

Chapter 8

Travel as a Basis for Atheism: Free-Thinking as Deterritorialization in the Early Radical Enlightenment

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I have been driven out of the court, where I knew not what to do; if they push me to leave France, wherever in Europe I shall go, I have acquaintances there thanks to my name. I can easily accommodate myself to a variety of foods and garments; I am indifferent towards climates and men.

—Théophile de Viau, 1623 (De Viau 1668, 13/1965, 58; all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.)

It is up to us to go to extreme places, to extreme times, where the highest and deepest truths live and rise up. The sites of thought are the tropical zones frequented by the tropical man, not the temperate zones of the moral, methodical or moderate man.

—Gilles Deleuze (1962, 126.)

Abstract The early modern radical *savant* did not travel so much as he read travel narratives. From Montaigne's cannibals to Locke's talking parrot, from Leibniz's plans to create a race of "warrior slaves" to Diderot's utopian *Voyage de Bougainville*, a kind of 'science fiction' or 'deterritorialization' of the narrative of the familiar, Eurocentric, Plato-to-Hegel narrative of Western philosophy can be discerned. A key feature of these artificial travel narratives is that they serve as a basis for proclaiming atheism (and China plays a well-known role here). The radical *savant* described here is neither the solitary meditator, nor the participant in communal knowledge-gathering projects for national glory (Bacon, Linnaeus). He (for it is always a he in this case) is less a producer of a stable, cumulative body of knowledge than a destabilizer of forms of existing knowledge.

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8.1 Introduction: Early Modern Knowledge-Gathering and Heterodoxy

29

30

We have grown accustomed to certain familiar pictures or scenes of the early modern savant – *images d'Épinal*, they would be called in French: reassuring coloured pictures in schoolbooks. These include, minimally, the savant as player in a communal enterprise (Bacon and Boyle, in the Royal Society; Fontenelle and Maupertuis, in the Paris and Berlin Academies of Sciences) and the savant as 'solitary' (Descartes's rejection of authority and what some have called his emphasis on the individual over the community¹). In other words, some savants have a House of Salomon, and some do not. More recently, attention has turned to a third figure we might call the savant as wanderer or traveler: hence the multiplication of Atlantic, Pacific, Caribbean narratives of knowledge expansion.² By 'traveler' I do not mean someone in a rather territorially homogeneous process of movement, like Locke's flight to Holland during the years 1683–1688, but rather, an individual involved in either of two kinds of knowledge-gathering projects:

- (a) enterprises of trans-national expansion of knowledge and science like Linnaeus' wanting new plants for Sweden and sending his students around the world, including Daniel Solander on James Cook's first trip around the world, in 1768–1771; Linnaeus was quite explicit about Nature having "arranged itself in such a way that each country produces something especially useful"³;
- (b) enterprises of internal *dépaysement* or *Entfremdung* – that is, 'de-familiarizing' enterprises, like Leibniz's projects to investigate talking dogs, stones containing plants or dried fish, or most surprising, fossilized remains of unicorns, the latter in his geological work intended as the first volume of a history of the House of Hanover, the *Protogaea*⁴; enterprises which perturb the sense of familiarity

¹Cf. Garber 1998, 40. This is not just true of the best-known texts such as the *Discourse* and the *Meditations*, but also the *Regulae* (Rule 3 emphasizes the importance of individual knowledge over and against knowledge from authority). Of course, one can also view Descartes as deeply 'dialogical' given the effort he put into collecting responses e.g. to the *Meditations*, but I do not think this attitude is 'fundamental' to his natural-philosophical project.

²Delbourgo and Dew, eds., 2008; Schaffer, Roberts et al. eds. 2009 (and commentary in Golinski 2011), and the various publications by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, including Cañizares-Esguerra and Seaman, eds., 2007.

³Linnaeus, letter of 10 January 1746 to the Swedish Academy of Science, quoted in Koerner 1996a, 151; see also Koerner 1996b. This aspect of Linnaeus has been well-known since Lisbet Koerner's study (Koerner 1999); a good shorter analysis is Sörlin 2000, 60–65. Interestingly, Linnaeus' vision of an *oeconomia naturae* (which may have influenced Smith's idea of the invisible hand), a vision of balance and equilibrium, meant that he refused to accept racist ideas about inequality of different races: "Wild peoples, barbarians and Hottentots differ from us only because of sciences; just like a thorny sour-Apple differs from a tasty Reinette, only through cultivation" (1759 speech to the Swedish Royal Family, quoted in Rausing 2003, 193).

⁴Leibniz wrote that he "has now seen and heard the talking dog; it pronounced well the words *thé, café, chocolat, et assemblée*, among others" (Leibniz 1849–1855, IV, 199, *cit.* in Ariew 2005, 139). On the *Protogaea* overall see Claudine Cohen's recent critical edition (Leibniz 2008).

or self-identity of a Western 'self' or 'narrative'. I do not discuss Leibniz's fascination with China here (see for instance his 1697 opusculum *Novissima Sinica* and his 1716 *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*; Leibniz 1994; Perkins 2004). But I do return to Leibniz below – not as a promoter of universal peace and rationality, nor as a natural philosopher addicted to exotica and natural curiosities, but as a more Eurocentric, sometimes even Teutonic thinker who often spoke for Christian political power when he declared that “The Turks have already learnt *our* military arts and naval science . . .” (Leibniz 1923, IV: 1, 398, emphasis mine). The latter Leibniz is less the philosopher “who considered heaven to be his country” and more the man who wrote a poem beginning “Exulta, Germania!” when Belgrade was finally taken back from the Turks (Almond 2006, 467).

In the fascination with the unfamiliar to which Leibniz, among others, bears witness, sometimes despite himself, there is an intimation of a more destabilizing project, which I shall call in what follows knowledge as *deterritorialization*: a process by which a territorially familiar, essential, ‘native’ state or ethos is weakened, subverted and generally uprooted so that it becomes unfamiliar, non-foundational and de-essentialized.⁵ We can see the latter kind of intention – it is hard to call it a ‘project’, since such cognitive enterprises are rarely ‘knowledge-gathering’ enterprises in any standard, cumulative sense and are even less likely to have a systematic character – taken up within the twilight world of the *libertins* (free-thinkers) and particularly the clandestine manuscript tradition from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, with texts such as the *Treatise of the Three Impostors*, a variable combination of libertine texts, depending on the manuscript version, such as Vanini and Charron, extracts of Hobbes and especially Spinoza (it contains the first French translation of the Appendix to Book I of Spinoza’s *Ethics*), which circulated in ever-reworked forms during the first half of the eighteenth century, beginning in 1719.⁶ What may emerge from this is the emergence of a *fourth* figure (in addition to the group player, the solitary thinker, and the traveler): the savant as a radical, moving as it were from the intellectual galaxy studied by Robert Merton and Steven Shapin to that studied by Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel.⁷

⁵The term ‘deterritorialization’ was first used in Deleuze-Guattari’s 1973 *Anti-Oedipus*, where it had a psychoanalytic connotation of the freeing of a libidinal entity from pre-established objects of investment; but it quickly, in their *Thousand Plateaus* of 1980 (translation, Deleuze-Guattari 1987), also comes to mean a socio-political process whereby, e.g., a population is either dispossessed of its territory (like peasants by lords) or in contrast, freed from a fixed territory such as land or a factory. Closer still to the sense in which I am using the term, Deleuze and Guattari say in their work on Kafka that “the first characteristic of a minor literature in any case is that in its language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16).

⁶The classic study of the clandestine tradition is Wade 1938; for recent overviews of the topic see Benítez 1996a, b; Thomson 2005, 2008, especially chapter 5: “Journalism, Exile, and Clandestinity.”

⁷Margaret Jacob’s focus on Freemason networks (in addition to her better-known studies on Newtonianism, the English Revolution and the Scientific Revolution) in Jacob 1981, 2006 fits as it

Moving from the savant as participant in a communal enterprise such as the Royal Society to the solitary meditator dissecting calves' or sheep's brains on Amsterdam's Kalverstraat and thirdly, to the traveler-wanderer, we arrive, then, at a fourth figure: a gentleman or rogue, scholar, pamphleteer, diplomat or amateur, who *does not* travel (except to flee punishment and censorship), is *not* engaged in globalized commerce – except in very diffuse senses such as the vitalist reception of Chinese medicine of the pulse via Jesuit translations, which I mention below – nor in the production of typical 'exotica' except inasmuch as they are reinterpreted to suit radical purposes: call them 'radical exotica'. A typical producer of radical exotica would be the *esprit fort* (and army captain) Boyer d'Argens, with works such as the *Lettres juives* (Boyer d'Argens 1738–1742), in which a group of Jewish travellers exchange impressions and stories of their adventures in various countries of Europe and the Mediterranean, or his *Lettres chinoises* of the following year, in which Spinoza's God is presented as derivative of the Chinese *Li*. Indeed many Europeans, d'Argens says, "follow a System which strongly resembles that of these new Chinese Commentators. *Spinosa*, a Dutch savant, was its *inventor*, or rather he *restored* it; for it is claimed that his sentiments were already, more or less, those of several ancient Philosophers."⁸ We see here a more or less direct statement of a sentiment often derived from Pierre Bayle (who would not have approved of it in this form): millions of atheists forming a stable, ethically grounded society cannot all be wrong! I shall call this conceptual figure promoting such views the *radical savant*.

Before seeking to further articulate this figure, particularly its relation to processes of deterritorialization, I should mention some methodological difficulties that arise in this sort of reflection. Notably, it is not clear how one might maintain such types in systematic isolation from each other. Consider the vitalist reception and appropriation of Chinese and Japanese medicine in eighteenth-century France, mentioned above. What should we make of this case? It is indeed a *heterodox* case within Western medicine: vitalists construct medical knowledge of the pulse through Jesuit narratives of Chinese and Japanese medicine,⁹ articulating a heterodox

were somewhere in between a narrative of respectable natural philosophers functioning as pillars of society and a narrative of anti-social, 'mad dog' deists / atheists / materialists like John Toland or the anonymous authors of the *Theophrastus redivivus* (1659), the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* (sometimes dated to 1716; cf. Benítez 1996a, 203), or *The Material Soul* (*L'Âme Matérielle*, approx. 1725–1730; Niderst 2003).

⁸Boyer d'Argens 1739–1740, vol. I, letter XIV, 106 (this text apparently served as a basis for Oliver Goldsmith's *Chinese Letters*). It is not possible here to go into details about this entertaining and interesting work; the first Chinese traveller-narrator describes how, upon arriving in Le Havre, he is asked if in China they believe in the Pope, and when he answers No, how he has to convince the crowd that his compatriots are also neither Huguenots nor Jansenists . . .

⁹Proust 1998; Terada 2006. There are Chinese and Japanese sources for the vitalist view: the former were notably collected in R. P. Harvieu/Louis-Augustin Allemand's 1671 *Les Secrets de la Médecine des Chinois* and the 1702–1776 Jesuit compendium *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses écrites des missions étrangères par quelques Missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*; the latter notably include Willem Ten Rhijne's 1683 *Dissertation de arthritide: mantisa schematica de acupunctura* . . . (London/The Hague/Leipzig 1683; translation in Carrubba and Bowers 1974).

Western 'holism' through the appropriation of 'Eastern' medical ideas. The more 'holistic' trend in Enlightenment medicine appropriates these traditions in a much more sympathetic way than mainstream medicine which tended to speak of them as nonsense, or of Asian medicine as backwards, e.g., as lacking any knowledge of the circulation of the blood. There is a striking contrast between mainstream Western medical discourse saying Chinese medicine is nonsense, and (for instance) the vitalist Ménéuret de Chambaud saying in no less a publication than the *Encyclopédie* that the Chinese have "gone further than us" ("il n'est pas étonnant qu'ils [les Chinois] soient allés plus loin que nous & qu'ils n'aient des lumières supérieures aux nôtres"; Ménéuret, "Pouls," *Enc. XIII*, 227a). He adds that they have a superior understanding of the interrelations of organs ("les filiations & les correspondances des visceres entr'eux sont sans doute bien apperçues en général," 227b). Ménéuret studied the *Maijing* by Wang Shuhe as translated in Du Halde's 1735 *Description de l'Empire de la Chine* (*Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise*).¹⁰

It is debatable whether Ménéuret's positive judgment is an instance of extension of a national body of knowledge, or a kind of recognition of alterity in knowledge (a cosmopolitanism in knowledge, as it were); but it is not quite the figure of the radical construction of knowledge I am interested in, for it lacks a certain *destabilizing* dimension. To be sure, even if the vitalist interest in Chinese and Japanese medicine is not part of an aggressive program to destabilize European religious, metaphysical or political values, it nevertheless testifies to a different type of ethos, a non-conquering one. We are clearly no longer dealing with the kind of rhetoric which is probably most famous in its Baconian variant, of extending the "power and empire of the human race itself over the universe of things," or "the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible," as Bacon describes the ultimate goal of the program of the *New Atlantis*.¹¹

It is noteworthy that the Jesuits were forbidden from studying and practicing medicine, and did not give much reports of treatments such as acupuncture. They focused on sphygmology (medicine of the pulse). Conversely, Ten Rhijne focuses on practices such as acupuncture (a word he is often credited with inventing), and does not mention the medicine of the pulse. On the role of sphygmology in the conceptual articulation of vitalist medicine in the eighteenth century see Terada 2006, and Wolfe and Terada 2008.

¹⁰To be clear, I am not using the word 'holism' in any especially valuative sense – in the older but still common sense, found on both sides of the 'divide', that Eastern thought is holistic whereas Western thought is mechanistic, with the implication that Western thought has somehow come closer to a hidden (holistic) truth by learning from the East – but rather as a historico-theoretical construct which had a certain efficacy. Namely, if 'mechanism' is the respectable paradigm of Western medical science in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (and beyond), 'holism' is a kind of heterodoxy, and as far back as the early eighteenth century, anti-mechanists looked to the East for legitimizing sources of their knowledge – which could be assimilated to 'native' forms of *exotica* such as the Hippocratic paradigm.

¹¹Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* I, 129; *New Atlantis*, in Bacon 1996, 480.

8.2 Knowledge as Conquest

143

Sometimes the idea of conquest just takes the form of an *analogy* between a project in natural philosophy and the voyages of discovery: 144
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it is fit that I publish and set forth those conjectures of mine which make hope in this matter reasonable, just as Columbus did, before that wonderful voyage of his across the Atlantic, when he gave the reasons for his conviction that new lands and continents might be discovered besides those which were known before; which reasons, though rejected at first, were afterwards made good by experience, and were the causes and beginnings of great events. (Bacon, *Nov. Org.* I, xcii). 146
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This is still very vivid as an idea two centuries later when Charles Fourier (the Utopian socialist) asserts that an inventor stands to new ideas as a traveler-naturalist stands to new plants that he brings back from an expedition: 152
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To ask that an inventor not move away from received ideas is like demanding that a naturalist, upon returning from a voyage of exploration, present not a single new plant. Those who brought us back from America quinoa, tobacco, potatoes, cocoa, vanilla, indigo and cochineal – haven't they done us a much greater service than if they had only brought back known species? (Fourier 1845, ix–x). 155
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Early modern savants are not always content with such analogies; in their zeal at achieving a kind of 'global reach' (a popular term in international relations theory, some decades prior to the term 'globalization', used to describe roughly the same economic phenomenon: Barnett and Muller 1974) they can depart from analogy altogether and plan *real* mastery of the world. Leibniz has been described as "the only prominent modern philosopher to take a serious interest in Europe's contact with other cultures" (Perkins 2004, 42). But the actual forms this "serious interest" could take are quite surprising. For after all, even the very respectable Leibniz, who "considered heaven to be his country," proposed a plan for *training a new army of warrior slaves*, in an audacious 1671 text entitled "A Method for Instituting a New, Invincible Militia that can Subjugate the Entire Earth, Easily Seize Control over Egypt, or Establish American Colonies" (written as an addendum to his better known *Consilium Aegyptiacum* or *Egyptian Plan*): 160
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A certain island of Africa, such as Madagascar, shall be selected, and all the inhabitants shall be ordered to leave. Visitors from elsewhere shall be turned away, or in any event it will be decreed that they only be permitted to stay in the harbor for the purpose of obtaining water. To this island slaves captured from all over the barbarian world will be brought, and from all of the wild coastal regions of Africa, Arabia, New Guinea, etc. To this end Ethiopians, Nigritians, Angolans, Caribbeans, Canadians, and Hurons fit the bill, without discrimination. What a lovely bunch of semi-beasts! But so that this mass of men may be shaped in any way desired, it is useful only to take boys up to around the age of twelve.¹² 173
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As Ian Almond nicely observed about the *Consilium Aegyptiacum*, "Leibniz's advice to Louis XIV, his attempt to persuade the monarch that an attack on Egypt 181
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¹²Leibniz 1923, IV, 1: 408; quoted and discussed in Smith 2011, 243.

would be 'to the profit of Christendom', appear almost to have been written with Gramsci and Said's analysis of the intellectual's complicity with imperialistic hegemony in mind" (Almond 2006, 464). The origin of this unpleasant fantasy of global reach (but policy and fantasy are not separated by any Chinese walls!) seems to have been Thomas Sprat's "Relation of the Pico Teneriffe," presented to the Royal Society in 1667 (Dascal 1993, 391), and the concept is very much that of the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire. Leibniz's well-known fascination with China goes in the opposite direction . . . (Leibniz 1994; Perkins 2004; Mungello 1998) but the above text bears witness to a more obsessively 'Orientalist' mindset. In contrast, a later text entitled "An Utopian Island" expresses what we might call more 'multicultural' sentiments (Dascal 1993).

Less disturbingly, the kind of confident, linear expansion of 'our' knowledge (whether it be French, European, etc.) is still expressed in Cornelius de Pauw's *Encyclopédie* article "Amérique," which concludes with a list of America's useful resources, from gold and silver to beaver skins and, further South, cinnamon, sandalwood, and "dragon's blood" . . . and his very influential *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains*.¹³ We find the same intent in Linnaeus' plans to import foreign species of plants to Sweden, and it is presumably in the background of the opening of the Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal's *Histoire des deux-Indes* (1770: full title, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, a multi-authored work, large parts of which are actually by Diderot), referring in particular to the impact of Iberian expansion: "No event has been so interesting to mankind in general, and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the new world, and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope" (quoted in Gascoigne 2010).

Whether the creation of an island of warrior slaves or, more pedestrian, the control over the growth and production of useful plants, what these forms of globalization have in common is a kind of 'total mobilization' in which the globe becomes unified: when Switzerland can be sought in the Indies, and the Indies in Switzerland (paraphrasing the Zürich naturalist Johann Jakob Scheuchzer writing in 1716; the original was more of a recommendation: "Switzerland must often be sought in the Indies, and the Indies in Switzerland").¹⁴ Or more bluntly yet, when "Trade is raised to highest pitch, . . . the empire of Europe is now extended to the utmost bounds of the Earth," as stated in the unsigned Introduction to Awnsham and John Churchill's (1704) collection of *Voyages and Travels*, which may be by John

¹³De Pauw 1768–1770, reprinted 1990. I cannot take up here the debates on universalism and relativism: suffice it to say that de Pauw combines both, if one compares his book to John Millar's later (1779) *The origin of the distinction of ranks* (a product of the Scottish Enlightenment), we can see in Millar but not in de Pauw a clear, systematic intent to synthesize ethnographic data from travelers, Jesuits etc. in order to formulate some relativistic principles for a nascent social science.

¹⁴Quoted in Pugliano 2009, 323. Scheuchzer was the author of the pre-Linnean *Natur-Historie des Schweizerlandes* (1706–1718).

Locke or by Edmond Halley.¹⁵ The scholarly version of Scheuchzer and Churchill's bold statements is the observation that, even if natural philosophy had always made universal claims, "by the eighteenth century, the practical basis for these claims was increasingly global, fostering new confidence in the universal validity of such knowledge."¹⁶

8.3 Radical Savants and Deterritorialized Knowledge

In contrast to the above forms of more or less globalized knowledge, the type of knowledge produced by the radical savant is – not exactly globalized, in fact. Not only is it *not* concerned with the extension of national glory, or with such forms of 'global reach' in early modern natural philosophy, now shown to have had a global economic context, or as a network in which scientist-travelers act as 'go-betweens'¹⁷ – and I am not addressing the sub-question of whether these journeys of expansion and appropriation might have or bear their own 'epistemology', distinct from that produced by politicians, intellectuals and other propagandists 'back home': a more 'transactional' epistemology, coupled to a rather circular 'ontology of networks'. It is more of an attempt to make the familiar, unfamiliar. The radical savant is something of an 'internal exile', although he often ends up away from his native land, denied even the right to burial in his national church, as happened to La Mettrie (Fontius 1967), Count Alberto Radicati di Passerano (Venturi 1954), or John Toland (Jacob 1981). The lives and ideas of La Mettrie and Toland are well known at this point, less so Radicati – a curious case of a radical exile expounding extreme materialistic views which resonated throughout the century even if what he actually wrote was not necessarily known directly. Like Toland and unlike La Mettrie, he suffered in large part because of his 'heterodoxy' (in his case, his attraction to Protestantism); he moved from Piedmont to England and after some years to

¹⁵"An Introductory Discourse containing the whole History of Navigation," in Churchill 1704, vol. 1, lxxiii, cit. in Schaffer 2009, 247. The passage began, much like Linnaeus's statements, by referring to the benefits of the importation of new plants, drugs and spices: "Natural and moral history is embellished with the most beneficial increase of so many thousands of plants it had never before received, so many drugs and spices, such unaccountable diversity."

¹⁶James Delbourgo and Nicholas Dew, "Introduction: The far side of the ocean," in Delbourgo and Dew 2008, 7.

¹⁷Hal Cook in his recent *Matters of Exchange* states that "it was no accident that the so-called Scientific Revolution occurred at the same time as the development of the first global economy" (Cook 2007, 411), but we never really learn why, or what this changes in other stories; clearly medical and natural-historical knowledge are highly involved with commodities and exchange, but this does not make them "the big science of the early modern period," as Cook rather strangely claims without explanation (410). For further analysis of early modern voyages of discovery as integrating the worlds of commerce, science and 'knowledge' see the work of Kapil Raj, e.g. Raj (2000); on go-betweens: Schaffer, Roberts et al., eds. (2009).

Holland, where he died in 1737. While in England he published his most shocking work, *A Philosophical Dissertation on Death. Composed for the Consolation of the Unhappy 'by a friend to Truth'*, a defense of suicide which had him thrown in prison along with his translator and his publisher (Venturi 1954, 209–215). Radicati's justification of suicide was based on a materialistic philosophy influenced by Toland.

This species of radicals – in the above case, materialists, although this is not a necessary condition (neither Montaigne, nor François de La Mothe Le Vayer, nor Henry de Boulainvillier are specifically committed to materialism) – are not travelers; they rarely make it further than St Petersburg or Berlin; however, as I indicate below, travel that remains virtual can also be a great source of deterritorialization. As Deleuze put it in an interview in 1988, “Il ne faut pas trop bouger pour ne pas effrayer les devenirs” (“One shouldn't move around too much, it scares off the [lines] of becoming,” Deleuze 1995, 138) – a phrase which, curiously enough, applies quite well to Newton's ‘immobility’, which his contemporaries viewed in a favorable light as somehow complementary to the *mobility* of the travelers who, for instance, went to the ends of the globe to measure the length of a pendulum, such as the astronomer Jean Richer's celebrated 10 month's work in Cayenne in 1672, or the priest Louis Feuillée's similar experiments at Panama and later Martinique, in 1712, reported to Newton by Cotes, and used in his calculations (Schaffer 2009, 261–264).

Making the familiar – the territorial, the national – unfamiliar can be described, as I mentioned above, as a process of deterritorialization, which, once again, is not a process of becoming ‘at home in the world’, a *Weltbürger*, but rather one of *ceasing to belong anywhere*, even if some bravely claim that they are “indifferent towards climates and men,” like Théophile de Viau, who was burned in effigy in front of Notre Dame in 1623. This kind of cognitive and intellectual process, which is bound up with the formation of radical knowledge, goes back to another famous story: that of Montaigne *personally making the trip* to see the cannibals. Montaigne was not able to go all the way to the Amazon, but in 1562 he made the effort to go to Rouen (522 km away, after all) to see a cannibal who had been brought to France by the explorer Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon (Montaigne 1588/1992, I.xxxi, “Des Cannibales,” 213). Montaigne made the journey because he believed in the necessary role of experience in forming theories, rather than just relying on the accounts of others. There is a strong sense here of ‘I saw’, ‘I experienced’, ‘I was there’; like the traveler. Here, the difference between someone who has physically crossed an ocean and been imprisoned by cannibals, like Hans von Staden (who was almost eaten by the Tupinamba, but partly owed his escape to their desire to wait for a certain species of berry to be ripe, which they liked to eat with human flesh: von Staden 1557/2008) and Montaigne, plays almost no role.

Montaigne derived from this experience what is probably the *fundamentum inconcussum* or Archimedean point of Western cultural relativism. Some cannibal habits only seem barbarian to those who

call barbarism whatever is not [their] own practice . . . These nations, then, seem to me barbarous in this sense, that they have been fashioned very little by the human mind, and are still very close to their original naiveté. The laws of nature still rule them, very little

corrupted by ours; and they are in such a state of purity that I am sometimes displeased
that they were unknown earlier, in the days when there were men able to judge them better
than us.¹⁸

Montaigne comments that “we may well call them barbarians, with respect to the
rules of reason, but not with respect to ourselves, as we surpass them in every kind
of barbarity” (210).

There is plenty of this usage of ‘proximal exotica’ in later radical thought: La
Mettrie slightly modifies the trope of the wild child with this reference to the ‘known
fact’ that in Poland, there are cases of kindly mother bears kidnapping newborn
babies and then raising them with as much affection as their own young.¹⁹ More
broadly, and more durably, travel accounts of animal species, typically ones like the
purported orang-outang, which disturb species boundaries (Tyson, Monboddo, La
Mettrie) can be used, along with some standard quotations from Bayle, Montaigne
and going back further, Lucretius, to support a theory of ‘animal minds’ which
becomes a centerpiece of clandestine and/or semi-public materialist philosophy.²⁰
As I indicated above, materialism is not in itself either a necessary component of the
figure of the radical savant, or a necessary consequence: thinkers such as Montaigne,
Gassendi or Locke can build a case either for the *legitimacy* of the mores of other
peoples and/or for the *ungrounded* character of our own moral systems and cognitive
apparatus, without deriving from such narratives specific consequences about the
unity of the natural world, or the rejection of any boundary separating humans from
animals (as La Mettrie and Diderot certainly do).

To return to the figure of cannibals, this discussion had more than one use in
radical thought. One can roughly reduce these to three: (i) Montaigne is engaged in
a project of displacement of the familiar; (ii) Locke, when he takes up the cannibals
example in the *Essay*, uses it to support anti-innatist views with respect to what he
calls “practical principles” (that is, moral principles of conduct): he points out that
the Tupinamba tribe in the Amazon considers that a high form of virtue is eating
one’s enemies.

Instances of enormities practised without remorse. But I cannot see how any men should
ever transgress those moral rules, with confidence and serenity, were they innate, and
stamped upon their minds. . . . Have there not been whole nations, and those of the most
civilized people, amongst whom the exposing their children, and leaving them in the fields

¹⁸“Chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n’est pas de son usage. . . . Ces nations me semblent donc ainsi
barbares, pour avoir receu fort peu de façon de l’esprit humain, et estre encore fort voisines de
leur naïfveté originelle. Les loix naturelles leur commandent encores, fort peu abastardies par les
nostres; mais c’est en telle pureté, qu’il me prend quelque fois desplaisir dequoy la cognoissance
n’en soit venuë plustost, du temps qu’il y avoit des hommes qui en eussent sceu mieux juger que
nous” (Montaigne 1588/1992, I.xxxi, 205–206).

¹⁹“On sait maintenant qu’il y a en Pologne des ourses charitables qui enlèvent des nouveaux-nés
laissés sur le seuil d’une porte par une nourrice imprudente, et les élèvent avec autant d’affection
et de bonté que leurs propres petits” (La Mettrie, *Système d’Epicure*, § xxxv).

²⁰A good example of this is chapter 3 of the anonymous manuscript *L’Âme Matérielle* (approx.
1725–1730); see the edition by Alain Niderst (Niderst 2003).

to perish by want or wild beasts has been the practice; as little condemned or scrupled as
 the begetting them? Do they not still, in some countries, put them into the same graves with
 their mothers, if they die in childbirth; or despatch them, if a pretended astrologer declares
 them to have unhappy stars? And are there not places where, at a certain age, they kill or
 expose their parents, without any remorse at all? In a part of Asia, the sick, when their
 case comes to be thought desperate, are carried out and laid on the earth before they are
 dead; and left there, exposed to wind and weather, to perish without assistance or pity. It is
 familiar among the Mingrelians, a people professing Christianity, to bury their children alive
 without scruple. There are places where they eat their own children. The Caribbees were
 wont to geld their children, on purpose to fat and eat them. And Garcilasso de la Vega tells
 us of a people in Peru which were wont to fat and eat the children they got on their female
 captives, whom they kept as concubines for that purpose, and when they were past breeding,
 the mothers themselves were killed too and eaten. The virtues whereby the Toupinambos
 believed they merited paradise, were revenge, and eating abundance of their enemies. They
 have not so much as a name for God, and have no religion, no worship. The saints who are
 canonized amongst the Turks, lead lives which one cannot with modesty relate . . . ²¹

It should also be noted that, comparably to Montaigne's encounter with the
 cannibals, Locke met with Native Americans who had travelled to England from
 North Carolina (Farr 2008, 498), and he discusses their mathematical abilities in
 the *Essay* (II.xvi.6, at Locke 1975, 207); he goes into more detail about Native
 Americans overall in the *Second Treatise of Government*. Locke also owned one of
 the largest collections of travel writing in Britain.

Lastly (iii), examples like that of the cannibals, along with other descriptions of
 the plurality of customs and beliefs observed by travelers, are used in the constitu-
 tion of the earliest explicitly *atheistic* arguments, since they are employed to rebut or
 weaken arguments for the existence of God. Of course, the testimony of travelers is
 also used to support the idea of a "universal consent" to the existence of God (going
 back to the *locus classicus* in Cicero, who suggested in the *Disputationes tusculanes*,
 I.xiii, that all peoples, even if they have false ideas, possess an idea of the gods –
 a kind of unanimity which should be considered a law of nature; Kors 1990, 138);
 and Pierre Bayle in turn will criticize this 'unanimity' argument for legitimizing,
 e.g. polytheism.²² Conversely, well-known texts such as the Jesuit Bartoloméo de
 Las Casas' 1527 *Historia de las Indias* will argue that there is no people, however
 "barbarous," who can be denied membership in the "Christian family."²³ Similarly,
 Joseph-François Lafitau's 1724 *Mœurs des sauvages américains, comparees aux*
moeurs des premiers temps is an ethnographic document which insists on the innate

²¹Locke 1975, I.iii.9, at Locke 1975, 70–71; for further discussion of Locke's anti-innatism in the context of travel narratives, see Carey 2006, ch. 3 (who notes, among other things, the influence of Gassendi's *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus aristoteleos*, written 1624–1626, published in his *Opera Omnia* in 1658). A similar focus on the Tupinambas is found in La Forge 1666, 354; on the Tupinamba as somehow paradigmatic cannibals, see Lestringant 1997.

²²"On ne prescrit pas *contre la vérité* par la tradition générale et par le consentement unanime de tous les peuples" (*Pensées diverses sur la comète*, § xlv, in Bayle 1727–1731, III, 53).

²³Pagden 1993, 69. That Las Casas, who was consistently an advocate of indigenous rights, was at one stage Bishop of Chiapas may seem to us an odd irony of history (thinking down to the present day's EZLN and Subcomandante Marcos).

religiosity of an indigenous population (here, Native Americans in Canada), in order to “deflat[e] the atheistic potential in cross-cultural comparison by arguing that all peoples had religions consistent with Christianity or had perverted them” (Garrett 2005, 186). But in the type of narrative I am retracing here, narratives of cannibals and other instances of early cultural relativism are directly used, alongside or similarly to reports on Chinese religion or philosophy, as argumentative ‘planks’ for Occidental atheism. However, before pursuing this atheistic development, I want to insist a bit more on the dimension of ‘unfamiliarity’ and ‘displacement’.

8.4 Novelty, Unfamiliarity and Estrangement

Crucially, this new, unfamiliar knowledge also has a disturbing dimension: it produces a sense of estrangement or alienation ((what used to be called *Entfremdung*); or, to use another over-determined word from another generation, part of what is emerging here is The Other. Quite different from the endlessly recycled tale we probably owe to Husserl’s *Crisis* (which is then reborn for each generation like a phoenix, e.g. as ‘the Death of Nature’), that the flowering of natural science we associate with the Scientific Revolution ‘cuts us off from the world’, producing alienation, creating a permanent divide between the world of quantity and laws of nature, and the world of quality and values, my claim is that humanism, the New Science, the challenge to Aristotelianism, and so forth, usher in a new *disquiet*, a sense that essentialism (including species fixism, however much Aristotle may or may not have believed in it: Wilkins 2009, 15–21) is false. To put it differently, the narrative of decline that is sometimes reiterated about the Scientific Revolution, ‘modernity’ and the like tells us that the new knowledge produced in early modern natural philosophy divorces us from the world of meaning and value, in favor of a ‘positivistic’ world of facts, quantities and laws of nature. In contrast, the story told here stresses that this new knowledge, produced inseparably by experimentation, voyages, natural history, philology, Orientalism, etc., does not usher in a confident era of science so much as a new sense of the world as *unfamiliar*. Consider again Montaigne:

Until this time, all these miracles and strange events were hidden to me – I have never seen monster nor miracle in the world more explicit than myself: One becomes familiar with anything strange over time. But the more I brood and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me. The less I understand myself.²⁴

As Tristan Dagron comments in an essay on Cardano, Montaigne and Vanini, here “Nature has ceased to be a ‘world’. The rule which governs the arrangement and the relationship of things is no longer that which guarantees the harmony and

²⁴*Essais*, III, xi, “Des boiteux,”: “Jusques à cette heure tous ces miracles, et événements étranges, se cachent devant moi – Je n’ai vu monstre et miracle au monde plus exprès que moi-même: On s’appivoise à toute étrangeté par l’usage et le temps, Mais plus je me hante et me connais, plus ma difformité m’étonne. Moins je m’entends en moi” (Montaigne 1588/1992, 1029).

unity of a totality, but rather the ‘rule’ of dispersion, variety and vicissitudinous becoming which transforms everything into everything” (Dagron 2005, 55). In a broader sense which I shall not discuss here, this is the sense that modernity is in its essence defined by crisis – political, metaphysical and so on.²⁵

We might take as the most vivid illustration of this inner disturbance in the Western ethos, the monster (Curran et al. 1997; Wolfe 2005). Without wanting to play up an ‘irrationalist’ history of science, there is a sense in which the fascination with monsters from the late Renaissance well into the early Enlightenment is not a steady process of naturalization and demystification of ‘folk biology’ towards a measurable, quantifiable scientific account of anomalies in biological development, but rather a kind of crisis of anthropocentrism in which a burgeoning skepticism tries to find support in the new empirical ‘sciences’ but instead just contributes to a growing sense of strangeness (not to say *Unheimlichkeit!*). Exploration narratives during the earlier part of this period are filled with this hope to discover monstrous races: “Who has not seen monsters, has not traveled.”²⁶ But in some cases it is good enough to have intimate familiarity with accounts of monsters, or, as we saw with Montaigne (who devotes another chapter of his *Essais* [II, xxx], to the case of a monstrous child), to have some partially direct contact with the exotic. As regards familiarity and strangeness, travel and internal exoticism (or deterritorialization and reterritorialization), an entire study could be written on the way some of the classic travel *cum* natural history narratives, such as Pierre Boaistuau’s 1560 *Histoires prodigieuses*, can move imperceptibly from tales of giant serpents or the unknown properties of certain precious stones, to the “wondrous (*prodigieuses*) stories of the Jews” (Boaistuau 1560, ch. X); Boaistuau probably doesn’t mean this as a compliment.

But the moral I derive from the emergence of this form of knowledge is not the wonderful irreducibility of the strange and the preternatural, à la Lorraine Daston (2000). Nor, granted, is it the *extension of the world of the known*. Rather, “the more I brood and know myself, the more my deformity astonishes me. The less I understand myself”: there is a recognition of the *destabilizing force* of the world of the unknown. This may usefully be compared to Jean Céard’s distinction between two different strategies employed by early modern naturalists faced with

²⁵Koselleck 1959/1988; Negri and Hardt 2000. There would be more to say here about ‘global reach’ and stages or forms of globalization (not so much in debates over economic cycles, concerning work such as Wallerstein’s and Arrighi’s – Wallerstein 1980; Arrighi 1995, 2007 – but rather, concerning early forms of globalization, via Christianity and the like). While I am obviously borrowing some aspects of Israel’s notion of ‘radical Enlightenment’, I am not using either his distinction between a moderate and a radical Enlightenment, or his focus on Spinoza and Spinozism as a driving force in the movement. Indeed, not all of the radical savants discussed here are political radicals in any straightforward sense. From the *libertins érudits* to La Mettrie, one can conceptually plan the destruction of an existing order – a metaphysical order, a religious order – without having any interest in the democratization of knowledge and thus in political revolutions; as I mention below, a ‘closet radical’ like La Mothe Le Vayer can explicitly oppose his own cosmopolitanism and free-thinking attitude towards customs and norms, to the entrenched prejudice of the common folk – without seeking to emend the latter.

²⁶Kappler 1980, 115: “[Q]ui n’a pas vu de monstres, n’a pas voyagé.”

unknown species and races, in which what I am discussing is closest to the 423
Franciscan priest and explorer André Thevet's warning, in his 1558 *Singularitez* 424
de la France antarctique, autrement nommée Amérique, that we should *not* inscribe 425
new discoveries under the heading of what we know: 426

Here are admirable facts of nature, and as she likes to do things grandly, diversely, and for 427
the most part, incomprehensible, and admirable to men. It would therefore be impertinent 428
to seek their cause and reason, like many try to do on a daily basis: because this is a real 429
secret of nature, whose knowledge is reserved for the creator alone.²⁷ 430

This does not sound like much of a program for building knowledge, however 431
radical. And there is a sense in which the inheritors of this line of thought – people 432
like La Mettrie, Buffon and Diderot (and possibly Joseph Priestley and Erasmus 433
Darwin on the other side of the Channel, in the next generation) – *are* committed 434
to building cognitive edifices, even if these do not always resemble strictly natural- 435
philosophical endeavours (“Do you see this egg? With this you can overthrow all 436
the schools of theology, all the churches of the world.”²⁸) But this is after all a 437
problem inherent in the concept of deterritorialization itself: how are you meant to 438
build something on it? 439

8.5 “Mummy, are Hunchbacks French?”²⁹ 440

I've said earlier that a narrative such as that of the cannibals – or that of monsters, or 441
that of navigation to ‘America’ – has several possible radical, destabilizing uses, and 442
precisely these need not be collapsed into some purely internalized Pascalian fright 443
and contemplation. It is a destabilization *in* and *of* knowledge, which however can 444
also be *productive of* knowledge (but then the question is, *which* knowledge or at 445
least *what sort of* knowledge? And it is not clear that the work of the radical savant 446
flows in any linear fashion into the emergence of a positive science; an exile – a 447
thinker and agent of deterritorialization – is unlikely to be the Secretary of any 448
learned society³⁰). The classic example of this is what is often stressed about the 449

²⁷Thevet, *Singularitez* . . . , f. 99a, quoted in Céard 1977/1996, 312. Thevet's work is known in good part also for its description of Brazilian cannibals. In his later *Cosmographie universelle* Thevet devotes a chapter to “Why I call this land ‘Antarctic France’ which others falsely call the Indies” (Thevet 1575, Bk. XXI, ch. 3; vol. II, 911a). “Car étant cette terre découverte de notre temps, si grande comme elle est ce serait simplese que de la soumettre au nom particulier de l'Inde”; “Car l'Inde est orientale et l'Antarctique est toute méridionale: le Pérou, Mexique, la Floride entre l'Équateur et le Pôle Arctique. Par quoi vous pouvez voir la faute de plusieurs hommes de notre siècle.” Quoted and discussed in Hoquet 2005.

²⁸Diderot, *Rêve de D'Alembert* (approx. 1769), in Diderot 1994, 618. I discuss Diderot's ‘biological Spinozism’ and the emergence of ‘biology’ as a science in Wolfe 2011.

²⁹Hugo, *Choses vues*, August 3d 1846, in Hugo 1987, 600; Wolfe 2008.

³⁰As regards the relation of the radical savant to institutions, it was easy enough, in the set of distinctions with which I began, to oppose the ‘company man’ à la Boyle to the solitary Descartes

discovery and conquest of America: that by doing so, Europe is “not just discovering 450
 an unknown geographical space,” but also, an unnerving sense of its own past, “that 451
 the accumulated wisdom of the Ancients might be, if not entirely false, at least 452
 seriously flawed” (Pagden 1993, 89): an oft-cited and early instance of this is the 453
 Jesuit José de Acosta’s comment on his journey to the ‘Indies’ (Acosta had a leading 454
 role in the Jesuit mission, and was later the rector of the University of Salamanca 455
 and advisor to King Phillip II): 456

I will describe what happened to me when I passed to the Indies. Having read what poets 457
 and philosophers write of the Torrid Zone, I persuaded myself that when I came to the 458
 Equator, I would not be able to endure the violent heat, but it turned out otherwise . . . For 459
 when I passed (the Equator) . . . I felt so cold . . . What could I do but laugh at Aristotle’s 460
Meteorology and his philosophy? For in that place and season, where everything by his rules 461
 should have been scorched by the heat, I and my companions were cold.³¹ 462

More is at stake here than a wrong map, or even the anxiety experienced when 463
 one realizes that the parent or authority figure can be wrong, or conversely the 464
 gleefulness with which some of the free-thinkers could catalogue instances in which 465
 reports from travelers refute Biblical stories and geographies, or more recent tales 466
 of wonders and marvels (La Mothe Le Vayer’s *Remarques géographiques* is filled 467
 with such reports, including also naturalistic *confirmations* of wondrous tales: faced 468
 with denials of a tale of oysters growing on trees on a certain island, he reports 469
 that in Madagascar, orange and lemon trees grow on the beaches, and that after 470
 a particularly high tide there can be oysters left hanging on the tree branches, 471
 Moreau 2010, 56). There is a sense, both of a profound disturbance in the ‘fabric’ 472
 of knowledge, and concomitantly of a disturbance in one’s *self-knowledge*. 473

This sense that the authoritative texts need to be abandoned in turn engenders a 474
weakening of the dominant European narrative which is not merely non-colonial or 475
 non-exploitative (Las Casas) or culturally relativistic (Montaigne, Locke, Diderot). 476
 For it is perfectly possible to ‘meet the Other and understand him’ as part of this 477

and the radical Boyer d’Argens or La Mettrie. But this leaves out the role, primarily in the next
 century, of institutions such as dissenting academies, which precisely trace their roots to individuals
 who could not get into Oxford and Cambridge in the late seventeenth century (thanks to John
 Gascoigne for this point). One could also point to Protestant, sometimes Huguenot-based scientific
 clubs in the early Enlightenment in places such as The Hague (discussed in Jacob 2006) – but
 they were secret. A point closer to my own narrative is that the radical usage of, e.g., philology
 is definitely not a solitary enterprise; texts such as the *Treatise of the Three Impostors* emerged in
 milieus such as the Berlin salons of the early 1700s. By the next century, a heterodox institution
 such as the Lunar Society of Birmingham appears, at which James Watt, Joseph Priestley, Matthew
 Boulton and Erasmus Darwin meet, with a shared ‘materialist’ goal focusing on the practical,
public consequences of the knowledge produced therein.

³¹ José de Acosta, *De Natura novi orbis libri duo* (Salamanca 1589), later entitled *Historia natural
 y moral de las Indias*, translated into French by Robert Regnault or Regnauld as *Histoire naturelle
 et morale des Indes tant orientales qu’occidentales* (Paris: Orry, 1598), II, ch. IX, in Acosta 1617,
 63b. John Gascoigne describes Acosta’s *History* as “a pioneering work of anthropology and natural
 history” (Gascoigne 2010). For discussion see Duchet 1971/1995 and Abbattista and Minuti, eds.,
 2006.

dominant narrative; indeed, Tzvetan Todorov has suggested that the extraordinary 478
 success with which the European has colonized and assimilated the Other is “chiefly 479
 due to their capacity to understand the other” (Todorov 1984, 248). Montaigne’s 480
 brooding – but also the fascination with monsters – is something else again: not the 481
 transparency of ‘know the other, know thyself’ but the opacity and ‘exoticism’ of 482
 “the more I brood” . . . 483

One could ask if and how the problem of grasping the existence of the monster 484
 translates into voyages of discovery which problematize national identity (whether 485
 via the savage purity of the Americas or the higher refinement of China); it is 486
 tempting to answer with an example from natural languages, here, Russian, in 487
 which the word for monster is *urod*, namely, that which stands apart from the 488
rodina, the motherland (Lecouteux 1999, 11), the place of birth. Or from everyday 489
 life, as reported by Victor Hugo: “I saw a hunchback pass in the street. A little 490
 girl nearby stared at him in surprise and said to her mother: ‘Mummy, look at that 491
 man!’ ‘Well, my child, do not look at him, he doesn’t like that. He is a hunchback’. 492
 ‘Mummy, are hunchbacks French?’”³² Whether in faraway accounts or at home, 493
 the monster is not merely a natural category but one which expresses a-nationality 494
 or a-territoriality. It is no longer very bold or original, after all, to note that our 495
 conceptions of Nature – as order, as norm, as source of value – are never neutral, 496
 which is to say that they are always valuative. 497

8.6 Confucius as Spinoza: Travel and Atheism 498

Travel narratives, whether they showcase the unadorned *peaux-rouges* of the New 499
 World or the highly educated Chinese scholar, perturb both a sense of familiarity 500
 about oneself and one’s ‘world’, and some of its foundational tenets; pushed to 501
 the extreme, they yield an argument for atheism, indeed, a variety of different 502
 arguments for atheism. Here is Locke again – someone who was certainly not an 503
 atheist himself – juxtaposing Caribbean tribes and “the literati of China” as evidence 504
 for stable, and *morally stable* practices of atheism: 505

Idea of God not innate. If any idea can be imagined innate, the idea of God may, of all 506
 others, for many reasons, be thought so; since it is hard to conceive how there should be 507
 innate moral principles, without an innate idea of a Deity. Without a notion of a law-maker, 508
 it is impossible to have a notion of a law, and an obligation to observe it. Besides the atheists 509
 taken notice of amongst the ancients, and left branded upon the records of history, hath 510
 not navigation discovered, in these later ages, whole nations, at the bay of Soldania, in 511
 Brazil [*here Locke mentions de Léry, CW*], [in Boranday,] and in the Caribbee islands, &c., 512
 amongst whom there was to be found no notion of a God, no religion? . . . These are 513
 instances of nations where uncultivated nature has been left to itself, without the help of 514
 letters and discipline, and the improvements of arts and sciences. But there are others to 515
 be found who have enjoyed these in a very great measure, who yet, for want of a due 516
 application of their thoughts this way, want the idea and knowledge of God. It will, I doubt 517
 not, be a surprise to others, as it was to me, to find the Siamites of this number. But for this, 518

³²Hugo, *Choses vues*, August 3d 1846, in Hugo 1987, 600; Wolfe 2008.

let them consult the King of France's late envoy thither, who gives no better account of the Chinese themselves. And if we will not believe La Loubere, the missionaries of China, even the Jesuits themselves, the great encomiasts of the Chinese, do all to a man agree, and will convince us, that the sect of the literari, or learned, keeping to the old religion of China, and the ruling party there, are all of them atheists. Vid. Navarette, in the *Collection of Voyages*, vol. i., and *Historia Cultus Sinensium*. And perhaps, if we should with attention mind the lives and discourses of people not so far off, we should have too much reason to fear, that many, in more civilized countries, have no very strong and clear impressions of a Deity upon their minds, and that the complaints of atheism made from the pulpit are not without reason. . . . (*Essay*, Liv.8, Locke 1975, 87–88).

China actually plays the largest role here: “the sect of the literari, or learned, keeping to the old religion of China, and the ruling party there, are all of them atheists.” And throughout the next two generations, radical (and frequently clandestine, anonymous) texts multiply references to China, most often in support of a program of (European) radicalism. The anonymous author of the manuscript *Les Doutes des Pirroniens* (*Doubts of the Pyrrhonians*, dated circa 1696–1711) illustrates the possibility of a republic of atheists precisely by referring to Chinese society:

The dominant Religion of the great empire of China, particularly that of its magistrates, is pure Atheism; as they believe in the eternity of the world, know no other God but the Spirit or the Active Virtue of the Sky, and do not believe in the immortality of the soul, or in rewards and punishments after death.³³

Now, further on in the text the author revises his claim somewhat and calls this “dominant Religion” “a kind of Atheism or Deism” (fol. 89), and then concedes that it may be improper to call them Atheists per se, since (“like the Egyptians”) they hold that the eternal matter of the universe is animated by a kind of divine soul (fol. 90). This sort of clandestine usage of China, while it is not an extreme (or ‘strong’) case of deterritorialization, is nevertheless saying more than just ‘in China they do things better than us’. It is building on Pierre Bayle’s idea that China amounted to “a society of atheists – millions of them – who seemed to be living civilized and honorable lives. This seemed to cast doubt on the need for any religious basis for morality if so large a society as China could operate without religion” (Popkin 2003, 271). In another anonymous manuscript, this one from approximately 1770, entitled *Dialogues sur l’âme* (*Dialogues on the Soul*), the narrator describes how difficult it is to find the home in Paris of a philosopher he has heard discuss the materiality of the soul. Then he comments: “In China people would have known. It is not that their cities are any smaller or less populated; but there, it is by merit that people are placed in the first rank.”³⁴ Similarly, one of the many versions of the

³³“La Religion dominante du vaste Empire de la Chine, qui est particulièrement celle des Magistrats, est le pur Athéisme ; puisqu’ils croyent l’éternité du monde, qu’ils ne connoissent point d’autre Dieu, que l’Esprit, ou la Vertu Active du Ciel, et enfin qu’ils ne croyent pas à l’immortalité de l’ame, non plus qu’aux peines et recompenses après la mort” (Anon., *Doutes des Pirroniens*, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, ms. 15191, f. 40, cit. in Benítez 2007).

³⁴Anon., *Dialogues sur l’âme*, ms. Bibliothèque Mazarine 1191, I, fol. 109–110, cit. in Benítez 1996b, 403.

Treatise of the Three Impostors, by the 'atheist priest' Etienne Guillaume, opposes Moses and Jesus to Socrates, Plato and Confucius in order to argue that the latter three are more ethically and intellectually admirable than the former two (Israel 2006, 714).

Henry de Boulainvillier's materialist-Spinozist usage of China is more explicitly that of a radical savant. Boulainvillier (as he preferred to spell his name) was the author of several chemical treatises of the Helmontian variety, a primer of Port-Royal logic, and rather more influential works of historical scholarship on the origins of monarchy (and a less-known history of Mohammed). But in addition, he translated Spinoza's *Ethics* and wrote some of the most penetrating commentaries on the latter's work. Curiously for our purposes, Boulainvillier explains that after reading several refutations of Spinoza, what finally convinced him to return to the texts of the Dutch thinker was the publication of the "doctrine of the Chinese" in the volumes of the Jesuit missions.³⁵ In his 1731 *Essai de métaphysique*, Boulainvillier plays a complex rhetorical game: he simultaneously (a) praises Confucius over and above any Western thinker, (b) uses the cultural prestige that the name and figure of Confucius had at the time to legitimize (Eurocentric) radical thought, by describing Confucius as an atheist and a materialist, and (c) tries to defend or rehabilitate the dreaded name of Spinoza, by saying that according to the Jesuits, Confucius is given the highest honours in his country; and his ideas are really not so different from Spinoza; thus it should not be such a scandal to admire Spinoza. Boulainvillier is building here on the Baylean image of a country populated by millions of 'virtuous atheists'.

It is important not to confuse this clandestine articulation of Spinoza and Confucius with the negative portrayal of Spinoza, the metaphysician of One Substance, as somehow 'Oriental' (and thus not really legitimately part of Western philosophy; the trope of 'Spinoza the Oriental' was already used by Bayle, and goes straight through to Hegel³⁶). In the clandestine context, assimilating Spinoza and Confucius could mean a praise of Chinese anteriority, a diminishment of the purported originality of a radical European thinker, or a *Lettres persanes*-style fictitious critique of Eurocentrism. (The cultural prestige of Confucius was such that, as noted by Nicholas Dew, the influential 1687 collection of Confucius' writings, the Jesuit-prepared *Confucius, Philosopher of the Chinese (Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive Scientia Sinensis Latinè exposita)*, received a review in the influential *Journal des Sçavans*, that was literally 7 times longer than that of Newton's *Principia* in the same year, i.e., 7 pages to 1 page.³⁷) However, one

³⁵Henri de Boulainvilliers (correct spelling Boulainvillier, which apparently he was very attached to, as Renée Simon indicates in her introduction to volume 1 of his works), *Essai de métaphysique* (1731), in Boulainvilliers 1973, I, 84. See also Bove 2008. On Boulainvillier's relation to libertine salon culture see Wade 1938, 97–123.

³⁶On Spinoza, 'the Oriental' see Hulin 1983. On the more positive Spinoza-Confucius parallels see Israel 2001, 588, 2006, ch. 25.

³⁷For the review of the *Principia: Journal des Sçavans* (Amsterdam), August 2, 1688, 128; for the review of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, Jan. 5, 1688, 5–12. See discussion in Dew 2009,

should not think that all clandestine discussions of China are univocally positive; 592
 some also challenge its form of government, as in Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger's 593
Recherches sur l'origine du despotisme oriental, published in 1761 by d'Holbach. 594
 For Boulanger, the Chinese form of government is an obstacle to progress, to the 595
 extent that 1 day, "the Chinese will be the unhappiest people of the earth" (§ 23).³⁸ 596
 This becomes a classic trope in Helvétius, Mably and others. 597

8.7 Radical Erudition

598

But to return to the radical savant, his discussion of types of knowledge, beliefs 599
 and doctrines from China and elsewhere is definitely a kind of *erudition* at work (in 600
 the sense of the *libertins érudits* onwards, that is, the group of 'gentlemen virtuosi' 601
 under protection of powerful patrons who pursued sceptical and Epicurean forms of 602
 erudition in the seventeenth century, such as François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588– 603
 1672), tutor to the Duc d'Anjou (the brother of Louis XIV) and overall skeptical man 604
 of letters, who Popkin dismisses rather cruelly as "an insipid Montaigne" (Popkin 605
 2003, 83) and Gabriel Naudé (1600–1653), author of the famous *Considérations* 606
politiques sur les coups d'État, member of the Académie française, and secretary 607
 to Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin and to Queen Christina of Sweden; Pintard 608
 1943/1983). In direct contradistinction to the way much globalized knowledge 609
 is reincorporated in national usage (the Bacon-Linnaeus model), the production 610
 of knowledge as deterritorialization is, to a great extent, the usage of forms of 611
 exotic knowledge (whether about the past, through philology, or distant territories, 612
 through travel narratives) in the service of a challenging or a weakening of national 613
 narratives. As previously noted, it does not matter whether the travel is actual 614
 or virtual in this case; one also thinks of the role of utopias, notably Cyrano's 615
 1648 *Etats et empires du soleil*, to which one may possibly add Kepler's 1634 616
Somnium (see Ofer Gal's essay "Two Bohemian Journeys" here) and Fontenelle's 617
 1686 *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, which explicitly says that when we 618
 are faced with the possibility of walking on the moon, we are in the position of the 619
 inhabitants of America before it was discovered by Columbus. 620

206–207, and more generally Mungello 1998, 90 f. The text was produced by at least seventeen Jesuit missionaries, with the help of many Chinese interlocutors, across almost a century. It gave Latin translations of three of the 'Four Books' (*Sishu*) that the Jesuits had identified as the core of the Confucian canon: the *Great Learning* (the *Daxue*), the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), and the *Analects* (*Lunyu*); the *Mengzi* or *Mencius*, was left out (Dew 2009, 210).

³⁸In a note to this section Boulanger uses the term 'despotism': "L'empire de la Chine demontre la sublime speculation des premiers hommes qui ont cru se rendre heureux en etablissant un gouvernement semblable a celui du ciel, il ne faut cependant pas croire que le gouvernement chinois puisse justifier les theocraties terrestres par ce que les beaux traits de l'histoire de la chine ne peuvent pas contrebalancer les maux que le despotisme y a causé et qu'il cause chez les autres nations."

Just as the travel narratives could be used as evidence for the existence of ‘mil- 621
lions of virtuous atheists’, or as support for Spinozism, or more modestly to stress 622
the skeptical point that we might not have absolute knowledge of, e.g. morality, 623
given the variety of customs in different parts of the world (hence we should suspend 624
judgment, the skeptical *epoche*), similarly, our interpretive categories should not 625
boil down to a monolithic definition of the radical savant. The *weaker* form of the 626
destabilizing, deterritorializing force of a certain type of knowledge or discovery, 627
is captured by studies of the rise of early modern skepticism such as Richard 628
Popkin’s. Namely, tales of worlds beyond the familiar oceans, the size of their 629
animals, whether one is hot or cold at the crossing of the Equator, or whether the 630
theologies of the Indians or Chinese or Native Americans confirm, challenge or 631
are neutral with respect to the narrative of Scripture certainly call into question 632
the reliability of knowledge as such. But the *stronger* form of this radicalism goes 633
beyond the skeptical motif (Charron, Montaigne, La Mothe Le Vayer, possibly 634
Locke), according to which exotic knowledge “functioned for thinkers of the period 635
as an emblem of the problem of knowledge-making in general” (Dew 2009, 235). It 636
carries the disturbance further. Of course, the natural response here is to inquire into 637
the exact status of this deterritorialized – or better, *deterritorializing* – knowledge. 638
Clearly, this is not ‘colonial’, ‘imperial’, or ‘mercantile’ knowledge which would 639
let itself be subsumed into a project of national or royal glory, but it also does 640
not seem to fit the obvious opposite model – itself quite legitimately ‘radical’: 641
that of a ‘knowledge from below’ (whether this is taken in a more Marxist sense: 642
Rancière 1981; Moulier Boutang 1998, or a more post-Marxist sense, including 643
that of Foucault: Fehér 1982/1987). In that case, what type of knowledge is being 644
produced here? 645

In some cases, there is a ‘weakly deterritorialized’ form of knowledge which 646
we can view as somehow cosmopolitan or at least anti-provincial, as when the 647
vitalist physicians in Montpellier warn against underestimating the importance and 648
sophistication of Chinese sphygmology (medicine of the pulse), in comparison to 649
Western medicine, or earlier – and more metaphorically – La Mothe Le Vayer’s 650
insistence that the best years of his life were spent outside his country, travel having 651
freed his mind from the constraint of local customs: a freedom opposed to the inertia 652
of “the common people” (*la multitude*, cit. in Dew 2009, 147; see also Moreau 653
2010). In other cases, there is a kind of exoticism which sometimes becomes, 654
or is reappropriated as, what I have termed ‘radical exotica’ (Montaigne, Boyer 655
d’Argens) or an entirely non-exotic, but strongly relativist case for weakening our 656
confidence in the mores and norms of our societies (as in Locke). Here, current 657
post-colonial or ‘global knowledge’ theory would insist on the way in which even 658
parochial knowledge is actually always already hybridized.³⁹ But, following Tristan 659
Dagron, I am more concerned with instances in which the new knowledge is 660
genuinely destabilizing (whether or not it is genuinely new – after all, a form 661

³⁹For redefinitions of the scientific knowledge collected at the “periphery” and processed at the “center” see Gruzinski 1999 and White 1991, and for the case of Newton see Schaffer 2009.

of atheist argument can be found as early as Tertullian, who is rediscovered in early modern radical theological texts by Henry Layton and others, including, more critically, by Malebranche; Thomson (2008), so that travelers like José Acosta and André Thevet can insist that we not inscribe new discoveries under the heading of what we know. In addition, the radical savant is not engaged in an enterprise of stable knowledge-gathering with relatively well defined goals, as would be the case of the natural philosopher (allowing for exceptions).

8.8 Conclusion

I have tried to describe, rather summarily, the difference but also relations between several kinds of modernizing discourses, all of which share

- (i) a certain overdetermined relation to travel (whether travel narratives, translations of scientific or theological texts from e.g. China, or personal encounters with 'otherness' like Montaigne going to meet the cannibal chieftains), and as we have seen, the travel can be actual or virtual;
- (ii) a 'radical' tendency to want to either start afresh, from the foundations upwards (Bacon), or at least focus on the production of new knowledge, including with reference to the worlds beyond the seas (Bacon again, Linnaeus).
- (iii) Subtly different from the latter category would be a case like the vitalist appropriation of (and praise for) Chinese medical knowledge. It is not so nationalistic (I called it 'cosmopolitan') but shares with the Baconian kind of program a cumulative attitude towards knowledge.

Moving towards the more specific definition of the radical savant as a thinker *in* and *of* deterritorialization, we come to cultural relativism, which does not have to directly entail either atheism or materialism, and which fuels two distinct projects: cognitive analyses such as Locke's anti-innatism, and more political analyses such as Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), including the critique of sexual repression in Western society, and his contribution to Raynal's *Histoire des Deux-Indes* (1781); and sometimes these two projects – sensationist or empiricist arguments about how the mind is 'furnished' with its ideas through the senses and relativistic travel narratives – come together in one individual, such as the great traveler and empiricist philosopher François Bernier (c.1625–1688).⁴⁰ Similarly, accounts presenting Confucianism as a kind of unproblematic,

⁴⁰Bernier lived for years in Mughal India and wrote a massively successful multi-volume history *cum* political and anthropological study of the peoples and customs of South Asia, the 1670 *Histoire de la dernière Révolution des Etats du Grand Mogol* (Bernier 1670, translated at the time as *The History of the Late Revolution of the Empire of the Great Mogol*, Bernier 1671; see the excellent analysis in Dew 2009, ch. 3), but was *also* a pupil of Gassendi who wrote the most influential summary of the latter's philosophy, the equally massive *Abrégé de la philosophie de Gassendi* (Bernier 1678), which influenced Locke amongst others in the articulation of a hedonistic

and morally worthy Spinozism of the East, which I shall discuss below, certainly 694
can be part of an atheistic narrative, without having to be so. However, Montaigne's 695
 brooding –and also the fascination with monsters – is something else again. The 696
 more naturalistic *and more destabilizing* analysis of phenomena such as monsters, is 697
 the recognition of the presence of a kind of knowledge which is not just the confident 698
 intention to 'revise our maps and fill in the blanks'. It is a deterritorialization in the 699
 sense of a *disturbance in the foundational certainties of a territory*. 700

Recalling Deleuze-Guattari's example of Kafka as the practitioner of a "minor 701
 literature" which deterritorializes the 'native' lands and languages in which he found 702
 himself, we might say the paramount case, not of the early modern radical savant 703
 in particular, but of deterritorialization, is Creole languages.⁴¹ Or, to use another 704
 vocabulary, the radical savant as discussed here is not a thinker of Empire but of 705
 'multitude' (Negri and Hardt 2000), where Empire is the name for a system that 706
 seeks to facilitate globalization as a 'closed system' of increased efficiency, and 707
 'multitude' is the name for that part, or mirror image, or monstrous double of Empire 708
 in which globalization becomes an 'open system': 709

The multitude must be able to decide if, when and where it moves. It must have the right also 710
 to stay still and enjoy one place rather than being forced to be constantly on the move. *The* 711
general right to control its own movement is the multitude's ultimate demand for global 712
citizenship. This demand is radical insofar as it challenges the fundamental apparatus of 713
 imperial control over the production and life of the multitude. (Negri and Hardt 2000, 400, 714
 authors' emphasis). 715

Just as the radical savant is neither the fluid 'go-between', traveler, diplomat, 716
 mercenary, nor the *Weltbürger* who feels equally at home in any environment, 717
 the condition described here is not tantamount to cosmopolitanism or "extrater- 718
 ritoriality" (Siegfried Kracauer's word, itself borrowed from Georg Simmel, for 719
 the condition of thought which necessarily requires an 'outside' or exteriority; Jay 720
 1986; Jeanpierre 2005). It is also a radicalism which rejects 'Empire' (as is manifest 721
 in the Diderot-Raynal *Histoire des deux-Indes*, for instance, with its lucid critical 722
 remarks on colonialism and commerce). These travelers, actual and virtual, erudite 723
 and self-taught, are not so interested in the self-contemplation of their own otherness 724
 (although La Mettrie plays a lot with his exiled situation at Frederick's court and this 725
 doubtless fuels the dark humor with which he contributes to the myth of "Monsieur 726
 Machine" or "Herrn Maschine") as in the contemplation of otherness *tout court* 727
 (first step, as with monstrosity, exotica, etc.) and then in the proclamation of a 728
 deterritorialized knowledge (second step, as in the integration of figures such as 729
 Confucius and Spinoza, in the *Doutes des Pirroniens* or Boulainvillier). Of course 730

motivational psychology, and an 'empiricist' account of cognition and the formation of ideas
 (Milton 2000).

⁴¹A recent discussion of 'Creoleness' by major Francophone Caribbean authors has it this way:
 "Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles. This will be for us
 an interior attitude – better, a vigilance, or even better, a sort of mental envelope in the middle
 of which our world will be built in full consciousness of the outer world" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau,
 Confiant 1989/1993, 75).

these general distinctions themselves contain further subdivisions: thus otherness can go both ways – from Orientalizing Spinoza to using the Chinese discussion to legitimate Western atheism. And even the latter kind of deterritorializing project can remain relatively narrow (like the confrontation with otherness in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*) or open-ended (as in Montaigne).

In discussing these different discourses, I have tried to emphasize the pertinence for 'global knowledge' analyses of a type of thinker who does not travel, except imaginatively, but, in this 'internal exile', plays an important role in perturbing the familiarity of the 'domestic' narrative, whether by stating his "indifference towards men and climates," like Théophile de Viau, conjuring up strange gems, monstrosities, cannibals, or hairy men, like Boaistuau, Cardano, Montaigne and Locke, or conversely by removing the 'strangeness' from Spinozism or atheism, by appeals to Confucianism or Islam. These deterritorialized conceptual performances, sometimes accompanied by a whiff of exoticism, sometimes predominantly bearing the mask of erudition, challenge key national and metaphysical commitments – from our sense of normality/abnormality to the existence of God. This is a far cry from either just exoticism or wonderful strangeness.

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