘historical plain method’ of ascertaining reason in animals, as put forth in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, based on the identification of whether an animal could possibly conceive of an *idea* (Locke 2.6.11; R.J. Richards 88). Indeed, Buffon’s identification of the outward quality of *speech* as a defining boundary between the animal and human world was already a common trope, and would remain a benchmark of anthropology for generations. Yet, this rather neat divide between speaking humans and non-speaking primates is undermined in the very same article by Buffon’s concession that there had occurred a certain degree of *interbreeding* between Orang-outangs and the humans who shared their habitat. In order to prove his theory of physiological compatibility, he implores his reader to imagine the very lowest echelon of the human species – the Hottentots – who, he claims, are as far removed from humans in a state of nature as Europeans are removed from them:

> chargez donc encore le tableau si vous voulez comparer le singe à l’Homme, ajoutez-y les rapports d’organisation, les convenances de tempêrament, l’appétit vêhêment des singes mâles pour les femmes, la même conformation dans les parties génitales des deux sexes ; l’écoulement périodique dans les femelles, & les mélanges forcés ou volontaires des Négresses aux singes, dont le produit est rentré dans l’une ou l’autre espèce ; et voyez, supposé qu’elles ne soient pas la même, combien l’intervalle qui les sépare est difficile à saisir (*Œuvres*, 389-90).\(^{161}\)

This remarkably casual reference to human/primate interbreeding is all the more extraordinary considering Buffon’s general reliance on the fecundity-principle of species definition – that any two animals capable of producing offspring could theoretically be thought of as a species (*Œuvres philosophiques* 355; see also chapter 2.2.3). Buffon, however, was actually drawing on a long-standing tradition about Orang-outangs in the

\(^{161}\) “[T]hus, embellish this image even more if you want to compare apes with men, add to it the organisational structures, the decorum of temperament, the vehement appetite of the male monkeys for the females, the similarity of the genitals in either sex of both parties; the periodic discharge in the females, and the forced or voluntary interbreeding of negresses with apes, the product of which is assimilated into one or the other species; and observe, supposing that they [apes and men] are not the same, how difficult it is to identify the gap between them” (my trans).
eighteenth century: like ‘Wild Men’ and Satyrs, notes Raymond Corbey, Orang-outangs were “believed to regularly capture women and rape them”, a tradition that was often used to explain their humanoid appearance (16). Jacobus Bontius, for instance, had suggested that the ‘Men of the Woods’ might have originally come about from the lust of apes and local women, while Edward Tyson admitted that the ‘Pygmie’s’ notorious “venery” often extended beyond their species to “fair women”, recounting a story he had heard of “an ape, which grew so amorous of … a celebrated beauty, that no chains could keep him within bounds”, and another of a “woman who had two children by an ape” (Bontius, qtd in Meijer 125; Tyson 42-3). Thomas Jefferson, in his Notes on the State of Virginia (1785), interpreted this same phenomenon as symptomatic of a universal attraction to those of a higher order; the preference of black slaves for white women, he claimed, was to be observed “as uniformly as is the preference for the Oran-oootan for the black women over those of his own species” (230). Indeed, anxieties about the ‘lowest’ human beings intermixing with the ‘highest’ primates more than reflected parallel concerns about the ‘lowest’ Europeans intermixing with inferior human varieties. When Edward Long warned his readers about female servants’ tendency to lust after African slaves, he did so in decidedly animalising terms: “the lower class of women in England”, he declared in his Candid Reflections (1772), “are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses or asses if the laws permitted them. By these ladies they generally have numerous brood” (qtd in E. Lawrence, 707). In his History of Jamaica published two years later in 1774, he judged it “very probable” that “the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied” (2.365).

Thus, the discourse of the Orang-outang in the eighteenth century was replete with racialised contradictions, generational anxieties, and projections of Western colonial relations. The very fact that Edward Tyson had dissected his Orang-outang in order to
disprove its humanity reflects how fundamentally important anatomy had become in defining the frontiers of Mankind. At the same time, the quasi-mythological nature of the various great ape taxa in Linnaeus’s *Systema*, and the reliance on a sort of ‘divine spirit’ in Buffon’s *Nomenclature des singes*, demonstrates the extent to which anatomical investigation into primates was still being used to reinforce the traditional moral limits of Western human nature. The intimation of Orang-outang ‘blood’ in certain human varieties, however, opened up primate discourse to a racialised brand of reasoning that was primarily reserved for the domain of human variety. If offspring between a human being and an Orang-outang had been possible even once, how could this be reconciled with the idea of an unbridgeable boundary – spiritual and corporeal – between the human and the animal world? The question was problematised ten-fold when one considered that most decisive factor of human variety discourse: the physical effects of civilisation. One of the defining features of the Orang-outang myth was that it possessed an extraordinary level of human-like sophistication. The fact that the creatures used tools was a source of constant fascination, was indeed variously embellished with reports that they lived in huts, attacked humans in groups like an army, and displayed a significant level of emotional comprehension. The Orang-outang’s civilised behaviour was regularly represented in images of the creature by way of representative objects, as in Tyson’s volume – wherein the animal, whose humanised gaze is directly aimed at the viewer, clutches a cane (see figs 17, 18 and 19). Others had direct experience of how ‘human’ primate behaviour could be: for five months in 1738, an Orang-outang dubbed ‘Madame Chimpanzee’ was put on display in Randal’s Coffee House in London, becoming somewhat of a celebrity in the periodic press. “A most surprising creature is brought over in the Speaker …” announced the *London Magazine* on her arrival,
It is a female, about four foot high, shaped in every part like a woman excepting its head, which nearly resembles the ape: she walks upright, naturally, sits down to her food, which is chiefly greens, and feeds herself with her hands as a human creature. She is very fond of a boy on board, and is observed always sorrowful at his absence. She is cloathed with a thin silk vestment, and shows a great discontent at the opening [of] her gown to discover her sex (September 1738 464-465, qtd in L. Brown 54).

The idea of civilised behaviour, of course, was central to all the major strands of human variety discourse; if the Orang-outang could be thought of in terms of ‘civility’, then it was surely possible that – as with humans – a manipulation or intensification of its exposure to this ‘civility’ might have developmental affects on its body and mind.
The idea of an anthropoid creature, that could be thought of in terms of ‘civility’, and was yet definitively uncivilised, was, of course, an ideal subject for Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of human ‘perfectibility’ in his Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes (1754). Interestingly, Rousseau too had entertained the notion that Orang-outangs might have produced hybrid offspring with humans, but for him the humanity of great apes lay not in the makeup of their blood, but in their potential for culture (390). “For those that read Rousseau in a literal sense,” notes Philip Sloan, the problem of a human-ape divide could be solved by way of “a historical transformation of human nature, accompanied by a parallel physical transformism, in which man-like apes were changed over time into civilised humans” (Sloan, Haakonssen ed., 2.913). In the opening pages of his Essai sur l’origine des langues (1781), Rousseau proclaimed that speech was by all evidence not ‘natural’ to man: the people of every nation, he asserts, learn their language differently, and are capable of speaking only in so far as they can learn to do so. Speech – the allocation of signs to things – is only necessary in civil society, wherein humans require it in order to satisfy their wants; in this sense, it is an institution rather than an intrinsic ability (87-8). Thus, it was inherently absurd to deny creatures as similar to humans as the Orang-outang the right to be considered in terms of humanity simply because they, like many humans, had not mastered this particular trait. In the Discours, Rousseau describes the remarkably human behaviour of certain speechless Orang-outangs in the Kingdom of Congo. These apes, Rousseau relates, known locally as Pongos (gorillas),162 were said to manifest all the sensibility of humans while lacking their ingenuity; they were rumoured to gather around campfires after the villagers had retired, but did not possess the wherewithal to keep the fire burning, and not only did they abduct women and girls as sex slaves, they sometimes abducted human children and raised them

162 Another legacy of the endemic confusion between primate species in the early modern world is that the term Pongo is now used to describe the genus of the modern orangutan family.
lovingly as their own (390-1). Rousseau was so impressed by what he had heard of Pongos, in fact, that he wondered whether they might not be a lost variety of human being, who had developed outside civil society and continued to exist in a pure state of nature:

Toutes ces observations sur les variétés que mille causes peuvent produire et ont produit en effet dans l’espèce humaine, me font douter si divers animaux semblables aux hommes, pris par les voyageurs pour des bêtes sans beaucoup d’examen, ou à cause de quelques différences qu’ils remarquent dans la conformation extérieure, ou seulement parce que ces animaux ne parlaient pas, ne seroient point en effet de véritables hommes sauvages dont la race dispersée ancienne dans les bois n’avoit eu occasion de développer aucune de ses facultés virtuelles, n’avoit acquis aucune degré de perfection, et se trouvoit encore dans l’état primitif de nature (167-8).163

If Pongos and other Orang-outangs were actually human beings, there would of course be no barrier to their potential hybridity with other humans. The fact that they did not speak, likewise, supported Rousseau’s theory of human ‘perfectibility’ – speech, quite simply, was an acquired trait, something that Man had learned at a certain point in his history, and not, as Buffon would claim, an inherent marker of humanity itself.

For Rousseau, of course, the Orang-outang hypothesis was first and foremost of social and political significance – a particularly dramatic example of the perfectibility of all human beings. Monboddo, however, taking his cue from Rousseau, was far more interested in building a solid case for the theory, attempting to prove that this most ‘unlikely’ of origin stories was indisputably possible. Even the most far-fetched and commonly ridiculed aspects of the Origins are supported with credible secondary sources; Monboddo infamously advocated the notion that a race of tailed men were living somewhere in the islands of Nicobar, for instance, but not without having received

163 “All these observations upon the varieties that a thousand causes can produce and have in fact produced in the human species make me wonder whether various animals similar to men, taken by travellers for beasts without much examination, either because of a few differences they noted in exterior conformation or solely because these animals did not speak, would not in fact be genuine savage [sauvage] men whose race, dispersed in the woods in ancient times, had not had an opportunity to develop any of its potential faculties, had not acquired any degree of perfection, and was still found in the primitive state of nature” (Bush et. al trans. 1992, 81).
personal confirmation of such from Carolus Linnaeus himself (Lovejoy 1948, 52).
Nevertheless, for Lord Monboddo, Rousseau was “the only modern author to have grasped
the real nature of man”, and his Discours was probably the single greatest influence on the
Scotsman’s Origin and Progress of Language some twenty years later (Sebastiani 84).
Indeed, asserts Lovejoy, the difference between Lord Monboddo and his French source
was that “Rousseau had buried his suggestion of our kinship with the apes in a note”, while
“Monboddo devoted more than a hundred pages to the defence of his hypothesis” (45).
Even for humans in a high state of civilisation, Monboddo noted, speech was a particularly
difficult faculty to master: one only had to observe the difficulties encountered by the
French when trying to pronounce the aspirated th, he suggests, or how the English “cannot
pronounce the aspirated k, or x of the Greeks”, while the Scottish imitate it with ease,
having grown up with similar sounds in their native accent (191). Then, of course, there
was the case of so-called ‘wild children’ who had grown up outside civil society and also
lacked this supposedly ‘innate’ capacity for speech. The children had all the organs
necessary to produce speech as well as any other human being, but did not because they
had never learned to; few would ever claim, Monboddo asserts, that these children were
incapable of forming ideas (184). According to Tyson’s anatomical analysis, Orang-outang
speech organs were almost identical to those of humans, so – no less than ‘wild children’ –
it could only be assumed that they “want … nothing in order to speak but instruction or
example, which the savages who invented the first language likewise wanted” (191). In
fact, if this simple, arbitrary boundary of speech was removed from the classificatory
criteria of humans and animals, claimed Monboddo, and if all the other similarities
between them remained the same, any attempted claim that Orang-outangs were not human
would be simply groundless. Both he and Rousseau, Monboddo states proudly, had
“reject[ed] with great contempt the notion of those who think that speech is natural to man.
Now, if we get over this prejudice … it is impossible we can refuse [Orang-outangs] the appellation of men” (188). More than this, if one admitted that the Orang-outangs were a variety of human beings without the use of speech, the great communities of them that supposedly dwelt in the Kingdom of Angola ought to be considered ‘nations’ unto themselves:

they are exactly of the human form, walking erect, not upon all-fours, like the savages that have been found in Europe [wild children]; they use sticks for weapons; they live in society; they make huts of branches and trees, they carry off negro girls of whom they make slaves, and use them both for work and pleasure. These facts are related of them by M. Buffon … It appears certain that they are of our species, and, though they have made some progress in the arts of life, they have not come the length of language (186).

Neither Monboddo nor Rousseau were actually the first to have suggested this possibility: back in 1747, in his L’Homme machine Julien Offray de la Mettrie had similarly theorised the capacity of speech in Orang-outangs on the weight of their anthropoid vocal organs, suggesting that they be taught to communicate using the same methods employed in the education of deaf people (Richards 85).

Like the major climate theorists, then, Monboddo’s idea of humanity is fundamentally based on constant transformation – both physical and mental. Yet, while mainstream climate theorists like Buffon and Blumenbach generally assumed that mankind was in a constant state of degeneration – being darkened by the sun, being stupefied by lack of civilisation, and being stunted by malnourishment – Monboddo and Rousseau envision humanity as existing in a state of progress, “turning ape into human through cultural tutelage” (Wahrman 133). Indeed, Monboddo seems to take a certain delight in undermining his great rival Lord Kames’s belief in a superior ancient Celtic race – intimating that the Highland Scots and the Native Americans (who, it will be remembered
from chapter 2.3.2, Kames had suggested were a separate species) were probably one and the same people:

The Celtic, if I am to believe the accounts I have heard of it, is spread over a great part of the world … I am informed by a gentleman from the Highlands of Scotland, who was some years in Florida in a public character, that the language of the natives there has a great affinity with that dialect of the Celtic which is spoken in those Highlands” (588-9).

Even aside from its legacy in the history of evolutionary thought, notes Lovejoy, Monboddo’s Origins is remarkable in that it successfully puts forth six major points, some of which were “startling novelties in the third quarter of the eighteenth century” (1948, 41). Namely, that: 1. the state of nature was a state of animality; 2. that it was thus desirable to leave this state behind; 3. that Man and Orang-outangs were the same species; 4. that the “physchological differentia” of this species was its perfectibility; 5. that human history had thus been a gradual ascent from animal savagery, rather than a descent from natural golden age; 6. that the recognition of all of the above necessitated a radically new historiographical discourse (41).

Something that is not often noted about Monboddo’s scheme of human progress, however, is that it does not necessarily come to an end-point at Western, commercial humanity. In fact, by way of learning and refinement, Monboddo suggests that Men could rise still further toward perfection, ascending into a higher rank on the Great Chain just as their ancestors had once risen out of their animalistic state. “Man, we know, may, by education and culture continued for many years, be transformed almost into an animal of another species …” he claims in the Origins, it is impossible to say how far science and philosophy may carry [the mind], but the human nature may, by such culture, be so exalted, as to come near to what we conceive of superior natures, and perhaps even to possess the rank of such as are immediately above us in the Chain of Being (23).
In fact, the idea that some humans had, “by education and culture”, become more advanced than the rest was a fundamental component of Monboddo’s human history, as put forth in the third and fourth volumes of his *Ancient Metaphysics*. Just as Hobbes’s Natural Man posited a “definition of civilised humanity [which] depended upon the presumption of an opposing, uncivilised form”, notes Alan Barnard, and just as Rousseau’s vision of modern society was constructed against “a pre-civil, natural ideal”, Monboddo’s Orang-Outang is “necessary in order to define Man as Monboddo wants to define him” (1995, 73).

Monboddo’s vision of the anatomically *superior* human is, paradoxically but not unpredictably, based on the great figures of antiquity, who, for the most part represent the hereditary elite. In the third book of the *Ancient Metaphysics*, he does not only “propose to consider … whether there not be a difference between the individuals of the same country and climate”, but also “whether that difference do not go to the race; or, in other words, whether the distinction of birth and family, of which we hear so much, be not merely a political distinction, without any foundation in nature?” (3.233). Like Orang-outangs or any other animal, he claims, Men once lived in ‘herds’, and in every herd there is always one animal who “will show more spirit, courage, and sagacity, than another”, and will thus become the leader of the group (237). In the fourth volume, he advances on his theory, proposing that once the leaders of any human herd have been distinguished, they will naturally separate into families, which – as civil society develops – will necessarily fall into one of two camps: those who govern, and those who are governed. Since it was their inherently superior attributes that initially permitted them to rise to the top of the herd, Monboddo claims, it is “certain that of the first and superior class of men … the governors are by God and nature destined to be”. Moreover, these individuals must be few in number, comprising only the superlative “excellency of the species” (4.178). The rest of mankind, following the wisdom of Hesoid, Plato and Aristotle, can thereafter be divided into two
groups – those “men who are capable of being governed as free men”, and those who “must be governed by fear or dread of punishment … there is nothing contrary to nature in the state of slavery” (4.178).

Such theories, of course, as this study has shown, were nothing out of the ordinary – they not only accorded with major texts of the ancient canon, and indeed with the Great Chain of Being worldview, but also followed a formula which typified social and political rank-formation in Britain, and colonial interpretations of foreign societies. The tripartite division of a tiny, super-talented elite, a broad, contented middling rank, and a vast under-class who remain oppressed for their own good, not only reflected the idealised structure of British society, but also the racialised/politicised interpretations of less ‘advanced’ societies in, say, J.R. Forster’s 1774 study of Tahiti. Rather, it is Monboddo’s interpretation of this system as part of a hereditary order that is regulated by a peculiar, providential form of ‘natural selection’ that is most striking to the modern reader. Having described his own vision of the excellent ‘few’, Monboddo subsequently addresses the problem of how one is to know if a given individual was born into one of the governing families. Luckily, he notes, “Man resembles other animals, and particularly the horse, whose blood is known by his spirit, as well as by his figure, shape, and movements” (4.179). In fact, he claims, the recent phenomenon of pureblood horses had provided a perfect analogy for the corporeal excellence of elite human families:

Nobody will deny, who knows anything of horses, that the spirit of a horse of blood is very different from that of a common horse … an Arabian horse of one of the noble families, as they call them, some of whose genealogies they pretend to have kept for 2,000 years, will, when his rider is dismounted in battle, instead of running away, stand by him, and neigh for somebody to come to his assistance … (3.237).

Horses of blood, of course – at least according to the myths woven around them – were immediately recognisable as superior; and anyone who argued against such claims, it
might be said, simply did not understand the equine culture. “I say that the character of a governing man”, proclaims Monboddo, “is as easily to be discerned in the features of a man, his look, his voice, and the movements of his body, as blood is in a horse, by his look, and movements” (179). A true nobleman, he states, should be naturally identifiable from his superior size and beauty – attributes for which he cites Euripides’s axiom “ειδος αξιον τυραννιδος [eidos axion tyrranidos]” (‘form worthy of a king) and Tacitus’s interpretation of the same, “forma principe viro digna” (‘form worthy of a prince’) (179).

Again, appearing to echo J.R. Forster, Monboddo qualifies his statement with the observation that in Europe “where money is so much valued” and where “the best blood may be corrupted by impure mixtures”, this dramatic physical difference between nobility and commoners is no longer so obvious to see as it once was (4.185). In nations where the distinction of rank has been more strictly adhered to, however, it was still to be observed. In India, notes Monboddo, the caste system stood as a simple recognition of the inherent differences of quality in certain families – and was perpetuated in order to maintain the physical and mental attributes appropriate to rank within the same lineal kin-groups. As he had been informed by a well-travelled visitor to the Indian subcontinent, he explains, “at this day their Rajahs, or Princes, are handsomer, of larger size, and more dignified appearance, than the rest of the people”. This division of society by ‘race’, he notes, is of a great advantage to the natural order, since it inhibits ambition, and thus the unbalancing of the Great Chain of Being: no one individual can “aspire to be of any higher caste; and therefore his only ambition must be to excel in his own caste” (4.243).

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164 The full Euripides (fl. 440-400 B.C.) quote is “proton men eidos axion tyrranidos” and is taken from his _Aeolus_ (of unknown date); the Tacitus quotation is taken from the _Annals_, Book 4 (c. 116 A.D.).

165 There is no reason why Monboddo should not have read the works of both Forsters, which had been published the year before the first volume of the _Ancient Metaphysics_ appeared, but since he later chooses to quote from the far less relevant Matras account of Cook’s first Tahitian voyage (see below), it is probable that these similarities in the writers’ analogies are simply the product of their shared intellectual environment.
Monboddo’s observations, indeed, perfectly accorded with recent reports from the South Seas. According to Bougainville, he explains, “[t]he nobles in Ottaheite are so much distinguished in that way from the Tootoos, or lower sort of people, that he [Bougainville] is inclined to believe them to be of a different nation” (4.207). Similarly, he records, James Matra – midshipman on Cook’s first Pacific voyage, who was sometimes believed to have authored the anonymous *Journey of a Voyage Round the World* (1771) – had recounted that “the leading men in all the islands where he was, had something in their appearance, their voice, and manner, which distinguished them from the rest of the people so much, *that it was observed even by the common sailors aboard the ship*, who knew them immediately to be governing men” (emphasis added 4.207). This last observation is, of course, one of the most interesting in the whole passage: Monboddo seems to believe, as had so many before him – from the Anglo-Saxon story of Imma (see section 1.1.2) to Georg Forster’s resentful denigration of Omai a few years earlier (see section 2.3.3) – that two blood-born nobles, even when one was Tahitian and the other European, would instantly *recognise* each other’s superior status. It is likewise assumed that those of the lower rank, such as common sailors, would not be sensible to this superior essence.

Eccentric as his theories were, then, it cannot be denied that Monboddo constructed a compelling case for his theories from the available wisdom of the time. What is fascinating, of course, is that Monboddo’s sense of anatomical hierarchy, like Tyson’s, is still firmly rooted in a conception of order that supported the providential superiority of certain social ranks, and which envisioned the hereditary privileges of these ranks as being expressed in their corporeality. It is this quintessentially pre-biological understanding of a *single order* that cuts across the limits of naturalism, politics, religion and society that most firmly separates Monboddo from the idea of evolution and hereditarily-based natural
selection. Yet, not only do his theories, from within the discourse of human variety theory, betray racialised notions of corporeal superiority that could at any time be seamlessly woven into the tradition of the noble body, but they also unite older ideas of socio-political meritocracy with strikingly new ideas of species development and body transformation. That is, the old justifications of illustrious noblemen rising to the summit of society and remaining there by upholding the greatness of their ancestors is here framed in a context of physical hierarchy and corporeal super-humanity. The first nobles became a governing class because of their singular merits, and not only have they passed down these merits ever since, but their position and purity of blood constitutes – ideally at least – a constant refinement of their bodies towards a higher state of being. In short, the fact that nobility is intimately implicated in Monboddo’s alternate vision of natural selection demonstrates how closely linked the very idea of nobility – that is, corporal blood excellence reflected in spiritual and social rank recognition – was to what the evolutionists wanted to prove: namely that one’s human worth could be, and perhaps should be, judged by the exact condition of one’s body.

3.2.3. ‘Captive Kings’: The Royal Slave Trope in Abolitionist Rhetoric

“Am I not a man and a brother?” The kneeling, shackled slave of Josiah Wedgwood’s iconic medallion, adopted in 1787 by the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, posed his question to the British public at a time when the transatlantic slave trade was being criticised on a national scale (see fig 21; J.R. Oldfield 41). The impact of Wedgwood’s medallion lies in the simplicity and directness of its question, and yet its answer, from whatever quarter it might be received, was likely to be anything but simple.
As this study has shown, the ideas of manhood and brotherhood, in the racialised discourse of human variety theory, invariably came with certain conditions: for Linnaeus, the black slave was indeed a Man, though, taxonomically, he was primarily a brother to those who shared his skin colour, habitat, humours, and social structure; for Buffon, this Man’s degree of brotherhood depended on the sun, the earth and the society in which he was raised, recreating him according to his exact longitude, latitude and elevation; for Goldsmith, this brother had drifted far from the Edenic original of Man, and his colour and physique bespoke indolence, laziness, and sexual depravity; for Hume he was a Man who merely mimicked brotherhood with Europeans, inherently incompetent by his own merit; for Kames, the slave was one among multiple species of Man, and thus a brother to none but his own kind; for Kant he was a brother in blood to those of his own progenies classifica, and a Man only in so far as his genealogical line would allow; and, for Monboddo he was at once more than Man and less than Man, brother both to the Orang-outang one step below him, and to the white European, one step above him.

The steady development of anti-slavery activism during the second half of the eighteenth century was one of the most dominant influences on race thinking in Britain at this time. As has been demonstrated in this study, both monogenetic and polygenetic human variety theories – whether they were based on climate, ‘civility’, bloodline, or divine providence – were all complicit in a culture that linked non-Europeans with servitude; if global populations were understood in terms of innate hierarchy, the oppression of those at the bottom of this hierarchy could thus seem somehow ‘natural’, or even inevitable. The multiple and contradictory tenets of human variety theory, indeed, were essential to the paradoxical institution of slavery. Slaves were valuable, notes George Boulukos, precisely because they were human, and could perform complex tasks that only humans could; yet the continuance of slavery nonetheless depended on the systematic
negation of this humanity (1). Slavery thus maintained an inherent paradox, which was increasingly dependent on multiple of templates of different ‘ranks’ within humanity, generally expressed through anatomical variety theory.


Thus, it is not surprising that the driving force of early abolitionism lay in the doctrines of non-conformist religious movements that challenged the very idea of hierarchical human order. The Quakers, in particular, who had long condemned the
practice of slavery in the American colonies, had been actively distributing anti-slavery literature in Britain since the 1760s, heading various campaigns which were eventually adopted by more mainstream religious groups and organised into an active abolitionist front in the 1780s and 90s, and reaching new political heights with Thomas Clarkson’s exposure of endemic slave torture in works such as the *Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788), and William Wilberforce’s landmark parliamentary bill of 1791 (Carey 2006, 397). The very rhetoric of the abolitionist movement, however, was itself an intense locus of race thinking, promoting a set of tropes and rhetorical devices whereby the black African slave – so much an *other* that he regularly trod the frontiers between race, species, and animality – could be fully understood as a Western, Christian human being. The ‘pan-varietal’ equality championed by abolitionists, no more than the pan-varietal ‘humanitarianism’¹⁶⁶ advocated by slave-trade reformists, vindicated the African slave’s inherent humanity in terms of his proximity to the virtue-based, Christian humanity of Western tradition. To recall Hannah Arendt’s observation, referenced previously in section 3.1.2, Man was not human simply because he assumed a human form, but because he performed the role of Man in civil society; a human being who was *nothing but* a human being had “lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man” (300). As embodied in the dominant trope of the ‘Grateful Slave’, an iconographic tradition to which Wedgwood’s kneeling supplicant also belongs, the consideration of black Africans as ‘equal’ to white Europeans often entailed the projection of white European values on the black African body (Boulukos 2-3). In one of those twists of irony so characteristic of racialised discourse, the black African’s full

¹⁶⁶ This is a word that must be used with caution; aside from the paradoxical qualities of terms like ‘humane’ and ‘humanitarian’ (for instance, the ‘humane’ treatment of animals), Wylie Sypher distinguishes earlier reformist rhetoric as *primitivist*, as opposed to the *humanitarian* sentiment that became prevalent later in the century (103).
assumption of European humanity meant his acceptance of a hierarchical tradition in
which he was, invariably, and in multiple ways, a quintessentially inferior human being.

This subchapter focuses on one of the most fascinating counterparts of the
Grateful Slave motif: the ‘Royal Slave’ – a construct of black humanity that at once
reinforced the Chain of Being worldview, the noble tradition of genealogically superior
‘race’, and the intimate relationship between racialised body hierarchies and European
social order. Though the ‘Royal Slave’ trope is often asserted as part of the ‘noble savage’
tradition, notes Barry Weller, he is in fact the exact opposite: “the point about the royal
slave is of course that he is precisely not a savage, but rather occupies (or has occupied) a
place in a highly articulated and hierarchical society” (69). The literary fantasy of an
African socio-spiritual hierarchy, whose leaders are noticeably more competent, more
physically beautiful, and essentially of higher human worth than those lower down on the
scale, is itself fundamentally humanising in that it plays out the idealised traditions of
Western social order upon the African body. The Royal Slave’s most basic criticism of the
slave trade is that it has upturned the Chain of Being – enslaving those who were not born
to be slaves. Indeed, the standard ‘Royal Slave’ narrative showcases a brand of
abolitionism/reformism which, as has often been pointed out, is often more racist than not,
by holding worthy slaves – whose ‘nobility’ is generally manifested through a series of
European virtues – up against rather less worthy slaves – whose ‘ignobility’ is aligned with
the dehumanising stereotypes of varietal tradition. Above all, it shows how the humanity
that abolitionist poets, playwrights and novelists were attempting to associate with black
slaves, was often inextricable from a sense of social hierarchy; that is to say, in order to
fully assume humanity on the same level as white Europeans, the African slaves of
eighteenth-century literature had to express an inherent understanding that some humans
were more human than others.
While this study has focused largely on the frontiers of race and nobility in the domains of natural philosophy and socio-political theory, it must also be remembered that these human ‘varieties’, who were causing so much consternation in the laboratories and lecture halls of the Royal Society, were simultaneously interacting with each other every day in the streets of Britain’s big cities, seaports, and even country towns. The long tradition of slave trading\textsuperscript{167} in the West Indies meant that black Africans were foremost among the exotic faces on the streets of eighteenth-century Britain. As early as 1596, Queen Elizabeth had expressed dismay at the nation’s black population, which seemed to increase with each new slaving expedition; she even went so far as to hire merchant ships to export the offending groups to Portugal and Spain, since “there are already hear too manie … [and] should be sent forth of the land” (qtd in Appiah and Gates eds, 41). During the seventeenth century (by the end of which black Africans far outnumbered whites in the West Indies), the black population was further supplemented with African missionaries who were sent to England to be educated, joined with African ‘princes’ and sons of slave-trading chieftains, as well as the ‘mixed-race’ children of West Indian planters (5.41). By 1750 there were between fifteen and twenty thousand black Africans living in Britain and, while this population was mostly based in London and the port cities of Liverpool and Bristol, by the end of the century individuals of African descent were dispersed throughout the island (J.R. Oldfield 20). The fact that no parliamentary legislation had ever been made on slavery in England left the status of this population rather unsure for most of the century, with various judges making highly variable rulings on a slave’s right to freedom once he stood on British soil. This ambiguity continued right up until the landmark James Somerset case of 1772, when the abolitionist advocate Granville Sharp successfully set the precedent.

\textsuperscript{167} The English had been trading slaves since at least the eleventh century, while the West Indian trade began to develop during the late Elizabethan era (Sypher 1942, 11).
that no individual had the right to forcibly remove a black slave from England (Appiah and Gates eds 5.42).

Nonetheless, ‘free’ black servants were regularly employed in the homes of the nobility, gentry, and urban elite in order to convey the wealth and opulence associated with West Indian plantations. The routine depiction of black servants in portraiture from the late-seventeenth century onward, notes J.R. Oldfield, is indicative of “the aristocratic taste for the rare and exotic, black servants, particularly young boys, who were soon familiar sights in larger country houses” (20). The genre painter George Morland, for instance, who produced two iconic abolitionist paintings in 1791 (‘The Slave Trade’ and ‘African Hospitality’), had previously composed a number of family portraits in which black servants are presented at the periphery of domestic scenes as “objects of display, intended to tell the viewer something about the ‘owner’s’ wealth, status, and respectability. They are props, fashionable possessions, as important in their way as a piece of china or the cut of a dress” (20-21). During their tour through the Highlands of Scotland, Samuel Johnson and James Boswell noted with some amusement that Lord Monboddo kept a black servant at his estate in Kincardineshire – something he and Johnson had in common. “How curious it was to see an African in the north of Scotland” Boswell noted as the pair took their leave from Monboddo House, “with little or no difference of manners from those of the natives” (1993, 38).

The relationship between these exotic servants and their masters sometimes made for a curious juxtaposition of a racialised underclass – linked with slavery, notions of corporeal depravity, and animalistic barbarity – and a racialised social elite whose privilege, birth, and luxurious lifestyle were commonly denounced, albeit in a rather different way, as agents of physical ‘degeneration’ (see chapter 2.2.2). Indeed, the intimacy between those who had been condemned to the very bottom of the social order (owing to
their birth), and those who had long claimed their place at the very top (again, owing to their birth), was not lost on those critics who ventured to opine that, in their shared extremity of ‘race’, the two groups might not be so different after all. Felicity Nussbaum has noted a fascinating convergence of noble tradition and the racialised body in one of William Austin’s well-known satirical plates from 1773, representing Catherine Hyde, the third Duchess of Queensbury, fencing with her black servant “the Creole Soubise” (see fig. 20; Nussbaum 7-9). The eccentric Duchess, a famous beauty and friend to Pope, Gay and Swift, is depicted in a manly stance (a reference to her notoriously plain, unadorned attire which sometimes saw her compared to the Chevalier D’Eon), while the phallic thrust of her opponent’s lance into her heart (a touché) hints at the pair’s rumoured sexual relationship (8). Though described in Austin’s caption as her ‘black servant’, Julius Soubise was anything but; in fact, having been brought to England as the child of a slave and ‘gifted’ to the Duchess in 1764, he was raised more like a son, growing up to become something of a celebrity amongst the London quality (8). Alongside his Christian name Julius, typically drawn from the leaders of Ancient Rome, the Duchess named him ‘Soubise’ after the French courtier Charles de Rohan, Prince de Soubise, and hero of the Seven Years’ War – thus associating him with both the idealised nobilitas of Roman antiquity and a decidedly modern example of (non-English, nonetheless) military virtue. She also took delight in dressing the boy in extravagantly expensive clothing – a trait, indeed, he would harness for himself as a young man. Assuming the image of a quintessential London ‘macaroni’, Soubise went on to become a prominent figure of fashion in London, exhibiting the latest and most ostentatious trends, practising oration with David Garrick and Richard Sheridan, becoming renowned for his ‘shapely legs’ and handsome face, and holding court to an endless succession of admirers at Vauxhall, the Opera, and Hyde Park (M. L. Millar 62). In fact, notes Monica L. Miller, Soubise seems to
have capitalised as much as possible on his own ‘spectacular’ quality: “aware of the constructedness of his position and performatively responding”, she notes, “he signified his visibility and status as a luxury item by meeting white excess with black luxuriance” (64). Thus, there can be seen in the person of Julius Soubise, and, indeed, in his filial/servile/erotic relationship with his noble mistress, a curious conflation of varietal ‘degeneration’ (as embodied in his non-European physique) and the parallel ‘degeneration’ of luxury, wealth, and vice (as incarnated in the excessive vanity and caprice of conspicuous display). Indeed, in many ways Soubise could be seen as a superlative symbol of elite luxury because his very body was a decoration, an item of fashion, the accessory of a magnificently wealthy noblewoman. It is interesting, then, that the resounding criticism of William Austin’s satire is one of racialised transgression. In the 1773 print, notes Nussbaum, Soubise is deliberately caricatured to resemble Tyson’s ‘pygmie’, heightening the incongruity of the clothes and status of this Duchess’s favourite “lap dog” (8). She, in turn, appears to have undergone a certain racial degeneration through her wanton transgression of social order: her fencing mask is shaded so as to mirror the colour of Soubise’s skin, her headscarf mimics his caricatured African ‘wig’, and her defeat signals hierarchical as well as sexual submission to her opponent. By lowering herself to his company, or, indeed, by raising him to hers, the Duchess appears to have sacrificed the purity of her own race. Soubise’s incongruously fine clothes thus represent racial impurity invading the ranks of nobility, while the Duchess’s blackened visage indicates the rapid degeneration of pureblood nobles to a state of racialised inferiority.
Fig. 21 William Austin. ‘The Duchess of Queensbury playing at foils with her favourite lapdog Mungo after expending near 10000 to make him a ——’. Soubise quotes the savvy black servant of Isaac Bickerstaffe’s 1768 play *Padlock*: “Mungo here mungo dere, mungo ev’ry where, above, & below Hah! Vat your Gracy tink of me now[?]”. Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

<http://images.library.yale.edu/>.
The fashion for young, black, male attendants in the elite households of eighteenth-century Britain can be partly explained by the phenomenal popularity of ‘African prince’ narratives – a craze which, in turn, was fuelled by the frequent arrival of very real African ‘princes’ on British soil throughout the century. Petty chieftains, particularly along the Gold and Ivory coasts, commonly sent their sons to England to receive a European education, while many others may have been brought under duress (Sypher 1941, 237). Something that captured the British imagination even more than these exotic African royals, however, was the fact that they were often sold into slavery themselves by double-dealing merchants, having to be (as the merchants expected) ‘ransomed’, or ‘bought back’ by the British government in order to maintain smooth diplomacy with African traders (237). An early example was the case of Job Ben Solomon, known simply as ‘The African’, who was stolen and ransomed in the year of 1733–4, described by the judge Thomas Bluett as “about five feet ten inches high, straight limb’d and, naturally of a good constitution; … his countenance was exceedingly pleasant, yet grave and composed; his hair long, black, and curled, being different from that of the Negroes commonly brought from Africa” (46). Another famous case was that of William Ansah Sesarakoo, the ‘Prince of Annamaboe’, son of the Fantin slave-trader John Corrente of Annamaboe, who was kidnapped, sold, ransomed, and returned to England in the 1740s. Not only did Sesarakoo’s story inspire multiple ‘Royal Slave’ narratives, but his sensational visit to Covent Garden in 1749 to see a performance of Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko; or the Royal slave* (1696, based on Aphra Behn’s 1688 novella of the same name, discussed below) became the subject of still more Royal Slave narratives – notably William Dodd’s poem ‘The African Prince, when in England 1749, to Zara at his father’s court’ (1749), which was teamed with a poetic ‘reply’ from Annamaboé’s fictionalised lover, Zara (Dodd 16). In Dodd’s poems, then, the real-life spectacle of ‘Royal Slaves’
watching and being moved by a Royal Slave narrative, is, in turn, transformed into a Royal Slave narrative – indeed, it was perhaps the only narrative that Dodd would have thought to associate with an African Prince. Journalistic accounts of the same event similarly tended to blur the distinctions between the Prince on stage and the Prince in the audience, assuming that Sesaraskoo’s reaction to the play offered an authentic glimpse of the Royal Slave in action:

[t]he young prince was so far overcome, that he was obliged to retire at the end of the fourth act. His companion remained, but wept the whole time; a circumstance which affected the audience yet more than the play, and doubled the tears which were shed for Oroonoko and Imoinda (qtd in Nussbaum 189).

Sesarakoo’s case and others like it were the subject of much concern among the British intelligentsia of the eighteenth century, at once questioning the bases of slavery, the significance of non-European royalty, and the legitimacy of human variety hierarchies. Samuel Johnson was horrified at the enslavement of those of high rank, remarking in 1777 that “in our own time princes have been sold, by wretches to whose care they were entrusted, that they might have an European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would avail either their dignity or their wrongs” (qtd in Sypher 1942, 59; Weller 68). Boswell however, who never embraced abolitionism, contended that the maintenance of slavery was more important to the universal order than the liberation of wrongly subjugated African princes. “To abolish a status, which in all ages God has sanctioned and man has continued,” he opined in response to Johnson’s disgust, “would not only be robbery to an innumerable class of our fellow citizens; but it would be extreme cruelty to the African savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life” (qtd in Sypher 59).
As William Dodd’s poetry demonstrates, it is difficult to say exactly whether the literary Royal Slave was responsible for a heightened awareness of cases like that of William Sesarakoo, or if it was the frequency of these cases that fuelled the demand for such narratives in contemporary prose, drama, and verse. Either way, the standard Royal Slave plot, which had already taken form in the later seventeenth century, persisted right into the nineteenth: its protagonist is invariably a male of high birth, who begins his narrative in a pastoral pseudo-African setting ruled by patrilineal royalty; he generally has a female counterpart, to whom he is undyingly constant; he is betrayed into slavery, endures its brutalities, and then dies with “grand gesture” (Sypher 1942, 9). Indeed, what is perhaps most interesting about the Royal Slave narrative is that this plot remains mostly unchanged throughout the entire century, while its significance is steadily transformed with each passing decade of growing anti-slavery sentiment. The Royal Slave plot, notes Sypher, which gradually gained popularity with religious anti-slavery movements in the mid-century, subsequently merged with “a great stream of egalitarian theory” in the wake of the Somerset case in 1772, standing as a central trope of the high abolitionist movement in the late century, and continuing to remain popular, especially in prose fiction, after the French Revolution had significantly quelled the trend for egalitarian themes in literature (10). One aspect of this era that Sypher neglects to address, of course, was the parallel development of human taxonomy, multiple variety theories, and indeed biological race – which, during this same time, was transforming the very basis of slavery justification, positioning anatomy and varietal potential at the very forefront of abolitionist debates.

Aphra Behn’s Oronoko; or, The Royal Slave (1688) not only cast the mould for the standard eighteenth-century Royal Slave narrative, but also established the most significant aspect of this narrative in relation to anatomically-based variety theory: the slave’s physical beauty. It must be remembered that Behn’s much studied depiction of a
black African prince, whose singular spiritual nobility manifests itself through white, European, and indeed ‘heroic’ physical features, pre-dates the coherent development of basic ‘human variety’ templates – it is a racialised discourse that remains firmly in a moral rather than the naturalist sphere, using the body to express the course of spiritual providence. In this aspect alone, it is highly significant: Behn’s Oroonoko represents a sense of ‘moral corporeality’ that not only continued to exist alongside ‘varietal corporeality’ in the eighteenth century, but which, as this study has shown, concurrently remained a standard trope of noble superiority. Oroonoko’s anatomy expresses his rank on the great Chain of Being in the just same way as that of any ‘true nobleman’ of literary tradition, and in this it liberally traverses the boundaries that would later be established by ‘varietal’ race thinking. Consider, for instance, the famous introductory description of Oroonoko:

He [Oroonoko] was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied; the most famous statuary could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing; the white of them being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and roman, instead of African or flat. His mouth, the finest shape that could be seen; far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble and exactly formed, that, bating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome (emphasis added, 80-1).

Oroonoko manifests white European features primarily because, for Behn, heroes are white European men. Indeed, Oroonoko resembles a nobleman (incarnating the physical ideas of heroic antiquity) before he resembles a white man; thus he can, unproblematically, be white despite the fact that he is black; like any literary hero or ‘true nobleman’ his physical appearance distinguishes him above the masses. This is interesting precisely because it showcases a racialised sense of European superiority while being removed from the boundaries of varietal discourse; Oroonoko’s “polished jet” blackness
demonstrates that he is a prince among Africans rather than a prince among all men, and yet, here, this superlative blackness functions as a pastiche of white European tradition – it is above all a mark of the prince’s purity, a ‘distilled’ quality of his nation, unsullied, as it were, with later associations of this same blackness with anatomical degeneration. He “is not just black”, notes Catherine Gallagher, “but very, very black. His blackness is, moreover, luminous, beautiful, wonderful” (2). In short, Oroonoko’s body plays out the traditional narrative of noble superiority as expressed through physical appearance, while, at the same time, maintaining the importance of his racialised difference to white Europeans. The depiction of ‘corporeal morality’ via racialised features, however, undermined the basic reasoning behind variety theory: as has been seen throughout this study, variety theorists focused heavily both on the idea of uniform anatomy and the moral/mental/social limitations of particular varieties, in order to consolidate the ‘reality’ of varieties themselves. Pro-slavery theorists relied even more so on the idea of ‘homogeneity’ within inferior varieties in order to justify the indiscriminate subjugation of the whole group. Oroonoko’s noble beauty, then, assumes a dramatically different significance when considered, for instance, alongside Edward Long’s description of Guinean slaves almost a century later in 1773:

The blacks of [Guiney have] a covering of wool like bestial fleece instead of hair … [they are characterised by] the roundness of their eyes, the figure of their ears, tumid nostrils, flat noses, invariably thick lips, and ‘[the] general large size of the female nipples as if adapted by nature to the peculiar conformation of their children[’]s mouths … they are devoid of genius, and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility and science … they are represented by all authors as the vilest of the human kind, to which they have little more pretention of resemblance than what arises from their exterior form … a general uniformity runs through all these various regions and people … all people on the globe have some good as well as ill qualities, except the Africans (352-3).

Long’s insistence that all Guineans share a uniform bestiality, that they alone among global human populations are invariable in their inferiority, seems directly to address and
negate the possibility of a real Oroonoko figure – and the potential humanisation of slaves (or at least some of them) that this figure represents. Indeed, when directly contrasted with descriptions such as the above, upon which the continuance of slavery depended, it is easily seen how Behn’s archetype of the Royal Slave took on an anti-slavery position all by itself.

The racial ‘evolution’, so to speak, of the Royal Slave character can already be seen in Thomas Southerne’s 1696 dramatic interpretation of Behn’s Oroonoko (the same interpretation that reportedly brought tears to the eyes of the Prince of Annamaboe in 1749), a work that truly consolidated the trope as standard feature of the eighteenth-century literature. Though uncritical of slavery as an institution, Southerne’s drama – which would become one of the most frequently performed plays in Britain for the next one hundred years – helped to establish what Barry Weller has called the Oroonoko effect: that is, the singling out of a genealogically distinguished slave (whose nobility is expressed through an affinity with Western virtue and a Europeanised anatomy) as representative of human dignity degraded (Weller 65; J.R. Oldfield 23; Boulukos 44). It is a device, of course, that only works (just like European nobility) when the few are contrasted with the many; the Royal Slave is, by definition, an exception to the rule of the inferior African body. Concurrently, in both Behn’s and Southerne’s works, by virtue of the fact that Oroonoko is an exceptional noble among the generally non-noble black Africans, the Royal Slave can make a case against the abuse of slaves while remaining complicit in the continuance of slavery. One of the most notable aspects of Southerne’s interpretation, however, is the fact that Oroonoko’s lover, Imoinda, described in Behn’s novel as “female to the noble male; the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars”, is recast as white. “There was a stranger in my father’s court,” Oroonoko explains near the beginning of the play,

Valu’d and honour’d much: he was a white,
The first I ever saw of your complexion:
He chang’d his Gods for ours, and grew so great;
Of many virtues, and so fam’d in arms,
He still commanded all my father’s wars.
I was bred under him,
...
He left an only daughter, whom he brought
An infant to Angola … (2.2, 29).

This transformation, notes Nussbaum, may well have been more practical than anything else – black women had never been on stage in England at the time Southerne published the play, and the spectacle of a white woman in blackface would probably have considerably diminished the seriousness of Imoinda’s role (the actor playing Oroonoko, of course, was always a white man in blackface) (158). Practical considerations aside, however, the ‘whitening’ of Imoinda has a significant effect on the narrative’s racial discourse. In lieu of her black skin, Southerne emphasises Imoinda’s status as a non-Christian in order to distance her from European racial identity, and yet Oroonoko’s union with this white female could almost be read as another inherently ‘noble’ quality of his character. Imoinda’s feminine beauty stands as a direct reflection of Oroonoko’s masculine nobility – and by becoming visually white, the racial transformation of Imoinda could arguably be seen as a further ‘whitening’ of Oroonoko’s moral rank.

Overt anti-slavery sentiment begins noticeably to infiltrate the Royal Slave tradition in subsequent revisions of Southerne’s play, which reflected the changing significance of the plot itself for mid-century audiences. John Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko: A Tragedy, as it is now Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury Lane* (1759), commissioned by David Garrick who starred in the leading role, amends Southerne’s text to make the slave-holders seem more ignoble in the face of Oroonoko’s nobility. “Pox on ‘em [slaves]” declares a West Indian planter in the play’s opening lines, “a parcel of lazy, obstinate, untractable pagans; – half of ‘em are so sulky when they first come, that they won’t eat
their victuals … a Christian may beat ‘em ‘till he drops down before he can make ‘em eat …” (1.1, 115). Oroonoko’s rebellion and death, then, becomes not only the tragic case of a prince who has been unjustly enslaved, but a case of a degenerate, deceitful, and honourless slave-holding caste who display neither respect for, nor understanding of, his high birth and rank – casting a dual ‘racial’ scrutiny on the white as well as the black characters. The vulgar (prose) speech of the planters, indeed, makes for a direct contrast with the (iambic) verses of Oroonoko and his retinue, exemplified in the speech of his companion Aboan:

O Royal Sir, remember who you are,
A Prince born for the good of other men:
Whose God-like Office is to draw the sword
Against Oppression and set free mankind
…
[Are] princes, the heirs of empire, and the last
Of your illustrious lineage, to be born
To pamper up their pride, and be their slaves? 3.2, 138 (as in, Southerne 3.2, 42).

The first fully abolitionist rendering of the Oroonoko plot was put forth in John Ferrier’s *Prince of Angola: A Tragedy*, which was published in 1788 at the behest of the Manchester Committee for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (Iwaniszew ed. 203). Maintaining much of Southerne’s original dialogue, Ferrier further enhanced the degenerative aspects of the slave traders in order to highlight the superior humanity of the African princes. The ‘noble’ savages here (not to say ‘noble savages’) become spokesmen for European nobility itself, the loss of which is expressed through the moral corruption, verbal vulgarity and social inversion of the *white* characters. Aboan’s speech, above, is indeed altered so as to make the African nobles more overtly aware of European ignobility:

By what enchantment is my prince beguil’d
Again to trust European honesty?
…
Whose accursed arts
Corrupt th’ingenuous Negro, and inlay
Our honest black with Christian wickedness.

... Who proud perhaps to own a Royal Slave,
May suffer you to get young princes for him

... The last of your illustrious lineage, born
To pamper up his pride and be his slaves” (238).

The play is furthermore supplemented with an appendix detailing the abuses of the contemporary slave trade.

By the late century, the Royal Slave trope had become so well established that it seemed to underpin practically every representation of ‘exceptional’ black Africans who disproved the varietal assumption of uniform inferiority. Even Gustavus Vassa’s benchmark work of abolitionist literature, the *Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) takes many cues from the Royal Slave plot: not only does Vassa claim to have been born into a hereditary elite, notes Weller, noting at the beginning of his history that “my father was one of those elders and chiefs … styled Embrenché … importing the highest distinction, and signifying in our language a mark of grandeur”, but throughout the narrative he consistently stands out as *special*, more *capable*, and more *competent* among his peers, both to his fellow slaves and his European masters (Vassa 4; Weller 71). Similarly, as part of his self-mythologisation, Julius Soubise too had, at times, claimed descent from African royalty (M.L. Millar 62). Other works of prose fiction utilised the ‘Oroonoko effect’ in various different ways, often incorporating the Royal Slave trope with more general criticisms of social transgression in British society. Perhaps the most interesting of these is Anna Maria Mackenzie’s *Slavery; or, The Times* (1792), which weaves the Royal Slave plot into an epistolary novel of manners. The novel recounts the story of Prince Adolphus of Tonouwah, who has been sent to the distinguished home of Mr Hamilton in London’s Finsbury Square to receive an English education, soon falling in
love with the young Mary Ann St. Leger,\footnote{This character’s name seems to hint at the (originally anonymous) author’s identity, demonstrating the comfort with which Mackenzie herself could assume the role of an Imoinda to the Royal Slave.} being betrayed by a rival suitor, reunited with his father in England, and eventually winning the heart of his beloved. Interestingly, the ‘manners’ that the novel commends follow the conventions of the literary Royal Slave tradition: the ‘good’ characters of the novel all recognise the value and desirability of Adolphus’s and Mary Ann’s ‘inter-racial’ relationship, since they value the pair’s shared nobility over their physical differences (Mary Ann, who begins the novel as an orphan, is soon revealed as “the produce of noble stock”); conversely, the ‘bad’ characters, including Mary Ann’s rival suitor Francis Berisford and her scheming guardians Mr and Mrs Abrams, see the relationship as a scandal – while they automatically consider themselves infinitely superior to Prince Adolphus, they, as pretentious middling upstarts, are incapable of understanding the inherent nobility of his blood, behaviour, and physical appearance (2.190).

The racial dynamic of Mackenzie’s novel is especially interesting in that it distinguishes the African elite as mentally and physical superior to lower Africans in the same way as the English elite are differentiated from the middling ranks – positing that those at the top of each hierarchy possess a common understanding. Just like his literary predecessors, the seventeen-year-old Adolphus is immediately recognisable to everyone around him as a ‘special’ African. When the captain of the ship that brings him to England is taken ill with gout, he instantly calls on Adolphus to take control of the voyage, who, in turn distinguishes himself by refusing to mistreat the African slaves on board (1.18). Just like his predecessors, indeed, this Prince of Tonouwah is assisted by a pair of servants, Sambo and Oran, whose constant deference, fear, and supplication serve to highlight their master’s leadership, bravery and honourable pride. Their inherent difference from him, furthermore, is demonstrated in their respective speech patterns: Adolphus speaks in long
eloquent sentences, punctuated sporadically with pleasing inaccuracies (both he and his father, for instance, sometimes refer to themselves in the third person); Sambo and Oran, on the other hand, speak in the caricatured pidgin of the stage-slave. “Sambo go England”, proclaims the former at the beginning of the novel, “– Live with prince. – No whip, no work, like slave” (1.21). Later, when his tutor asks Adolphus why they complain about life in England while he never does, the prince explains that Sambo and Oran are not black Africans in the same way as he is a black African:

I am neither a servant nor a slave; and the son of a king should not be capricious … though you continually aim to lessen my ideas of hereditary dignity, yet – do not be angry, sir, – yet I cannot forget that Adolphus is a prince; that Sambo and Oran are but his father’s subjects. How should they then think as I do? I know they are my fellow-creatures, claiming all the rights of humanity; but do not, good sir, do not suppose they are my equals, in strength of mind, self-denial, or descent (95).

Adolphus’s physical beauty again consolidates his superiority of character, and though he is not given a detailed physical description in the manner of Oroonoko, it is later revealed that he (unlike Oroonoko, and reflecting the ‘post-varietal’ values of the 1790s) is almost as “white as a Christian” (109, see below). Most significantly, Adolphus’s ‘traditional’ sense of social order implicitly casts a critical light on the novel’s English characters, whose speech patterns are similarly indicative of their social (and moral) rank: Mary Ann, her father, and Adolphus’s protector all speak in a self-effacing and highly decorous rhetoric, while the insolent, self-assured jabbering of Mrs Abrams and Francis Berisford is characterised with mispronunciation, misspelling, and grammatical errors. Indeed, Berisford’s broken elocution can at times be compared to that of Sambo: “Slow and sure at setting out,” he writes to Adolphus explaining his malicious plan, “–Set off cool. Keep my breath. –Lie by. –Let ‘em all get before me. … –How d’ye like my plan? Full of mettle isn’t it?” (2.62).
The difference between Sambo and the Abrams, however, is that Sambo accepts his inferior rank with dignity and grace, while the Abrams – who, it might be mentioned, spend the novel plotting to embezzle Mary Ann’s fortune – can think only of rising in society. The minute particulars of the Abrams’ social situation are, typically, communicated through their street address. The novel is careful to mention that they live on Church Street (present-day Fournier Street), in Spitalfields – which not only situates them in the heart of ‘artisan’ East London, but in the best part of this quintessentially ‘low’ district. Having been at the heart of a considerable redevelopment project in the 1720s, Church Street boasted some of the finest houses in the area, mostly occupied by wealthy silk merchants who used the garrets for industry and often converted the ground floor into a ‘shop space’; the presence of silk waste found packed between the floor joists of these houses, notes F.H.W. Sheppard, suggests that the sound of looms would have been audible from the attic workshops (199). In the context of this novel, that is, Church Street can be taken as a street with ideas above its station. Certainly, Adolphus seems disgusted with the Abrams’ household when he is invited to meet Mary Ann’s guardians. After waiting “a quarter of an hour in a small parlor” he is led upstairs “by a clumsy black boy in a crimson and white coarse turban” (a vulgarity that seems to injure the African prince most of all) before stepping into a “large shewy dining room” (100). On being introduced to the prince, the Mrs Abrams wastes no time in embarrassing her charge by treating him as a servant: “Mercy on me!” she exclaims to Mary Ann, “what’s this the young black-a-moor you said was so handsome? Why he is not at all like our Mark Anthony! Laus-a-me, he’s almost as white as a Christian!” (101). Even more interestingly, Mrs Abrams seems to base her misplaced sense of superiority on contemporary human variety theory; clumsily inviting herself to dine with Adolphus’s guardians, she states that: “one coach will hold us all; and as for young Caesar, I have no objection to his riding with us, though he isn’t, perhaps, of
our own *spechus*, as the great Mr ****\(^\text{169}\) says” (102). Adolphus, of course – whose noble virtue has granted him an inherent sense of English decorum, while his non-Englishness permits him to openly give vent to these convictions – can reply to Abrams’s self-invitation with a naïve directness unavailable to his English friends: “he declared, with a look of the warmest dislike, that Mr Hamilton [his guardian] entertained none but people of fashion, birth, or education; consequently, as Mrs Abrams could not be admitted under either of those claims, she would meet with a repulse” (103). Mrs Abrams, scandalised, counters him with uncontrolled fury:

> this scrubby negro, *cannable*, this *selvidge*, chuses to insult me. –Sir, if he was a Christian, or even a Jew, one would not mind it so much. But when the *parlermint* house is all up in arms about ’em, when even all Mr Will-by-force can say stands for nothing, though he pretends they’re free born like us, is such a puppy as *this* to chatter? (103).

Perhaps the most important element of this entire scene is that it positions this work of abolitionism between two opposing ‘racisms’. Mrs Abrams, of course, is echoing a distinctly modern form of ‘varietal racism’ – and indeed directly referencing a variety theorist in order to support her point of view; yet, as emphasised in her mispronunciation of the word ‘species’, the narrative frames her very belief in such sensational variety theory as an aspect of her *ignorance*. On the other hand, the more polite company in the room sit in silent embarrassment, because Mrs Abrams is transgressing the boundaries of an older form of ‘race’ – she has not only neglected to show deference to the highborn royal before her, whom the ‘good’ characters instantly recognise as inherently superior in body and mind, but is so blind to the ranks of universal order – and, indeed, so waylaid by her ‘modern’ notions of varietal race – that she places him on a level with her African servant boy. In short, Abrams’s implementation of standard ‘varietal racism’, which

\(^{169}\) Probably Edward Long.
necessarily requires her to place herself above the Prince of Tonouwah, transgresses the older sense of ‘noble racism’ according to which she is inherently lowborn and he, owing to his genealogy and hereditary privilege, is her superior. Anti-abolitionists, then, according to the narrative, are not only ignorant – they are ill-bred. A true understanding of universal order, it would seem, not only requires the assessment skin colour, but also of morality, station, birth, education (and, according to Adolphus, fashion); it is an understanding that Adolphus is not ‘merely’ a black African, but a black African whose exalted rank brings him within the acceptable bounds of white Europeans, and, indeed, of white Europeans who are hierarchically superior to the Abramses. The abolitionist criticism of the Abramses’ racism then, essentially centres on the idea that their racism is too simple, ignoring the essentially racialised aspects of social rank.

For Sypher, Anna Maria Mackenzie’s Slavery represents the “the apotheosis of the noble Negro”; it is:

a grand total of the deficiencies of ‘literary’ anti-slavery – the juxtaposition of the noble and ignoble savage, nauseous sentimentality, primitivistic critiques of culture, willful neglect of fact, the arbitrary selection of an exceptional Negro over whom to weep, and the vicious implication that the ordinary slave deserves his bondage (287).

The distinction between Royal Slaves and common slaves, of course, also speaks volumes about the English society that enforces the different treatment of each. Not forgetting that this novel was published in 1792, the suggested ‘racial’ integrity of properly honouring royalty and nobility should not be underestimated. In an awkward digression from the novel’s main action, the characters remove briefly to Revolutionary France where they come face to face with a merciless, bloodthirsty Republican regime. The last page of the novel, in fact, is given over to the Frenchman M. Soissons, who apologises on behalf of his countrymen: “the liberty we contend for blossoms sweetly in your nation. –Had our mode
of government been as mild as yours, the rights of royalty would have been equally secure.

—Go then, Sir and enjoy with your friends the pure sunshine of freedom” (2.237). This episode, of course, sanitises the text of any potential sympathies for full social equality, yet it also highlights how the Royal Slave can, at this time, be neatly woven into the mythology of a particularly English sense of freedom. By linking abolitionism with an older sense of noble ‘race’ and defence of traditional social order, Mackenzie is, at the same time, linking it with the English race. The recognition of truly noble and worthy individuals, even among slaves, is posited as a celebration of the social order – while the indiscriminate oppression of entire nations is characterised as a potential agent of this order’s destruction. The inherent sense of deference that moves the highborn English characters to honour Adolphus, then, can be read as a ‘racially’ English tendency to honour royalty, and indeed to respect, and protect every individual’s inherited place in the Great Chain of Being.

The Royal Slave trope stands as a striking example of the endemic racism in abolitionist and reformist rhetoric – demonstrating that there existed a scale of human worth even within contemporary pleas for the compassionate treatment of all human beings. It also demonstrates, however, the sheer resilience of noble templates of race right up until the end of the eighteenth century, which were not only intimately entwined with naturalist variety discourse, but simultaneously stood alongside it as independent modes of reasoning rooted in social rank and hereditary identities. Most importantly, the Royal Slave trope demonstrates how easily the frontiers of social rank could, at this time, be blurred with those of racialised identity. Whether they were literary figures like Oroonoko or Adolphus, or mythologised celebrities like Julius Soubise or William Ansah Sesarakoo, the fact that these black Africans could be considered at the top of a Western-style social hierarchy had
profound consequences for how their ‘race’ was conceived. The transformation of the Royal Slave’s physical appearance, whether in the ‘heroic’ identity of Oroonoko or in the ‘varietal’ identity of Adolphus – ultimately reflects the long association of hereditary nobility with physical excellence. The super-human qualities of the Royal Slave fulfil the same expectations and desires as the curiously white-skinned Aree of the South Seas Islands – that is, they express the reality and validity of social hierarchy through the subject’s physical body. The Royal Slave was at once a threat to human variety theory by highlighting the heterogeneity of inferior nations, and a buttress to greater ideas of human worth – re-imagining the African world as a reflection of Western order, where the racialised qualities of a hereditary elite fundamentally reinforced the ‘super-human’ legitimacy of Britain and Ireland’s leading families.
3.3: Conclusions

3.3.1: Race Thinking is Fundamentally Based in Noble Tradition

In the opening chapter of this study, the core construct of noble tradition was delineated through the following six assertions:

1. Some people are naturally excellent.
2. This excellence can be transmitted genealogically.
3. Familial excellence naturally correlates with an elite socio-economic status.
4. Inherited excellence should be re-performed in each generation.
5. There exists a specific corporeal expression of inherited excellence.
6. Integrity of genealogical, socio-economic, performative, and corporeal excellence – called ‘true nobility’ – is essential for the continuance of inherited excellence in future generations (see chapter 1.1.1).

In eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland these same components at once underpinned the ideas of nobility as a historical tradition, nobility as an idealised state of virtue, and nobility as an exclusive circle of elite families who exerted enormous influence over the legislative power of the House of Lords, and who stood at the summit of contemporary social hierarchy. What has been seen over the course of this study, however, is that these same components – by providing a conceptual link between the ideas of excellence, human anatomy, and genealogical identity – fundamentally informed a broad concept of ‘race’ in the early modern world, as well as a hierarchised system of ‘race thinking’ that aligned genealogically-defined groups with the ranks of universal order. This first concluding sub-chapter, then, comes back to review the core construct of nobility in light of this study’s investigations into nobility as a racialised entity, and its influence over the development of race thinking in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland.
Perhaps the most significant link between the nobility construct and the race construct in the eighteenth century was the idea of inherent and inimitable excellence. The noble model of excellence can, as discussed in chapter 1.1.1, be best understood in terms of Ancient Greek arete – that is, it is a notion of excellence directly relative to a given context, reaching the full potential of any particular state of being. Noble excellence, therefore, is not only constructed as a natural and personal virtuosity, but as an essence that is definitively appropriate for noble rank – becoming, in turn, the superlative quality of an aristoi caste, and the basis of aristokratia governments. The arete-excellence that characterises any given aristoi, or ‘best people’, is at once based in the individual and in the nature of that individual’s role in society; it is to excel within humanity by virtue of excelling within a specific (and arbitrary) social status; through the assertion of an arete quality in an aristoi caste, the powerful essentially justify their authority by referencing their own power. The idea of inherent and inimitable excellence, in turn, implicitly stratifies humanity into those who are excellent and those who are not, into the ‘better sort’ and all the rest; it necessarily constructs a lower as well as a higher field of human worth – the excellent can only become excellent through the implicit subjugation of the non-excellent, and the non-excellent can only hope to become excellent by deferring to the arbitrary social authority that defines and produces this excellence.

The racialised dimensions within this idea of inherent human excellence should not be underestimated: firstly, it is an idea that often supersedes even the hereditary components of noble tradition – for, it is a vision of the best members society naturally rising to the top of that society; secondly, this excellence is constantly and consistently expressed through ideas of corporeal superiority, nourishing the notion that human worth is bound up with the physical human body, and that better people are (literally and symbolically) stronger, more beautiful, and more anatomically ‘perfect’ than others; and
thirdly, to recall the assertions of Michel Prum, Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (referenced in chapter 2.1.1), noble excellence is a quintessential act of social alterisation, or the fabrication of an other by way of an arbitrary set of qualities (2012, 7; 278-9). Race itself, claim Balibar and Wallerstein, begins with ‘self-referential’ race thinking – establishing those in control of the discourse as a ‘race’ (here, by virtue of their shared, inherited excellence) and, in the process, implicitly racialising those who do not control the discourse in terms of their ostensible deviation from the dominant racialised identity (278-9).

The second most significant ‘racialised’ component of the noble construct is the idea that inherent and inimitable excellence is manifested through superior anatomy. At its most basic level, the idea of a nobleman’s ‘superior’ anatomy can be seen as a facet of his traditional military virtue: the ideal ‘noble’ physique is almost always a warrior physique, showcasing a martial aesthetic of the human body that bespeaks strength, superiority, and the ultimate glory of the society it represents.170 Furthermore, the idea that ‘true’ nobles manifest this warrior physique even in non-military societies places all the more emphasis on the notions of hereditary distinction and descent from illustrious ancestors. On another level, however, the idea that true nobles bear a certain anatomical form – be it that of a warrior or otherwise – ostensibly provides visual evidence of that noble’s arete-excellence, creating a self-perpetuating dynamic of hegemonic authority: if noble status is linked with a certain physical form, this physical form, in return, serves to bolster the perceived reality of noble status. In other words, the conceptual links between human excellence, physical perfection, and noble rank not only suggest that nobles are anatomically superior, but that, conversely, a certain anatomical form (arbitrarily named superior) bears an affinity with

170 Representations of noble women, of course, usually make for an exception to this trend, but not always: feminised versions of the ‘noble warrior’ physique can, for instance, be found in Boulainvilliers’s Germanic women, Macpherson’s Ancient Celtic women, and certain ‘Amazonian’ descriptions of Aphra Behn’s Imoinda (Essais 336; History 206; Oroonoko 1688, 129).
noble rank. The beautiful, the capable, and the militarily successful manifest a *natural nobility*, independent of their social rank, that may or may not be recognised by the established authority.

In fact, the power of the physical body alone to express nobility – that is, to express a spiritual, social and political superiority that can thereafter be transmitted genealogically – has been one of the most consistent elements of ‘noble race’ as examined in this study. Sallust’s Marius, despite his Plebeian status, offers forth his own hardened, battle-scarred body as evidence of his nobility; his excellence exists through his body, and it is his excellent body that communicates his superlative virtue. The lack of excellence evinced by the degenerate physical form of his Patrician rivals, on the other hand, has the power to cast legitimate doubt on their nobility (see chapter 1.1.1). This very same dynamic can be seen hundreds of years later in the physical form of Sydney Owenson’s Prince of Inismore, whose ‘Herculean limbs’ stand as an essential – even incontrovertible – signifier of his ‘true nobility’, in contrast to the mere quotidian humanity of his post-Cromwellian counterparts (see chapter 3.1.3). In fact, the notion that *nobles tend toward a specific physical type* even underlies the ‘noble’ beauty of William Cavendish’s favourite horses in the *New Method*, and the racialised species stratification of Jonathan Swift’s Houylnhnmns in *Gulliver’s Travels* (see chapter 3.2.1); it can be read in each of the individualised depictions of dukes, earls, and barons in Francis Nichols’s *British Compendium*, and in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s perfunctory assertion in the *De generis* that European elites possess brilliantly white skin (see chapters 1.2.3 and 2.2.2); it is present in Elizabeth Gunning’s depiction of the tall, graceful, and handsome protagonist of *Lord Fitzhenry*, and also in Lady Geraldine’s assumption, in Maria Edgeworth’s *Ennui*, that a real nobleman will be known at first sight, since he is ‘a full head taller’ than his non-noble companion (see chapters 2.3.1 and 3.1.2 respectively). Crucially, of course, this
same ‘noble’ anatomy is invariably a white European anatomy. Both Rodomond and Zoa in The Lady's Drawing Room can be seen to blossom into a physical manifestation of their own true nobility: in Rodmond’s case, the transcendence of an ignoble education sees him assume all the physical ideals of noble beauty; in Zoa’s case, this same process necessarily sees her transform from a ‘tawny’ Indian into a white European. Likewise, in order for Aphra Behn and Thomas Southerne’s Royal Slaves to truly manifest their natural nobility, they must assume white European features – because the ‘excellence’ of idealised white European anatomy and the ‘excellence’ of idealised noble anatomy are, essentially, the same thing.

The inherent, inimitable excellence of nobility, then, was inseparable from an idea of superior anatomy that drew on both traditional warrior physiques and white European beauty ideals. Furthermore, as this study has shown, both these concepts were equally bound up with the idea of genealogical group identity. The notion of eugeneia, as discussed in chapter 1.1.1, asserted that noble families were much more than wealthy dynasties – that their birth was, in fact, an indispensable part of their aristoi identity. The genealogical component of noble tradition ensures that no matter how poor or dispossessed a noble becomes, if he is wellborn he will always be inherently noble; and no matter how much a non-noble emulates noble life-style, noble functions, and noble excellence, if he is lowborn he can never express ‘true’ nobility. That is, it asserts nobility, like race, to be an unchangeable (but improvable) quality of the body and blood, aligned with a certain position in the scale of natural order (see chapter 2.1.3). The ‘active’ component of nobilitas, however, was just as important as eugeneia to ‘eugenic’ noble identity in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland. Nobilitas, as will again be remembered from chapter 1.1.1, describes a noble quality that is part hereditary and part attained. As a long-standing element of noble tradition, it can be seen to play a crucial role in the maintenance
of *eugeneia* ideals: namely, it allows the non-noble to be inducted, as needed, into a noble sphere by charging them with adherence – over successive generations – to the dominant templates of ‘eugenic’ authority. Crucially, it does not contradict the genealogical vision of nobility, but serves to enrich it, to justify it, or even to account for when it is lacking. Sallust’s Marius claimed a nobility of *virtus* in the face of degenerate Patricians, but once he had reached a dominant position in the established authority – here, by attaining a consulship – his *virtus* was necessarily transformed into a hereditary *nobilitas*. His active merit, in other words, was inducted into a genealogical sphere: his descendants would, thereafter, inherit his *nobilitas* – but only if they continued to participate in the active political systems favoured by the established authority, creating a genealogical-political entity of their own (while never threatening the core ‘eugenic’ authority of the Patricians). This very same dynamic between *eugeneia* and *nobilitas* can be observed in the relationships between peerage and gentry in eighteenth-century England (see chapters 1.3.2 and 1.3.3). The gentry display an ‘active nobility’ (being their landed income, their attention to decorum, and their studied emulation of noble tradition – especially in matters of marriage and property transfer) but do not, and most likely never will, possess full ‘eugenic’ nobility (to have been directly born into a noble family). Genteel status can, albeit with difficulty, be *attained*, but must subsequenlty be actively upheld with each coming generation; through this process, it establishes a new ‘eugenic’ unit, nourishing and conceptually reinforcing the authority of the ‘eugenic’ families higher up the chain of precedence, while never threatening their supremacy.

The constant interplay of these notions of *eugeneia* and *nobilitas*, then, is at the very heart of noble race, and, in turn, at the heart of race thinking in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland. It is through this interplay, in fact, that noble race – which expounds an inherent, inimitable excellence, manifests itself through a precise set of ‘othered’
anatomical features, and exists primarily as a genealogical entity – harnesses the ability to racialise other groups: by positively defining itself as a race, nobility negatively identifies racial characteristics in those outside that race – yet, by accommodating the creation of eugenic units, and the potential induction of these units into the dominant race, multiple lesser races are necessarily created, and defined by their genealogical proximity to the paradigmatic ‘master’ race (master, that is, in that – like a master key – it defines the arbitrary limits of ‘eugenic’ race itself). Just as the gentry engage in a brand of nobilitas that implicitly bolsters the eugeneia structure of the nobility, other racialised groups can be understood to have been assigned what is essentially a lesser degree of nobilitas. That is to say, firstly, that a racialised identity must, by definition, accept the existence of ‘race’ itself – and race is always arbitrarily defined by the dominant ‘master’ race; and secondly, that racialised identities thereafter depend on consistent adherence to that identity over successive generations and within genealogically confined limits – race is passed down from one generation to the next, but each generation must ‘perform’ that race in order for it to fully exist. Thus, if the very performance of a race within genealogical confines validates the reality of racialised identity, it necessarily validates those in control of the racialised discourse as a ‘superior’ race.

Within noble tradition, in short, we thus find the three most basic elements of race thinking: firstly, the idea that there are excellent people, that this excellence has a physical expression, and that this state of being is transmitted genealogically; secondly, that this template can be transferred onto the non-excellent – that there are non-excellent people, that non-excellence has a physical expression, and that this state of being too is transmitted genealogically; and thirdly, and most crucially, neither of these genealogical states of being, excellent or non-excellent, can survive without the other. Noble tradition here, quite simply, provides a ready-made formula for racialised identity – a formula that would have
profund significance in the construction of the empirical race concepts during the eighteenth century.

3.3.2 Race Thinking had a Formative Influence on the Development of Human Variety Theory

Noble tradition, then, can be seen to have provided the fundamental framework for race thinking and racialised group distinction in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland by forging a set of conceptual links between inherent excellence, anatomical superiority, and genealogical identity. This second concluding subchapter goes on to consider how nobility-based race thinking, as reviewed in chapter 3.3.1, can be understood in relation to the empirical discourse of human variety at this time—how, indeed, the genealogical mode of human hierarchy based on noble tradition gradually shaped scientific understandings of the human body, and informed an entire scheme of linear stratification based on arbitrary anatomical features.

As explored in chapters 1.3 and 2.1, one of the most important aspects of early-modern ‘race’ was its sheer ambiguity and subsequent capacity for contradiction. Racialised understandings of the exotic other were not, in eighteenth-century Britain, clearly distinct from racialised understandings of religious groups, national groups, or indeed different social ranks, and the genealogical basis of racialised groupings was, for the most part, a case of inheritance rather than heredity. Nations, then, were racialised because they transmitted their traditions, language and culture genealogically; different social orders, likewise, were racialised because they genealogically transmitted the status and identity of their particular order. The ambiguity of racialised identity, furthermore, reflects the inherent relativity of the Great Chain of Being worldview. The Neoplatonic
template of universal order was not only dependent on arbitrary cultural context, but had the power to reframe this context as an inevitable aspect of creation. Thus, just as self-referential race thinking began with those in charge of the discourse defining the limits of race, the Great Chain model allowed those who controlled the discourse to decide who sat atop the scale of precedence, while the rest of society was automatically graded according to its proximity to this paradigm of a dominant elite. In this way, the Chain motif also allowed multiple and contradictory signifiers of superior or inferior social order to be considered in relation to one another. Any quality deemed deviant in relation to the established authority – poverty, foreigness, incivility, heathenism, unfamiliar skin colour, or the use of an alien language, for example – could, through the idea of a Great Chain of Being be considered in relation to any other deviant quality, thus establishing a shared dimension of ‘natural’ subjugation. Laziness, for instance, could thus seamlessly be aligned with stupidity or barbarism (as in Hottentot mythology), while sexual laxity could be ‘rationally’ aligned with non-standard clothing or mode of life (as in Oliver Goldsmith’s descriptions of Asian populations, see chapter 2.2.2). Since any deviant quality indicated a naturally low position in the universal order, these qualities could be variously and arbitrarily combined to characterise the racialised identity of lower echelons of social hierarchy.

Concordantly, the Great Chain of Being worldview not only favoured and promoted the idea that universal hierarchies were fixed in the scheme of creation, but also that they remained constant by way of genealogy: lesser beings, this philosophy assumed, gave rise to lesser beings, and higher beings gave rise to higher beings. In this respect, the very act of hierarchical subjugation in early modern Britain can itself be understood in terms of racialisation, delineating arbitrary qualities in certain groups that are assumed to be passed down from one generation to the next, thereby limiting these groups in terms of
spiritual worth. The Curse of Ham tradition is a case in point: this tradition, explored in chapter 1.3.2, was initially employed to rationalise the social oppression of serfs during the early medieval period, before subsequently serving as a common explanation for the anatomical otherness of black Africans, and was even, as demonstrated in Maurice Shelton’s *True Rise of Nobility*, used to assert the superior ‘Japhetic’ legacy of the British nobility. The constant premise of the Curse of Ham tradition is, of course, genealogy – it identifies its arbitrary groups, be they serfs, black Africans, or nobles, in terms of temporal and linear continuity; they not only become real and coherent groups by existing over successive generations within a genealogical limitation, but are therefore automatically associated with a certain spiritual status.

Race thinking, then, as established by noble tradition, actively functioned in conjunction with the Great Chain of Being worldview. Nobility, however, provided eighteenth-century race thinking with a yet another crucial dimension: the idea of blood purity. The isolation of genealogical groups in terms of linear purity, particularly as demonstrated in this study’s examination of the historical texts of Henri Bernard, Comte de Boulainvilliers, profoundly influenced the concepts of race and human hierarchy, and ultimately forged one of the most fundamental links between ‘noble race’ and eighteenth-century human variety theory. Boulainvilliers’s texts provide a fascinating example of ‘self-referential’ race thinking in action: his Germanic nobles form a ‘race’ because they can be understood in terms of direct linear legacy; through this legacy, accordingly, their inherent and inimitable excellence (a natural talent for just governance and military success) can be linked to their distinct physical appearance (blond, tall, and beautifully proportioned) and their genealogical line (descent from the Frankish conquerors). Boulainvilliers, indeed, exploits the noble tradition of blood purity – which had theretofore served to limit and fortify noble status – in order to racialise an entirely new ‘eugenic’ unit,
and to characterise this unit in terms of ‘natural’ superiority. Blood purity, in other words, permits Boulainvilliers to construct a ‘race’ across borders, languages, cultures, and centuries of history. More than this, it allows him to ‘prove’ that this race of French and English nobles reflect a dominant rank in the Great Chain of Being: their purity of blood incontrovertibly testifies to their descent from historical and providential conquerors.

These three structural supports of noble race – the ‘top-down’ system of human stratification (relating all subordinate groups to a dominant paradigm), the identification of genealogical groups with precise spiritual ranks, and the use of blood ‘purity’ to define the limits of a racialised identity – can all, of course, be seen to inform the development of human variety theory in the eighteenth century. If contemporary critics worried that Carolus Linnaeus had not adequately asserted the Homo sapiens’s superiority over the rest of the Animal Kingdom in his Systema Naturae, they could certainly rest assured that the Homo sapiens europeanus albus was, in every one of his given attributes, characterised as innately and inimitably superior to his fellow human varieties – with the lesser varieties of the Homo sapiens hierarchically organised in terms of their graded proximity to this dominant template of humanity. As explored in chapter 2.2.3, Buffon’s and Goldsmith’s development of a ‘race’ construct that can only exist in a state of temporal constancy (that is, it exists only insofar as it can generate more of its own kind), as well as their refinement of a climate theory discourse that emphasised the effect of environmental influences within genealogical groups, lent the older, well-established notions of genealogical identity an entirely new significance in the experimental field of human science. Indeed, when the idea of true nobility is imposed upon the discourse of human variety, as in Johann Reinhold Forster’s Observations Made on a Voyage Round the World, the two ideas are often difficult to distinguish: Forster’s Arees manifest a white European physical type as a direct consequence of their nobility, intimating that white Europeans, as a group, and
owing to the very same combination of *eugeneia* and *nobilitas*, are a kind of nobility among mankind. Similarly, Johnson’s *Voyage to the Western Isles of Scotland* contrasts a dominant human variety of Englishmen/Lowlanders against an inferior ethnic group of Highlanders, and yet regularly accepts the notion, without a great deal of reflection, that the Highland nobility will manifest a superior (English) anatomy as a matter of course. Noble templates of blood purity, indeed, as discussed in chapter 2.3.1, even had the power to reshape the idea of nation – with the various nobilities of Ireland representing different versions of true Irishness by reason of their uncorrupted lineage.

Most of all, human variety theory reflects noble tradition in its underlying desires. In the modern Western world, the concept of ‘human race’ as a biological or scientific reality has been all but entirely discredited (see chapter 2.1.1) – a development which highlights more than ever one of the central questions in the history of race: what kind of society would put so much effort into discovering the precise borders of racialised human groups where, by all available evidence, they did not exist? By understanding the hegemonic functions of noble race, its capacity to racialise other groups in order to fortify its own reality, and its relationship with a linear Chain of Being worldview, we can come one step closer to finding a response to this question. Ultimately, human variety theory was just one, ‘scientific’ manifestation of the vast hierarchical systems that underpinned the concept of humanity itself in the eighteenth century. Noble tradition informed human variety theory in Britain and Ireland precisely because it informed the dominant template of corporeal (and indeed socio-economic) humanity, and, by consequence, the entire hierarchy that was built around this template, decending, in a plenitudinous, gradational, and continuous manner, through various level of deviance.
3.3.3 Noble tradition was Crucial to the Development of Modern Race

This last concluding subchapter, then, finally brings us to the notion of ‘race as one of the major groupings of mankind’ that emerged in the final years of the eighteenth century (see chapter 2.1.1). This study ultimately argues that, when investigating the history of ‘human race’, it is crucial to appreciate that the older conception of race that prevailed in Britain and Ireland throughout the eighteenth century did not simply concern the identification of human groups that ostensibly looked and acted a certain way, that manifested an exotic religion or skin colour, or that existed as a colonial ‘other’. It was, in fact, a mode of understanding humanity itself, which had existed long before the emergence of empirical human types, and, in many ways, continued to exist alongside the modern template of ‘biological’ human races. It was a mode of understanding humanity, furthermore, that underpinned every relationship between every social and spiritual rank in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland, because it was the basis of rank itself: it was an idea of race, indeed, that Thomas Paine rallied against in his Rights of Man, and that Edmund Burke clung to so dearly as the foundation for everything he understood about a functioning society; it was an idea of race that allowed Lord Monboddo to assert the idea of nobility, super-human anatomy, and natural rulership as a foil to the quasi-humanity of anthropoid apes; it was an idea of race, indeed, that allowed Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko and Anna Maria MacKenzie’s Prince Adolphus to be white despite the fact that they were black, because it engaged with the entire system of social signifiers around them in order to vindicate a certain understanding of their position in the natural order of things.

When searching for the origins of modern race as a concept, that is, we need look no further than to the arbitrary structures of our own society. Nobility, it might be said, is remarkably similar to race theory because they both recognised, on some level, what we
now understand as the mechanics of genetics and biological heredity; yet, far more important than this, is the fact that both nobility and race thinking, on recognising these vague and often inconsistent patterns in the general scheme of human generation, automatically interpreted them in terms of superiority and inferiority. As mentioned in chapter 3.1.2, many eighteenth-century commentators found it easy to racialise and even ‘biologise’ the nobility, because ‘race thinking’ itself follows the same hierarchical structures as noble tradition. To this, it might be added that it was easy to racialise the nobility because both nobility and race thinking expressed a similar desire to control the limits of humanity: by defining themselves according to a precise set of qualities, and insisting that these qualities exist within certain genealogical limits, they both functioned as touchstones for an entire system of human interaction that inherently privileged one dominant group above all others. Nobility, as asserted at the close of this study’s second section, is race – both in the older and the newer senses of the word – because, by its very nature, it expresses a hierarchy of human value which is inseparable from graded excellence, graded anatomy, and graded genealogy, and because, during the eighteenth century, this structure ultimately became the prime methodology for ranking human types in a hierarchy of worth which was thereafter proclaimed part of the natural order of things. The eighteenth-century British and Irish nobility existed as a race in the same way as human varieties did because they had always existed as a race. At the close of the eighteenth century, and at the dawn of a new era wherein global humanity would be subjected to a formidable new order of biological evaluation, nobility stood as one of Britain and Ireland’s most fascinating expressions of a ‘better sort’ of human being – an ancient standard of hegemonic elitism that had insidiously shaped the very future of Western humanity. While the great towering wigs, the expansive silk dresses, and the raised leather pattens would all be brushed away at the end of this most ‘aristocratic’ of
centuries, the ubiquitous principles of ‘natural’ nobility were yet rushing forth into modernity, permeating the very foundations of human value at every level, from high to low, and from white to black.
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« The Better Sort » : Race et noblesse dans la pensée et la littérature des Îles britanniques au XVIIIᵉ siècle

RESUME
Durant des siècles, la noblesse britannique a défendu une hiérarchie fondée sur la lignée et la généalogie, qui s’inscrivait dans la tradition occidentale de l'ordre universel. En 1735, cependant, l'Homo sapiens de Linné marque le début d'un nouveau discours sur les hiérarchies humaines, désormais fondées sur la « variété » physique. Cette étude veut cerner l'influence de la tradition noble sur les conceptions de la race, en Grande-Bretagne et en Irlande, au cours du long XVIIIᵉ siècle. Nous examinons un ensemble de textes de nature diverse, dans l'espoir de mettre en lumière la continuité des hiérarchies généalogiques à travers plusieurs disciplines et sur plusieurs centaines d'années. La première partie retrace l'histoire du privilège héréditaire comme « identité généalogique » à partir d'œuvres comme A British Compendium, or, Rudiments of Honour (1725-7) de Francis Nichols et l'Essay on Man (1734) d'Alexander Pope. La seconde partie réexamine ces mêmes traditions sous l'angle de la théorie de la race au XVIIIᵉ siècle. Elle s'intéresse aux idées de la race et du breeding dans le roman anonyme, The Lady's Drawing Room (1744), et à la rhétorique de la variété humaine dans plusieurs ouvrages d’histoire naturelle, dont A History of the Earth and Animated Nature (1774) d’Oliver Goldsmith. La troisième partie étudie l'influence des Lumières et de la Révolution française sur l'idée de « race noble » telle qu'elle apparaît dans les Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) d'Edmund Burke, ainsi que le rôle de la « noblesse naturelle » dans des œuvres abolitionnistes, notamment Slavery, or, the Times (1792) d’Anna Maria Mackenzie. Ainsi, cette étude entend démontrer que la tradition de la « race » noble a été, et demeure, une composante fondamentale dans la construction d'un concept de « race » humaine, qui fait de la pureté du sang, de la supériorité des mœurs et de l’anatomie des principes définitoires de la hiérarchie humaine.

Mots-clés : noblesse, race, généalogie, hiérarchie, Grande-Bretagne, Irlande, XVIIIᵉ siècle

‘The Better Sort’: Ideas of Race and of Nobility in Eighteenth-Century Great Britain and Ireland

ABSTRACT
For centuries, British nobility promoted an elite hierarchy based on genealogical precedence within the greater Western tradition of universal order. In 1735, however, Carolus Linnaeus’s Homo sapiens signalled the beginning of an entirely new discourse of human hierarchy based on physical ‘variety’. This study aims to identify how noble tradition influenced conceptions of race in Great Britain and Ireland during the long eighteenth century. Tracing the persistence of a ‘pureblood’ model of human superiority in the West, it traverses a vast range of historical material in order to highlight the continuity of genealogical hierarchies across multiple disciplines and over hundreds of years. The first section reviews the history of hereditary privilege as a backdrop to noble culture in eighteenth-century Britain: examining works such as Francis Nichols’s British Compendium, or, Rudiments of Honour (1727-7) and Alexander Pope’s Essay on Man (1734), it considers how nobility as a genealogical identity was accommodated in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ understanding of human hierarchy. The second section considers these same traditions in terms of the eighteenth-century ‘race’ construct: it considers the notion of ‘breeding’ in works such as the anonymous Lady’s Drawing Room (1744) and the rhetoric of human variety in naturalist texts such as Oliver Goldsmith’s History of the Earth and Animated Nature (1774). The third and last section considers the influences of Enlightenment and the French Revolution on ideas of noble race in Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), and the role of ‘natural’ nobility in abolitionist texts such as Anna Maria Mackenzie’s Slavery; or, the Times (1792). In short, this study demonstrates that the tradition of noble ‘race’ was, and is, a fundamental component of the human ‘race’ construct, asserting blood purity, anatomical superiority, and inimitable excellence as defining principles of human hierarchy.

Keywords: nobility, race, genealogy, hierarchy, Great Britain and Ireland, eighteenth century

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