

## PRIMITIVISM

**Primitivism** is a name for a cluster of ideas arising from meditations on the course of human history and the value of human institutions and accomplishments. It is found in two forms, chronological and cultural, each of which may exist as “soft” or “hard” primitivism.

### 1. FORMS OF PRIMITIVISM

*Chronological primitivism* maintains that the earliest stage of human history was the best, that the earliest period of national, religious, artistic, or in fact any strand of history was better than the periods that have followed, that childhood is better than maturity. In short, it argues that to discover the best stage of any historical series one must return to its origin. Primitive man, for instance, was better than civilized man, primitive Christianity was better than later developments of Christianity, the arts of savages and children are better than those of educated men and adults.

*Cultural primitivism* maintains that whatever additions have been made to what is called the “natural” condition of mankind have been deleterious. Unfortunately the meanings of the natural are so multiple that cultural primitivists vary widely in what they consider to be the state of nature. They are often chronological primitivists as well, but this is not inevitable. One may believe that a complete absence of civilized institutions is a blessing and yet think that primitive man was as much beset by them as modern man. Or one may think that man as he first appeared on earth was gifted with all that man requires to live well and yet not to believe that such requirements are sufficient for modern man. Logically one may be both a chronological and a cultural primitivist, a chronological but not a cultural primitivist, a cultural but not a chronological primitivist, or neither one nor the other.

*Hard primitivism* is the doctrine that man is happiest when he is not burdened with arts and sciences, lives with the fewest possible needs, is satisfied with the simplest of lives. A cave suffices for a house, acorns for food, the skins of wild beasts for clothing, a heap of dried leaves for a bed. The hard primitivist is likely to hold up the animals as exemplars; for they ask, he will say, for no more than Mother Nature has given them at birth. When the hard primitivist is also a chronological primitivist, he will maintain that at the earliest period of human history man lived as the animals do, without luxuries. But he is not forced to be a chronological primitivist; he may simply believe that men are overburdened with unnecessary desires and that they should “return to Nature” or to the “simple life.”

*Soft primitivism* maintains that the best life is the life without toil, the sort of life that was sometimes depicted as characteristic of the islands of the South Seas where the climate is gentle, the earth spontaneously productive, the animals friendly, the sea full of fish easily caught. Soft **primitivism** often accompanies chronological **primitivism**, as it did in the legend of the Golden Age or in one version of life before the Fall.

## II. CULTURAL **PRIMITIVISM**

Cultural **primitivism** came to the fore in the Greek Cynics who apparently had no interest in appraising contemporary life. In spite of the fundamental differences in the Greek and Latin ethical schools, they all agreed that the end of life was personal self-sufficiency (*autarky*), freedom from all claims made by the external world upon the soul of the individual. The Platonist found this in the life of reason, freedom from the demands of the senses; the Aristotelian found it in the Golden Mean, freedom from extremes; the Epicurean found it in freedom from pain and indeed from all but the simplest pleasures; the Stoic found it in apathy, freedom from any emotional attachments. The emphasis on freedom from something or other is the essential point; and one might reasonably conclude that the ancient philosophers had become weary of society, of family, of friends.

*I. Cynicism.* The most extreme form of *autarky* was sought and found by Diogenes of Sinope, whose teacher, if tradition is correct, was Antisthenes (ca. 444-365 B.C.), a member of the Socratic circle. Though we have no writings of Diogenes and only scattered fragments of dubious authenticity from his master, it is fairly well established that their principal axiom was that life according to nature was the best of life. "Nature," however, is one of the most ambiguous words in either Greek, Latin, or English. It may refer to that which distinguishes one class of things from all others, or to the geological landscape. It may name that which is congenial as contrasted with the unnatural and the supernatural as well. It is both descriptive and normative. For the very reason of its invincible ambiguity it has taken on a strong emotional color, and arguments about the value of human behavior are based on whether it is natural or unnatural, natural or merely customary, instinctive or deliberate. One is always hard put to it to know precisely what a man means when he calls an act "unnatural" or "natural."

To the early Cynic one of the basic meanings of the natural was that which distinguishes it from the customary, that is, *physis vs. nomos*. (Later *nomos* in the sense of "law" came to be divided into the Law of Nature and the Law of the State.) And if we read the tradition correctly, we should have to conclude that for Diogenes the natural was that which he could not discard and still live. Thus we could discard clothing and throw a rag about us to keep off the cold; we could discard a house and creep into a wine jar; we could discard all family ties, wives and children, and procreate like the animals; we could even discard cooked meat and eat food raw. Those things that could be discarded without committing suicide are all the contributions of civilization, and it might be assumed that mankind as it came from the hands of the Creator was without them. As far as Diogenes was concerned, he had only to look at the beasts to see what was natural and what unnatural; and, looking at them, he threw away his clothes and his cup, wrapped a length of cloth round his body, and lapped up water like a dog. To carry out this program to its logical consequences was to renounce all social life whatsoever, to give up schooling, the arts and sciences, all crafts except the simplest (for the birds built nests and the spiders spun webs), and to roam about in solitude.

The revolt of the Cynic was above all a revolt against the intellect. The use of reason might seem to be natural to man in that most of the ancients believed rationality to be man's *differentia*, the one thing that distinguished him from the animals. But it was

perhaps easier to follow one's instincts and appetites than to reason to what ends one wished to attain. So the Cynic deprecated any attempt to supersede instinct by learning. If one did not follow one's instincts and appetites, one could substitute something else which would do just as well: intuition, direct communication with revelation, momentary desires. And there are grounds for believing that this is precisely what Diogenes did. Hence stories began to circulate about the Cynics that seemed obscene to their contemporaries: doing "the works of Demeter and Aphrodite" in public. If the charge was founded, the Cynic *was* obscene. And if his program eventuated in such practices, it followed that the arts and sciences were an evil and should be discarded. When he assumed that primeval man was more natural than civilized man, he turned to chronological **primitivism** and attributed to our primordial ancestors only those forms of behavior which were not based on learning, or, as he would have said, on art. The natural desires are then defined as those which can be gratified by all men regardless of their state of civilization: the universal, the biologically irrepressible, the primary. Hence shame and modesty must be repressed, as Aratus had said the Iron Race had repressed them, for they obstruct the satisfaction of our fundamental drives. Cynicism was the most extreme form of cultural **primitivism**.

Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics, having accepted reason as essential to humanity, could not indulge in this kind of moral philosophy. Reason is above all a critical faculty, whether it is employed in logic, science, or ethics. In Aristotle it chastens our instinctive appetites by holding them to the mean; in Plato it teaches us to reject the temporary for eternal goods; in the Stoics it clarifies our duties and corrects passionate and willful behavior. The Epicurean with his emphasis on pleasure and his dislike of "culture" nevertheless saw, by using his reason, that most pleasures are the prelude to pain and that the avoidance of pain is the sanest form of hedonism. Antirationalism was an inherent part of cultural **primitivism** as it appeared in pagan thought.

Occasionally Socrates was held up as an exemplar by the Cynics. He was represented as being contented with simple pleasures, being neither an ascetic nor a voluptuary. He could withstand cold and hunger and yet did not disdain the comforts of life. He was about as self-sufficient as a man could be and yet he enjoyed the company of friends and philosophic discussion. He was rational and yet listened to the controlling voice of his *daimon* ("guiding spirit"). The true Cynic, however, could not follow Socrates, for he could not admit that any desire which was "natural" should be controlled. He could not disapprove of incest, as Dio Chrysostom puts it in his *Discourses* (X, 29-30), for "cocks do not see anything wrong in such unions, no do dogs or asses, nor yet the Persians." Diogenes even approved of cannibalism, since some nations indulge in it.

Perhaps the best account of the Cynic life is that given by Lucian in his *Cynicus*, though it dates from a much later period (second century A.D.). Here the Cynic is pictured as unshorn, shirtless, barefoot, roaming from place to place, sleeping alone on the hard ground, dirty and in rags. He is proud of his economy, for he needs no money. He has everything he requires. He is chided for rejecting the good things that Nature has given him—the wool of sheep, wine, oil, and honey—but replies that like a temperate man he uses those goods that he needs and does not gorge himself with delicacies that are superfluous. Lucian launches into a criticism of luxury that was to be repeated over and over again in the course of history. "Embroidered clothes are no warmer than others, houses with gilded roofs keep out the rain no better; a drink out of a silver cup—or a gold

one for that matter—is no more refreshing, and sleep is no sweeter on an ivory bed—the reverse in fact is true.” The enjoyment of these supposed delights simply involves one in endless trouble, whereas the simplicity of the Cynic's life is free from worry and anxiety.

The fusion of the simple life with life in the Golden Age was made by the essayist, Maximus of Tyre (second century A.D.), in his question, “Whether the Cynic life is to be preferred.” Maximus was a paradoxist and it is doubtful that his conclusions were to be taken seriously. But whether this is so or not, some people did take them seriously. When man was created, by Prometheus, he was “in mind approaching very near to the gods, in body slender, erect and symmetrical, mild of aspect, apt for handicraft, firm of step.” He had at his disposal an environment with abundant food such as Earth “is accustomed to bear when undisturbed by husbandsmen....” Strife was unknown, peace reigned, health was in every body, all was perfection itself. But then in another age men began to divide up the earth, built walls and fortifications, made soft clothes for their bodies, hung gold about their necks and on their fingers, built houses, and invented locks and keys. They molested the earth with mining, built ships for war and foreign trade, caught birds out of the air, slaughtered the animals, and filled their bellies with blood, and, seeking wealth and pleasure, they fell into poverty and misery. Maximus gives us here a picture of man's unhappiness which might apply to any century, whether pagan or Christian.

The remedy for this condition is obviously the simple life. Compare the men who live naked, without a house, without arts, who have all the earth for their city and their household, with the men who have all the clothes, the kind of house, the arts and contrivances of civilization. Who is the happier? Obviously the former. For he is free, whereas the latter is as a man in a dark prison, weighted down with irons. He will relieve his misery by singing, guzzling food, and sexual indulgence. Yet he is always afraid of the consequences and is never really free. His antithesis is the Cynic, the man of the Golden Age, who “is living in the clear light of day, whose hands and feet are free, who can turn his neck in any direction, can lift his eyes to the rising sun, look at the stars....” In short, he is Diogenes. There follows a eulogy of the early Cynic describing him as the one free man.

If then Cynicism is the natural program of life, it must be the program followed by all who are not corrupted by civilization. Hence it is the universal philosophy, much as the “religion of nature” was believed to be the universal religion in the eighteenth century. Its universality sufficed to recommend it and in a time when cosmopolitanism was being preached, not only by the Stoics but by the Christians as well, the search for a universal philosophy was of paramount interest. It was not surprising that the monks should have been identified later on with the followers of Diogenes and that they should have adopted as their uniform the Cynic cloak, the *tribon*, a cloth wrapped loosely about the body.

2. *Epicureanism*. But before entering into the Christian version of cultural **primitivism**, we must say a few words about Epicureanism, Stoicism, and the simple life. Though this doctrine sometimes has been interpreted as urging involvement in all sorts of pleasures and the very name of its founder has become a synonym for the ultrahedonist, the original sources of the doctrine, as far as we have them, tone down the note of pleasure seeking. Epicurus himself urged men to simplify their desires and to search for the attainment of

only those which are necessary for the free life. He did not refuse to partake of the pleasures that were offered to him so long as he had to make no effort to get them. But as a free agent, seeking *autarky*, he would be content with very simple pleasures. "Bread and water," he says in his *Third Letter* (Diogenes Laërtius, Book X, 130-31), "yield the very acme of pleasure to a man who is really hungry and thirsty." And the same frugality of corporal delights was to be paralleled in the delights of the spirit. But there was certainly no anti-intellectualism and the Epicurean seldom went to the extremes of the Cynic in shocking his neighbors.

The Epicurean who is best known is Lucretius (first century B.C.). And though he is in some ways an anti-primitivist, assenting to man's technological progress through the discovery of fire, yet he had a streak of hard **primitivism** in him which comes out when he is relating the life of primitive man. Lucretius clearly admires the physical strength of the first man "created out of hard earth," who was able to stand the cold or heat and was not assailed by illness. He lived like an animal, roving about, and had neither agriculture nor cooking, but fed on acorns and berries, which were then more plentiful than they are now. He drank water from the streams, had no fire, no system of laws, no settled customs. "Whatever booty or chance gave to each," he says (Book V, 958ff.), "that each bore off at his own pleasure, taught to be strong and live for himself alone. And in the woods Venus united the bodies of lovers; for each woman was won either by mutual desire, or by the violence of a man and his vehement lust or at a price of acorns." These men chased the wild beasts with stones and heavy clubs, lying on the naked ground when fatigued and sleeping until dawn awoke them. But their Spartan regimen was no preventive of lamentation; for they often met death through encounters with wild beasts which caught and mangled them, and they died "in wild convulsions." But at the same time they were not bothered with foreign trade and navigation, which apparently most primitivistic authors disdained, and rather than seek food in foreign lands they let themselves die of famine. "In those days men often took poison in ignorance; now, better instructed, they give it to others."

In such a passage as this Lucretius admires the vigor of our primordial ancestors and their ability to do without some of the superfluities of life which his contemporaries thought of as necessities. But he is no chronological primitivist. For he goes on to relate the story of man's progress from savagery to civilization, beginning with the discovery of fire. This part of the story properly belongs to the history of the idea of progress and we shall leave Lucretius here. But we should point out that he regrets man's lapse from primitive simplicity. Our greatest misfortune seems to have been the discovery of gold, "for the majority follow the party of the richer" (V, 1113-15). The idea of wealth stirs men to seek position and power and they forget that it is better to live as a subject and in peace than as the governors of others. Men, moreover, having discovered metals, had the means to make weapons, and war began; Lucretius dilates upon our departure from primitive pacifism. Yet he also praises learning and the arts.

But best of all was the philosophy of Epicurus, which freed men from their supernatural terrors, "set bounds to both desire and fear," and showed us the chief good which we all seek. It is clear that Lucretius is ambivalent about primitive conditions, admiring physical strength and the ability to do without luxury, but also regretting the absence of the arts that enlighten men. He definitely rejects chronological **primitivism**, for the first stage of history was far from the best. He wavers also about the value of

cultural **primitivism**, for the best period was the second stage of history when men lived a simple pastoral and agricultural life. Men then for the most part lived at peace with one another and only later did ever more horrible wars begin. His attitude is very similar to that of Rousseau in the Second Discourse. Both men are on the whole cultural but not chronological primitivists.

Though Lucretius' contemporary Cicero favored anti**primitivism** to **primitivism**, there were certain primitivistic strains which appear in his writings. He too uses "nature" as a catchword, without any definite meaning, goes back to antiquity for authoritative knowledge, looks for the natural in the child. But he also believes in the value of racial experience, holds up the light of nature as a guide which has been diverted from the true path by prejudices, and often has recourse to the consensus gentium ("general agreement") as a criterion of truth. The Law of Nature has been corrupted by man, who has invented statutes which are as poisons to the body politic (*De legibus* II, v, 13). None of this is systematic and it would be misleading to try to organize such ideas into a system.

3. *Stoicism*. The early Stoics—Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus—are said to have agreed with the Cynics about some of their tenets. For instance, Zeno and Chrysippus are said to have believed in the community of wives and the permissibility of incest. Zeno even is reported to have approved of cannibalism "in certain circumstances," and to have argued that money is needed neither for travel nor for exchange and that the reputation and the esteem of others are not goods. These resemble Cynic doctrines and all seem to issue from the initial axiom, "follow nature."

Along with such ideas went a positive adoration of the cosmic scene, as expressed in the *Hymn to Zeus* of Cleanthes. This religious attitude towards the cosmic order led to a contempt for man, to whom all evils were attributed. Yet since man had been created by Nature and therefore was created good, evil must be due to a Fall. But how explain the fall of a perfect man? This problem was solved by the Stoic invention of cycles, according to which doctrine things went from good to bad indefinitely, with a cosmic conflagration putting an end to the world's Great Year. Since the rise of evil is inherent in natural law, it was one of many reasons for remaining in a state of apathy and taking things as they come. But unfortunately for the consistency of the system, the Stoic was more apathetic about evil than he was about good. And among the goods of life was the use of reason. The Stoic was not indifferent to philosophy nor to the pleasant aspects of civilization. His apathy was internal. He accepted or rejected goods as they occurred. Stoicism in fact was a doctrine with many shades of meaning, some members of the school being closer to Cynicism than others, and some, like Seneca, now being more, now less "cynical."

Seneca emphasizes the physical superiority of primitive man and the advantages of the absence of the arts and of private property. But at the same time, the primitives were obviously not Stoics and their resemblances to Stoics in their way of life were instinctive rather than rational. Seneca was a strong believer in the value of knowledge: it is better to know why a certain course is right and then to pursue it than it is to pursue it without knowing why. The innocence of the savage, like that of the child, is good but not so good as the conscious virtue of the Sage. Most of this can be found in Seneca's ninetieth Moral Epistle, addressed to Lucilius, which begins with the opinion that though life is a gift of the gods, the good life is a gift of philosophy. The first men followed nature, had the strongest man as their chief; but his strength lay in his mind as well as in

his body. Therefore in the Golden Age the wisest man was the leader. Seneca's description of such a leader would correspond to what was later said about benevolent despots: they were all-powerful but used their power for the benefit of the tribe. Yet, as in so many political philosophies, one had to admit that degeneration could set in and the benevolent despot become a tyrant; the rule of law had to take the place of the rule of a king.

So far Seneca says that he is following Posidonius. But since Posidonius says that philosophy gave men all the arts, of which Seneca has a low opinion, he is abandoned as a guide at this point. Seneca cannot believe that architecture and the use of iron, from both of which only evil has resulted, could have come from philosophy. Here his cultural **primitivism** shows itself strongly. On the contrary, Seneca believes that it was man's cunning (*sagacitas*) that invented these things. The wise or philosophic man can do without houses and rare foods. He is content with little, for most of the things we prize are encumbrances. Seneca launches into a typical diatribe against luxury in the vein of the early Cynics, a diatribe which is the more amusing in that its author was enjoying all the luxuries of the imperial court while writing this. "Luxury has abandoned nature; day by day she grows greater, age after age she has been gathering strength and making intellect the minister of vice."

Almost everything which civilized men value is subjected to the philosopher's scorn. The only way to reconcile the acceptance of all these evils rationally is to see that they follow from the cosmic law, the steady degeneration of mankind. It was probably from Seneca that Rousseau found his source for his First Discourse, if one was needed. For Rousseau too took as his theme the depreciation of all the arts and sciences (see also Seneca's eighty-eighth *Moral Epistle*). Though there are less woeful passages in Seneca, in the end his teaching leads to despair. In each cycle the earth is destined to senescence and decay, and all that a man may accomplish will be in vain if he hopes that his accomplishments will be lasting. As he puts it in *Natural Questions* (III, xxx, 7-8), once the cycle is ended, men will be created anew, "born under happier auspices, knowing naught of evil." But their innocence will endure only so long as they are new. Wickedness creeps in quickly.

4. *Christianity and Cynicism.* The cultural primitivism of the Christians appears in the influence of Cynicism upon the ideas which they held concerning the best life. Unlike the Pagans, however, they had a sacred text which told them at least the rudiments of a moral philosophy. Their problem was mainly a rationalization of the doctrine and the drawing of inferences from its basic principles. For just as the Pagan believed in a fundamental distinction between nature and custom, so the Christian believed a conflict to exist between the laws of God and those of man. There was a further contrast found in Christianity, one arising from the Platonistic inference that the creation was inferior to the Creator. Nature, in every sense except that which equated it with God, was part of creation and, though inferior to God, yet it showed traces of its Maker's hand. But there were other traces of the Greek use of the term "nature" in Christianity. Saint Paul, for instance, when he tells the Corinthians that women should cover their heads, bases his lesson not on Scripture but on the unnaturalness of a woman's hair being her covering. The "teachings of Nature" also turn up in the Epistle to the Romans, where the Gentiles are described as doing by nature the things that are commanded by the Law.

This became customary in the patristic period. When one comes to a man like Tertullian, who was born a pagan, it is not surprising to find him resorting to an appeal to nature when he can find no scriptural support for his teachings. He uses the argument when he is preaching against the wearing of wreaths as decorations for the head; such usage is unnatural. But he equates the Law of Nature with the Law of God, the Creator of nature. In general one can say that Tertullian turns to nature about as often as he turns to Scripture. So Lactantius, attacking philosophy, uses a type of epistemological **primitivism**, arguing that philosophy is too recently founded a practice to be followed. True wisdom, he maintains, must be innate, and what is acquired must thus be rejected in favor of the innate. In fact, if philosophy were true wisdom, then before its appearance on earth men would have lived in nature. But this is absurd, for by definition man is a rational animal. The Carpocratians, an heretical sect, appealed to nature in support of equalitarianism. This heresy, which seems to have recurred in the thirteenth century, and appears in the Roman de la Rose, supported the marital status of nature, for the community of goods demands the community of wives. The Marcionites, on the other hand, saw Nature as an evil deity and did not contrast nature and custom, but Nature and God. Hence that which was natural and good to the Carpocratians was on that very account evil to the Marcionites.

Out of this confusion Saint Ambrose draws a conclusion which had definite effects. He puts this cultural **primitivism** to special use in arguing that the Law of Nature decreed that all things should be owned in common; but wives were not among the things owned. We have already seen that it was common among the Pagans to oppose private property; indeed many of them maintained that its initiation in early times was the source of most of our ills. Now there was no basis in the Old Testament for the belief that private property is unnatural or that God had ordained the earth to be owned by all in common. But certain texts of the New Testament, such as Matthew 19 and its parallels, condemned riches, though even these texts did nothing more than advocate an extreme form of charity. But by seeing Adam, as Saint Augustine also was to do, as the entire human race and God's gifts to Adam as of the earth and the fruits thereof as a gift to all mankind, Ambrose was able to preach primitive communism as a Christian doctrine. Mankind thus becomes a corporate person bound together by the Law of Nature. It is for that reason that charity has the position that Saint Paul gave it. But, says Ambrose, there is no distinction between the Law of Nature and the Law of God. Both appear in the operation of instinct, though sometimes we fail to follow instinct. If we had continued to follow it as the first men did, we should have had no need for statute. He is so convinced of this that he is almost unique in early writers in finding in children a model for the kind of behavior of which he approves. The child, who is innocent, follows the Law of Nature (*lex naturae*); he is a living example of what Adam was like before the Fall. He is, in Cicero's language, a mirror of nature (*speculum naturae*). And like Adam he is neither avaricious, guileful, cruel, ambitious, or insolent. He is the opposite of such things because he follows nature, not because he has received any instruction. Saint Ambrose has his own interpretation of the word "knowledge." Knowledge for him is cunning (*astutia*). The commandment not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge was the commandment not to be cunning, thus avoiding all the vices attendant upon its use. The good Christian then is a man in the state of nature, childlike and unreasoning. Thus the same type of

argument which in Cynicism produced the ragged and wanton Diogenes, produced the saint in Christianity.

The cultural **primitivism** of the Cynic also comes out in the Christian doctrine of the simple life. The Cynic had rejected almost everything which civilization had given mankind. But this contempt for the worldly things of life was also shared by some of the Christians. Justin Martyr, for instance, continued to wear the philosopher's cloak, the *tribon*, after his conversion, and it was easy for a third- or fourth-century man to confuse the monks with the Cynics; both wore soiled garments and carried wallet and staff. Even Saint Basil confuses Cynics and saints from time to time, as when he compares the ethical ideals of the Pagans and the Christians. The teachings are highly similar but their motivation is quite different.

Moreover some of the early Fathers did not hesitate to use pagan as well as biblical sources in support of their ideas. One of the best examples is Constantine's using Vergil as a prophet, in the *Fourth Eclogue*, of the birth of Christ. Another is the legend that Saint Paul and Seneca had been friends, a legend that produced their correspondence. In fact the use of pagan sources grew to such a point that Saint Jerome protested vigorously against it. But that did not prevent him from listing Seneca among the saints. The similarity between the two sets of doctrine was so great that some writers explained it away as plagiarism on the part of the pagans. So Philo Judaeus (first century A.D.) had spoken of Plato as "Moses speaking Greek."

It must be granted that the Christian who followed the way of poverty and chastity, who was free internally while a slave externally, was indeed hard to distinguish from a Cynic or a Stoic. And when monasticism was instituted, the resemblance was all the greater. The hermit for that matter was not unlike Diogenes in his wine jar; the monk in his monastery reminded one, as the Essenes had, of the Golden Race, sharing all things in common, having few if any wants, and living a life of freedom from external goods. But the resemblance was superficial. For the Christian lived not in dependence on himself alone, but in full dependence on God. The pagan ascetic was not an ascetic because he was doing penance, but because he wanted to be free from all social ties. In reality the Cynic or Stoic reduced his wants as a gesture of self-assertion, the Christian as self-denial. One of the clearest examples of the Christian motivation, and practice as well, is in the *Pseudo-Clementina (Homilies XII, vi)*, where Peter says, "I eat only bread and olives and rarely vegetables—and my wrap and cloak (*tribon*) are this very thing which is thrown about me. Nor have I any other nor need I others. For in these I have more than enough, for my mind, looking upon all the eternal goods over yonder, sees none of the things here below." With the exception of the last sentence, this might have been said by any Cynic, by Epictetus, or even by Epicurus.

This difference in motivation sharply distinguishes Christian cultural **primitivism** from pagan. The pagan would be free not only of wants for material things, but, as we have said above, from the claims of family and friends. The Christian would be free of the former but hardly of the latter, since brotherly love or *caritas* was one of the virtues which Saint Paul had most earnestly commended. In Saint Basil's *Longer Rules* it is made clear that a communal life was to be instituted for the monks, but within the community living was on a par with what one had learned from pagan cultural primitivists. Dress should be as simple as possible and a single cloth ought to suffice for protection against

the weather; the rule of poverty should be strictly enforced and it was pointed out that there is virtue in living a hard life. Basil actually refers to Hesiod as a teacher of this rule and offers the Cynic hero, Hercules, as an exemplar. But he was schooled in the classics and did not hesitate to use even the language of the Cynics when it suited his purposes. Nor does he refrain from the Cynic argument that desiring only the bare necessities is in accordance with nature. But he, as a saint, exceeds their limitations, for the Cynic permitted the gratification of bodily needs, including the sexual, whereas he suppresses all pleasures and is suspicious even of good health.

The hard **primitivism** of the monks, regardless of its motivation, so closely resembled that of the Cynics that it was easy to confuse the two. But after the Dark Ages the Cynic was forgotten and the ascetic monks stood in his place as models of the virtuous life. In the twelfth century we find a man like Alain of Lille writing a *Summa of the Art of Preaching* in which (Ch. 25) he refers to nature without any mention of those biblical passages which one might expect him to quote. He urges self-sufficiency (*autarky*) and indicates that it can be attained by checking concupiscence, rejecting pleasures, being moderate in eating and drinking, and limiting one's wants to those that Nature demands, that is, to sustaining life. The basis of this passage is Seneca, not the Bible, and earlier in the same work (Ch. 5) he almost reproduces a speech of the Cynic Antisthenes in saying, "If you live in accordance with Nature, you will never be poor." But Alain had read his Latin authors and held them in greater respect than was customary in the earlier period of Christianity. So Peter Cantor (twelfth century), whose *Verbum abbreviatum* is a sort of anthology, sets forth not only passages such as Luke 6:20 and Matthew 8:20, but alongside these, long quotations from Seneca's epistles. This is a way of bringing pagan and biblical authority into harmony.

More typically Christian was Guigo the Carthusian (early twelfth century). Addressing his fellow monks and extolling poverty, he recalls the hermits and their life of hard work and abstinence. He was impressed by the communism of the primitive church and the sacrifice of possessions. Yet, as might be expected, the hard **primitivism** of his appeal is based on the need for self-humiliation rather than on the Law of Nature.

Another aspect of the cultural **primitivism** of the Middle Ages was a strain of anti-intellectualism which, though never dominant, was nevertheless strong. It could not be denied that Adam fell because he wished to know something which he had been forbidden to learn. In Tertullian the sacrifice of rationality is no more than any saint should be willing to make. Pope John XIII took another stance: living in the tenth century, he pointed out that the vicars of Peter and his disciples had no need for pagan authorities, that God had not chosen orators and philosophers to preach his word, but illiterate and unpolished men. But these words, which were only the faint echo of a philosophy, were repeated by none other than Saint Anselm in his *De contemptu mundi*. And Saint Bernard in the twelfth century put intellectual curiosity in the same class as the sin of Eve. Self-knowledge, he insisted, was alone worth seeking—paradoxically enough a pagan goal—but knowledge about external things is vain. As for that knowledge which is necessary for the Christian life, self-knowledge and the knowledge of God, these may be had without technological or scientific training. In his *The Steps of Humility and Pride* (II, 10) we find him praising ignorance of both the mechanical and the liberal arts on the ground that the Apostles were ignorant of both. A pure conscience and unsullied faith are enough to win salvation.

Similar views are expressed by Helinandus, the Venerable Guibertus, Hildebert, and even Pope Innocent III. The Pope almost preached ignorance on the plea that we are made sick by too much learning. "Let scholars," he says in his *De contemptu mundi* (I, xiii), "scrutinize, let them investigate the heights of heaven, the stretches of the earth, the depths of the sea, and let them dispute over each particular and explore whole subjects, let them spend their time in learning and teaching. For what shall they discover from this occupation but labor and pain and affliction of the spirit?" And he refers back to Ecclesiastes. This is followed by a diatribe against all the arts and sciences, a diatribe which was to be made again in the sixteenth century by Agrippa von Nettesheim. It was in itself a repetition of the thoughts of the Greek Cynics.

### *III. THE NOBLE SAVAGE*

One of the problems that confronted the primitivist was the discovery, if possible, of the natural man—the man who followed nature rather than custom or opinion, and who was a living exemplar of the primitivistic life. The Greeks found such persons among the savages, both real and imaginary. The Scythians, the "blameless Ethiopians," the inhabitants of the Fortunate Islands, and the Hyperboreans were fair samples of what they found or invented. Life in the Fortunate Islands, as in the Land beyond the North Wind, was characterized as softly primitive: the climate was pleasant, earth gave its fruits spontaneously, the goats, as Horace put it (*Epode XVI*, lines 40ff.), came to be milked unbidden. In short, all the delights of the Golden Age seen through the magnifying glass of the poetic imagination are attributed to these lands. And as for the Hyperboreans, they live until they have found their pleasant life sufficient—not boring, according to Mela in his *Chorographia* (III, 35-37). They then wreath their heads with garlands and fling themselves into the sea. The Scythians, like most Noble Savages, lived a hard primitivistic life. They were nomads, ate meat, and drank mare's milk, and, though they grew fat and indolent, they had no need for luxuries. In Herodotus (IV, xix, 46-47) they emerge as a somewhat praise-worthy people for they have produced at least one sage, Anacharsis.

But in later writers they are described as very pious, never injuring anyone, nomadic, and communistic. So Pseudo-Scymnus, in his *Orbis descriptio* (A.D. 850-59), describes them. Similar remarks are made by Strabo, the geographer; and the tradition of these hardy and wise Scythian passes on into Latin in Cicero, Horace, and Vergil. Ovid, however, who knew whereof he was speaking, despises the savages of the Pontus, region of the Scythians, and can find nothing good to say of them. It is interesting that when the colonists came to America, their views of the Noble Savage were similarly modified by direct acquaintance. They may have been touched by the glowing accounts of the native American which had been made by the first explorers, but they were quickly disillusioned.

The most famous passage in Latin literature on a savage people is in the *Germania* of Tacitus. But the Germans had already been described by Julius Caesar in his *Gallic Wars* (VI, 21-23) as men who admire chastity, live mainly on milk, cheese, and meat, have no private property, and are noticeably brave in war. The tradition that idealizes them begins in Seneca's *De providentia* (IV, 14-15). Though Seneca admits the

harshness of the German climate, he admires the people for walking in the path of nature. Tacitus gives us more details. The Germans are a cattle raising people; they have no pride in adornment; are particularly brave; have no cities; are chaste and in general monogamous, knowing little of adultery; are very hospitable; are communistic; and have no elaborate funerals. They are thus contrasted with the Romans. But at the same time, they have certain weaknesses: belligerency, gluttony, drunkenness. In short he is describing this people as he believes them to be and is not imagining a culture to fit a preconceived theory.

The Christian writers were not so fond of Noble Savages as the pagans were. After all they had tried to convert them and had suffered directly at their hands. Many of the twelve Apostles had been sent beyond the frontiers of the Mediterranean Basin and had not been welcomed by the inhabitants. Above all the barbarians had not received the Revelation and, though they could hardly be blamed for that, they could not be thought of as on a par with Jews and Christians. But sometimes one finds an early Christian author who will see some good in them. Saint Jerome for one used the barbarians as a standard of comparison with Christians, excusing to some extent their injustice, their avarice, and their general wickedness, since they knew no better, whereas the Christians did know better and hence were less excusable for their sins. Salvianus (fifth century) goes a bit farther in his *De gubernatione Dei* (III, i, 2) citing the Goths as models of sexual decency. The Romans, he says, are unchaste, the Goths are pure, and that is precisely why God permitted them to conquer the Romans.

The Greek Fathers also occasionally refer to the barbarians in terms of praise. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, admits their moral weaknesses, drunkenness, idolatry, belligerency, but at the same time says that they are superior to the Christians in invention. He even brings up the case of that preeminent Noble Savage, Anacharsis, as a model for Christians to observe with shame. But his point usually is that if the savage can achieve excellence, the Christian ought to do as well. This, as a matter of fact, was the general tendency of Christian writers until the twelfth century when the reading of classical texts was revived. Then one finds, for instance, Hugh of Saint Victor writing of the Scythians in his *Excerptiones priores* (V, ii) in the same vein as his Greek forebears had done, emphasizing Scythian virtues, their Spartan endurance, their abstemious diet of milk and honey, and their great corporeal strength. By this time the Scythians had become a legendary people.

The idea that somewhere there was a people living in accordance with nature never died out. Though the Christian writer could not find a real Noble Savage, he could find a few imaginary ones. The Camerini, for instance, have never been identified with any real tribe, but in the *Liber junioris philosophi* (ca. fifth century A.D.) we are told that they receive their food as a gift from heaven, live in a juristic state of nature, know no evil, do no work, and die happy at the age of one hundred and twenty years. At the same time, along with this mild form of cultural **primitivism**, the author reports that their country abounds in precious stones, something no pagan author had ever imagined. The emeralds, pearls, and sapphires remind one of Saint John's heaven.

The Camerini did not survive, as far as is known, in medieval literature; the Brahmins who, though real, were treated with as much fantasy as the Camerini, became known in Western Europe as early as the fourth century B.C. through the histories of Alexander's wars. In the *Gesta Alexandri* of Pseudo-Callisthenes, a work influenced by

Christianity, the Brahmins take the place of the Scythians. They are withdrawn from the world like monks, live in nakedness, have neither domestic animals, agriculture, iron, buildings, fire, bread, wine, clothing, “nor anything pertaining to the productive arts or to pleasure.” Their diet is vegetables, fruits, and water. They sleep on beds of leaves. The passage describing them ends with a dialogue between the Brahmins and Alexander, in which the former talk like Greek Cynics who have learned some manners. Their aim, they say, is to live in accordance with nature, which means to have no wealth, to withstand the cold and the heat, to conquer oneself rather than others. They have no love of money, of pleasure, of fornication, murder, or wrangling. In short the main difference between the regimen of the Brahmins and that of Diogenes is that it is communal rather than solitary. The story of this encounter was repeated and with repetition grew until by the twelfth century the Brahmins were proto-Christians.

Yet it is fair to say that medieval writers were not enthusiastic about savages. The main function of these writers in the history of cultural **primitivism** was to keep alive the idea that it was possible to live in a hard primitivistic fashion and at the same time be virtuous, in fact exemplary in behavior. And it goes without saying that such men would also be happy. The more remote the savage, the more likely was it that he would be virtuous. The Icelanders win the palm, for they live on the young of their flock exclusively, are clothed in skins, inhabit caves, and, as Adam of Bremen (eleventh century) put it in his Description of the Islands of the North, they lead “a life holy in its simplicity.” They ask for no more than nature yields and are especially happy in their poverty. They own all in common and practice charity to all. But, says Adam, they are now all Christians.

The desire to find somewhere or to believe that somewhere there exists a really virtuous and happy people may have been the stimulus in the Middle Ages to invent islands in the Atlantic where a life in accordance with nature would be lived. The Fortunate Islands, the Earthly Paradise, the Islands of the Blessed, Saint Brendan's Island, Perdita, the country of Prester John (though not an island in this case)—these were some but not all of these happy lands, far, far away. When it was a question of the Earthly Paradise, clearly the apocalyptic visions of early Christianity played their role in describing these lands. But the belief in such lands persisted up to the time of Columbus and indeed beyond that time. In fact Columbus' account of his third voyage almost if not quite identifies the West Indies with the Earthly Paradise. The people, he says, are graceful, shrewd, intelligent, and courageous. But they are also timid, and this was a trait that made them little to be feared. They are the best people in the world, “so unsuspecting and so generous with what they have, that no one who had not seen it would believe it.” With Columbus we are at the beginning of the Renaissance and modern views of **primitivism**.

#### *IV. MODERN PRIMITIVISM*

By the end of the fifteenth century the explorers had changed men's minds about the inhabitants of the globe, having found men who had never heard of the Gospel and who nevertheless seemed to be living in relative decency. The invention of printing moreover had given more men access to the accounts of these people and when combined with all the inventions and discoveries of the sixteenth century, permitted people to doubt

a good portion of what they had always accepted on authority. But the proliferation of books, which were now preserved instead of being lost, makes it impossible to enter into details about the history of a point of view which was widely adopted and as widely combated. Hence what follows attempts to be no more than a sketch of the various kinds of modern **primitivism**.

Saint Augustine had laid it down as an outline of history that there would be seven ages of the world, of which the first, from Adam to Noah was the best. This age corresponded to infancy; and Augustine drew a parallel between the life of a human being, from babyhood to senescence, and the life of the race. This parallel has been used in historical accounts of civilization up to our own times by a writer like Spengler and in a modified form by Arnold Toynbee. To Augustine all would end in a cosmic Sabbath corresponding to the seventh day of Creation on which God rested. His outline was repeated without significant variation throughout the Middle Ages, and in modern times vestiges of it appear in speculations on the senescence of the world, of which the outstanding example is Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*, of which the first edition appeared in 1681. By emphasizing the decay of all the physical forces, proved by the diminution in size of the animals, including man, the book gave additional reason for looking backwards with longing to the first age when all was fresh and vigorous.

But by the end of the fourteenth century the submerged social classes had revolted in England, France, and a bit later in Germany. The famous cry of Wat Tyler,

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?

recalled to his listeners that social class was not in the order established by God, and was a stimulus to return to the original plan according to which the Creator ordained the life of his people. One found much the same thing in the Proto-Protestant and Protestant movements in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when only primitive Christianity and the words of the Bible as “uncorrupted” by commentators were considered authoritative. Of these movements in their most primitivistic form one might select the Adamites. From then on the idea that the best condition of anything was its primordial condition was often taken for granted; and we find that there is a tradition not only of seeking the earliest form of religion as the best, but also the earliest form of the state, of the arts, even of the individual.

Columbus' accounts of his voyages were given currency in the works of Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, 1459-1526), whose *Decades* were frequently translated and reedited. Peter Martyr gave detailed accounts of the conduct of both the Spaniards and the Indians; and though those of the Indians were not always to their credit, nevertheless he kept alive the tradition that the natives resembled the men of the Golden Age. The islanders of Hispaniola, for instance, would be well nigh perfect if only they were Christians. They go about naked, like the Adamites, know nothing of weights and measures, “nor of the source of all misfortunes, money... living in the golden age, without laws, without lying judges, without books, satisfied with their life, and in nowise solicitous for the future.” They are like men who were living before the social compact and yet with no need for government. The description is one which could well be written by a cultural primitivist but for one particular: the Hispaniolians are ambitious and fight

among themselves. The Cubans are similarly described. They hold the land in common and know no difference between *meum* and *tuum*. Peter Martyr compares them also to the men of the Golden Age, and they apparently differ from their neighbors in Hispaniola only in that they are naturally equitable and never injure one another. If one believed this writer, and many did, one saw that ideas that might have been thought of as simply literary conventions or legend were in fact true. The Indians were primitive in the concrete sense of preserving the manners of the first age of man. They were real people living in a state of nature.

But the idea of the Golden Age was also kept alive in belles lettres. Italian literature of the fifteenth century is full of allusions to that happy period, and the following custom, started by Vergil in his Fourth Eclogue, was often used to celebrate the advent of any new ruler. All the well worn clichés about the earth producing without toil, the community of goods, the happiness of mankind, the beauty of men and women, their goodness, were brought out of storage and put into liquid verse. Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1504) was a case in point with its fairylike land, peopled by exquisite shepherds and shepherdesses, all of whom speak in exquisite tropes. This classical theme, derived from Theocritus and Vergil, was reinforced by the reading of travelers' tales. Gilbert Chinard in his *L'Exotisme américain dans la littérature française au XVIe siècle* has shown how such reports extended the imagination of poets, even when they were using the idiom and mythology of the ancients.

It would be impossible to list all the contributors to the progress of modern **primitivism** for they survive in too great quantity. We shall therefore confine ourselves to mentioning a few of the most influential and let them stand for the rest. Of these Michel de Montaigne must head the list, for his *Essais* (1580) not only went through several editions and were widely translated, but one of them, *On the Cannibals* (Book I, 31), was hotly disputed by his seventeenth-century critics and was thus called to the attention of men who might not otherwise have read it.

There was, however, little in this essay that had not been anticipated by reputable classical writers, though they would not have been writing about American Indians. Montaigne's main thesis is simply that civilization does not improve morals. He points out that all that is barbarous among American natives is their strangeness, for we always think that the strange is barbarous. These people are wild (*sauvages*) in the same way that berries and flowers are wild: they are the product of "our great and powerful mother, Nature." They are living as men lived in the Golden Age, without trade, letters, mathematics, courts of justice, political ranks, servitude, riches or poverty, contracts, legacies, leisure occupations, individual kinship, clothing, agriculture, metallurgy, wine, or grain. They have no words for lying, treason, dissimulation, avarice, envy, belittlement, pardon, or misunderstanding. And, quoting Vergil (*Georgics* I, 20), he says, "These ways of life were first taught by Nature." Their country enjoys a mild climate, so that it is rare to see illness or any defects of bodily structure. They live on the coast and have plenty to eat. Their food is cooked without artificial embellishments. Their houses and clothes are simple, and they rise with the sun and eat their single meal immediately. They pass their time in dancing, while their youth are at the chase.

After relating their regard for women, the discourses of their old men, and their wars against a transmontane people, Montaigne comes to their cannibalism. He

excuses this on the ground that they eat only their enemies, and they eat them not for sustenance but for vengeance. (This would seem to show that they could do things for which they had no names.) But this was no worse than what the Portuguese were doing, which was to bury their captives waist-deep and then shoot at them with arrows. There is no sense in our being horrified at their behavior if we can accept our own. "I think," Montaigne says, "it is more barbarous to eat a man alive than to eat him dead, to tear to pieces by torture and pain a body still capable of feeling, of roasting it bit by bit, of letting it be bitten and torn by dogs and swine"—here he cites what he had seen during the wars of religion—"than to roast and eat him after his decease." In any event cannibalism is better than our ordinary defects: treason, disloyalty, tyranny, and cruelty.

Montaigne here is not embellishing the life of his primitives; on the contrary he accepts all their blemishes but maintains that in comparison with our own, they are either no worse than we, or not bad at all. The primitive thus serves as a basis of contrast, and this service is founded on the premiss that morality is not to be judged by an absolute standard but by the context in which deeds are done. The argument may not be solid if acts are considered in isolation. But Montaigne was one of the first to think of the total regimen of peoples and he uses his law of nature as a standard for that. To take this attitude is to challenge one of the traditional premisses of the Church, that the foundation for morality lies in the *Decalogue* and the words of Christ. It might also be argued that these words are at the same time the Law of Nature and the Law of God. But in that case the goodness of savage life would be an accident of history and in no sense a paradigm for civilized people. Montaigne, it should also be noted, contributed to that side of **primitivism** which looked to the animals for models of good behavior, and to children.

The feeling spread that if goodness could be found in men who were supposed to be living in a state of nature, then one had but to revert to the Greek ideal. The problem was to find exemplifications of that which was natural. As a result of this search new concepts of **primitivism** arose. The savage began to lose his prestige as soon as more reports came in from, for instance, the North American settlers. No one who had been through the Deerfield Massacre could feel friendly towards the Indians. They became simply a blood-thirsty lot. Their behavior showed that they had not received the word of God and knew nothing of the theological virtues. Someone had to take their place. And when the islands in the Atlantic became exhausted as a source for **primitivism**, men turned to the Pacific. When there were no more imaginary lands to be inhabited by imaginary saints, instead of abandoning the notion, writers turned elsewhere.

First to be endowed with the characters of the Noble Savage, probably because of the influence of Rousseau, was the Peasant, living a simple, pastoral life as was lived in the pastoral period of history. The Peasant lived close to nature in the sense of the nonartificial. He was primitive only in degree, for after all he plowed his fields, sowed them, reaped the harvest, bought and sold; but he was innocent of most of the arts and sciences and, until advanced methods of agriculture were introduced, he could be endowed with simplicity, innate wisdom, guilelessness, and, by the time Wordsworth came along, with poetic insight. He seemed to be living in intimate communion with forces over which men had no control, the wind and the rain. It was the urban dweller who represented Custom as opposed to Nature.

Sometimes a ballad would play on the Peasant's shrewdness, his ingenuity, even his ability to outwit the city man. Men of education, like Montaigne or Agrippa von

Nettesheim (1486-1535), along with some of the Protestant mystics, insisted that learning was a cover for a higher kind of knowledge which needed no schooling to emerge. This was a reversion to that form of anti-intellectualism which had appeared now and then in the Middle Ages, when writers pointed out that Christ had not chosen scholars for his disciples but fishermen. Only four of the Apostles, as far as is known, were actually fishermen, but since the occupation of only one of the others, that of Matthew (a tax collector, *publican*) was known, no one could be contradicted who held to this opinion.

At the same time there was a current of thought that was definitely antipeasant. It appears, to take but one instance, in the vogue for emblems, whose supporters insisted that the deepest truths were too important to be revealed to all and sundry, that Christ had spoken in parables not to teach the unlearned, but to conceal his real meaning from them. The sixteenth century had as one of its marked traits the antagonism between learning and folly, and Erasmus was not alone in praising the latter. Agrippa's *Eulogy of the Ass* was in line with the tradition of the Wise Fool; and the party of the Wise Fool could appeal to Saint Paul, "the Fool in God," or for that matter to Tertullian if they knew about him. Montaigne was bitterly attacked in the seventeenth century for his anti-intellectualism.

But in a time when one side of Protestantism was emphasizing any man's ability to interpret the Bible, the other side could only take refuge in insisting that the truths of Scripture were too complicated, too recondite, for the understanding of anyone but a scholar. Yet just as the American Indian could be peaceful, gentle, kind, able to do without law and judges, so the farmer knew instinctively the essentials of religion, and the inessentials could be reserved for those who wanted to study them. It would be absurd to see in this no more than an epistemological quarrel. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were, as we have said, periods of armed revolt, revolt not only against the State but also against the Church. And once the Peasant had the audacity to declare that he had the same rights as the landed proprietors, the magnates, and was willing to fight for them, the truth would be proved pragmatically. As in the case of the Noble Savage, closer acquaintance with the Peasant led to doubts. The Peasant, like the urban ruffian was soon to be just as evil as the noble, the burgess, or the small employer.

The lower classes had to wait until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to become fully rehabilitated. And by that time they were on the wane, slowly rising in the social hierarchy. But there was another candidate for the position of primitivistic paradigm waiting in the wings, ready to enter the stage when the cue came. That was the Child. The Child might have come into his own with Christianity, for the verses of Matthew 18:3, beginning, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," might have been expected to be an incentive to put childhood on a pedestal. But that did not take place and, though it may seem strange from the modern perspective, even the cult of the infant Jesus was relatively late (sixteenth century). It was Montaigne again who first began calling attention to the rights of the child to be a child and not an immature man. And in Rousseau's *Émile* this right was accentuated and developed into a theory of pedagogy. Rousseau did not urge men to turn into children—that was to come in the middle of the twentieth century. But he did insist on the evil of treating children as if they were only potential adults. And since there was a strong streak of anti-intellectualism in him, it was easy to infer that he meant education to be nothing more than allowing a child to do as he would.

It is true that Rousseau believed in a source of truth that was nonempirical and which he called the heart. One could always argue that, if men were simply rational, then the present person without schooling was defective. But this would never do, for society needed men of all grades of intelligence, and there must be at least a minimum of knowledge accessible to us all. We have quoted Cicero on the Child as a *speculum naturae*. This meant that one did not have to go to the Scythians to gather information about universal beliefs in order to discover what Nature had to say to us. One had but to look at the Child.

This form of cultural **primitivism** contained within itself an element of chronological **primitivism**. The Child stood for Adam before the Fall. He was innocent and pure and the fact that his innocence depended on his impotence was irrelevant. He was like an angel. In the words of John Earle in his *Microcosmographie* (1628), he is “the best copy of *Adam* before he tasted of Eve or the apple.... He is nature's fresh picture newly drawn in oil which time, and much handling, dims and defaces.” The process of growing up is degeneration. The history of individual men reproduces the history of the race. And if we wish to understand what has happened to mankind since the Fall, we have only to watch the Child as he matures. He gradually loses his primeval innocence and innate wisdom; in Wordsworth's words, the “shades of the prison-house begin to close” about him. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Child loomed larger as an exemplar; and children's rights took on greater importance, not only in the eyes of educators but also in those of moralists. The twentieth century, said Ellen Key, was to be the “century of the child.” The Child, she maintained, instinctively knows both what is right and what is true. The totem of this school of thought might well be Hans Christian Andersen's child who saw that the Emperor was naked.

From the Savage to the Peasant to the Child would seem a fairly steep descent, but there was one more step to be taken, the step into animality. Diogenes the Cynic had already taken the beasts as his model. And it had been said that man had learned his arts from the spider and the bird; that the beasts never went to extremes of eating and drinking and sexuality; never made war upon their own kind; and, according to some writers, were not only as rational as men but more so. During the Middle Ages when men believed that the animals had been created for the use of mankind, this sort of **infra primitivism** was recessive. But during the Renaissance it was revived. How seriously admiration for animals was preached is questionable. But the problem of their intelligence, as of the existence of their souls, was very seriously debated. For if they had souls, those souls might be immortal; and if they were intelligent, what became of man's *differentia*?

To treat the beasts with kindness is modern and it would be senseless if the creatures had no feelings, as the Cartesians maintained. But since the development of theories of evolution, men have tended to integrate themselves into the whole biological order and to feel their kinship with the other animals. This tendency would by no means allow us to infer that animals had rights which were equal or superior to our own. But it would lead men to protect them from cruelty, to study their ethology, to admire their ingenuity. One thing above all was true of them: they could not be called unnatural. They had developed no culture which might lead them away from that which was “in accordance with Nature,” and even more than the Child, the animal was a mirror of Nature's designs. One other strain of cultural **primitivism** should be mentioned, though it

was short-lived. That is the strain of epistemological feminism. At the end of the eighteenth century, especially among the romantics, it was believed that women had a kind of insight into the truth which was lacking in man; it was called "intuition." Intuition usually was directed towards character reading, the arts, and the concealed motives of human behavior. The story of the rehabilitation of Eve does not belong here. But it is not out of place to recall that most of the evils which beset mankind had been attributed to her weakness when faced with the Serpent. Christ as the Second Adam had redeemed mankind from the sin of the first Adam; the Blessed Virgin as the Second Eve had been the immaculate vessel of the Redeemer. But somehow or other woman had to wait for some centuries to pass before the German romantics saw in the sex those dark enigmatic forces which are unperceived by the more active and rational male. This very attractive point of view was not of long duration. With the economic and political emancipation of women, they were given something approaching equality and hence lost what mystery they had previously possessed.

Chronological **primitivism** today has lost most of its force. Few take the story of either the Golden Age or prelapsarian Adam literally. Life in the Islands of the Blessed has become simply a literary decoration, at most a wistful dream, and there are no Noble Savages left to admire. But the theory of social evolution as framed by nineteenth-century writers like Herbert Spencer led some people to believe that preliterate tribes were really primitive, as children or eggs prior to adults or freely living individuals. According to this view there ought to be no significant differences among such tribes. Yet one could hardly lump together the Polynesians and the Bantus, the Eskimos and the Patagonians without noting important differences in manner of life, social organization, kinship rules, sanctions, in short, ideals. The use of the word "primitive" to characterize all such people was scientifically unfortunate, for there was no evidence that any civilized group had ever literally evolved from any condition identical with that of the so-called primitives. But psychologically the misfortune was not so great, for it satisfied those who had primitivistic leanings. It induced men to look upon the arts of the Africans and the American Indians, the South Sea Islanders and the Eskimos, with greater sympathy and, though the reasoning about such matters was usually weak, the results of the reasoning were to broaden our sympathies and understanding. The South Sea Islands were usually described in terms of soft **primitivism**, but soon the detection of yaws and elephantiasis balanced the notice taken of beautiful women and the abundance of fruit and flowers.

The extension of our field of aesthetic appreciation, moreover, was helped by the opening of caves in France and Spain, by the discovery of the rock paintings of North Africa and southern Mexico. Where some saw in these works of art the persistent need for self-expression, others saw in them a degree of "naturalness" which was lacking in what came out of the academies. Consequently there was an aesthetic movement back to what was believed to be primitive; and the drawings of children, as well as the masks and images of the Africans or Maoris, became the inspiration of artists like Paul Klee, Miró, and Picasso. Some of these men have denied this influence, but an artist is seldom aware of all of the forces which have been most powerful in forming his style.

There has also been a reversion to a form of anti-intellectualism with primitivistic overtones in the work of both Freud and Jung. Freud was a bitter critic of civilization and found in it the unconscious vestiges of primitive mentality. Yet he never urged us to act

either as uncivilized human beings or as children. Jung on the other hand with his theory of archetypes tended towards a definite aesthetic **primitivism**. The archetypes were supposed to be a limited number of universal symbols possessed by the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious by its very nature is the common property of all human beings, regardless of their culture. Hence to uncover these symbols is to see directly into the minds of all one's fellowmen. But it was also to discover within one's psyche an identity with the primitives. Thus we had a form of cultural **primitivism** which led its proponents to interpret all myths, all forms of scientific theory, all artistic expressions of aspirations and fears, all ethical commandments, in a manner independent of linguistic barriers. Since the archetypes tend to be covered with layers of cultural accretions, they are most clearly found in the child or the childlike adult, who are not inhibited by convention from seeing and speaking primitive truth.

There was also a strain of cultural **primitivism** in the two outstanding forms of fascism, that of Italy and that of Germany. Mussolini was heavily influenced by anarchism and the theory of violence. The emphasis upon leadership, that which was later to be called by the Nazis the *Führerprinzip*, was a throwback to the model of the horde governed by the will of a strong man. Mussolini emphasized the need for strength and power. Bitterly opposed to any form of humanitarianism, a kind of neo-Darwinism was his ideal. Man was a superior form of ape and must remember this.

In Nazism the animal origin of mankind was even more strongly emphasized. The motto "*Blood and Soil*" was supposed to indicate the continuing link between the blond beast of today and the blond beast of primitive times. Men like Ludendorff and Rosenberg even urged a return to the religion of the Nordics, the worship of Odin and Thor, as a fit religion for the German people. The Nazis would readily have claimed that civilization had detracted men from their original condition, for it was no longer the civilization of the Germans; it was an international style of culture. But his primitivistic vocabulary did not prevent the Nazi from using all the modern methods of destruction when he made war.

Finally, it might be conceded that some forms of extreme "progressive education" are based on primitivistic postulates. If the child is to be permitted to satisfy all his desires, however contrary to the general peace, he will obviously act in a totally undisciplined manner. Discipline is something imposed from outside; it rarely, if ever, originates from within. Hence it cannot be called "natural." But progressive education was also based on the hope, which had been expressed by Rousseau, that the child would soon grow out of its anarchic state, just as society was believed to have done. In fact, some theories of pedagogy were derived from transferring the Law of Recapitulation out of embryology into sociology. It was then maintained that the growth of the individual recapitulated the history of the race. Hence the child must be allowed to repeat all the stages through which mankind had grown to maturity.

Since some historians, Spengler for instance, had utilized the basic metaphor of the life cycle as a picture of a nation's progress, there seemed to be some evidence that would justify this educational process. But though the American child might begin his schooling with studying the American Indian, building tepees, dancing corn dances, making Indian costumes, none seem to have been made to live in a cave, eat his fellows' flesh, or hunt with stone-tipped arrows. At the time of writing a similar movement has set in among certain sociologists to erect the animals again as exemplars of civilized

behavior. Thus the “territorial imperative” is used to interpret what civilized nations are doing on the international scene. But it is not always clear whether this is an interpretive description or a program.

There always remain residues of earlier cultural periods in every period and these tendencies may not be of long duration. **Primitivism** now seems to exist mainly in the arts, perhaps because it is no longer reasonable to deny the benefits of scientific discovery and technological inventions. It appears as if modern man were committed to civilization with all its weaknesses and lack of picturesqueness.

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