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Hunting-and-gathering society: an eighteenth-century Scottish invention ¹

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Abstract

Present-day anthropologists and archaeologists have a definite notion that earliest mode of subsistence was hunting-and-gathering or hunting-gathering-and-fishing. However, perhaps contrary to common belief, the idea of the hunter-gatherer did not emerge from empirical studies, nor even from travellers' in the Age of Exploration. Nor did writers commonly cited as having something to say about hunter-gatherers, such as Hobbes or Locke, have any clear notion of the hunter-gatherer at all, much less a clear notion of hunter-gatherer society.

Rousseau invented a kind of forager lifestyle, and Montesquieu had a notion of hunting society, but in neither case were these lifestyles significant to the authors' general theories of the nature of human social life. Rather, the invention of the 'hunter and gatherer' as an exponent of a particular, original and long-lived way of life, came fully into existence and rose to significance with the Scottish Enlightenment. For some writers in this school, notably Adam Smith, the Age of Hunters was largely hypothetical and only of passing significance. Yet Smith, Kames, Ferguson, Millar and others, with their various concerns with evolution, human nature, and economics as the driving force in human relations, developed an understanding of hunter-gatherer society that is, for the first time in history, comparable to that we recognize today. It is only through the eighteenth-century invention of economics that we have a clear idea of hunter-gatherer society; and, through the influence of teachers and writers from that century to this one, that idea has retained a definite and traceable continuity.

This paper will touch on that continuity only in passing. Its main purposes are to demonstration of the significance of hunter-gather society to eighteenth-century Scottish thinkers, and to provide examples of the diverse theories of hunting-and-gathering society that those thinkers created.

In spite of their small numbers, hunter-gatherers have at times been of great significance in social theory as well as in anthropology. However, it is all too easy to assume that peoples we think of as hunter-gatherers were conceived in similar terms in past centuries. Often they were not. We know today that the overwhelming part of humanity's 2,000,000-year existence has been spent in hunting and gathering societies. Our intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did not know this. We know that non-hunter-gather societies evolved from an earlier hunter-gatherer social existence. For seventeenth and even eighteenth-century thinkers, this was not at all obvious. Today the notion of the 'hunter-gatherer' is taken for granted. Even the notion of 'hunting-and-gathering society' is commonplace, among anthropologists, archaeologists, and the general public alike. There is some debate today about whether it is better to speak of hunting-and-gathering society, or instead hunter-gatherer sociality. Tim Ingold (1990; 1999), in particular, advocates the notion that hunter-gatherers live 'socially', but not in 'societies', partly because the notion of 'society' as he sees it is embedded in a discourse of social domination. I will come back to that point later.

My point for now is that, whether we agree or disagree with Ingold, today we all know what is meant by the phrase 'hunting-and-gathering society'. And further, that in spite of that, today's knowledge should not be assumed for past centuries. 'Hunter-gatherer society' or 'hunting-and-gathering society' was in its essence a late eighteenth-century invention, and it came to be realized as meaningful in social theory largely within Scotland. It is important at this point to clarify what I am claiming and what I am not claiming. I do not mean to claim that **no-one** before the eighteenth century or outwith Scotland had any idea of hunting and gathering as preceding other means of subsistence. Nor am I suggesting that **no-one** before had conceived of these means of subsistence as characteristic of early human existence. Rather, what I am arguing is that it was only with the French writer Montesquieu, and more significantly with some of his ideas as developed in eighteenth-century Scotland, that a theoretical understanding of hunter-gatherer society, that is recognizable in anthropology today, comes into being. Moreover, it remains in being as part of a tradition that continues in anthropology to this day.

There are two requirements that need to be met before there can exist a theory of hunter-gatherer society. First, there needs to be a notion of progress with more than two stages -- in other words, to use the language of the day, not simply savage/civilized, barbarous/polished, or brutish/sociable. Rather, we need a notion of at least three or four stages of human social evolution. Secondly, there needs to be a concept of society as based on **economic relations**. The reason for the first requirement (more than two stages) is substantive rather than formal: eighteenth century thinkers and their immediate predecessors simply could not conceive of a dualist classification which placed only hunter-gatherers in one category and all the rest of humanity in the other. The reason for the second is, at the simplest level, that hunting and gathering are by definition economic activities. Any notion of 'hunting-and-gathering society' must therefore be an economic notion; and any theory about such a society must, at least in part, be an economic theory.

Let me add a final disclaimer. The possibility that sixteenth-century Jesuits may have had ideas on hunter-gatherers that influenced the eighteenth-century Scot William Robertson, for example, would not refute my argument. Nor would the suggestion that hunter-gatherers themselves, or their neighbours, would have had a pre-eighteenth-century notion that they lived in a 'society' that did not practise herding or cultivating.² That is, at least in part, because invention as much as discovery is a process of awareness – not necessarily a single event.

Take the analogy of another eighteenth-century phenomenon, the 'discovery' of oxygen. Historians of science debate over who truly discovered oxygen: Carl Wilhelm Scheele, Joseph Priestly, Antoine Lavoisier, all in the 1770s, or even seventeenth-century alchemist Zbigniew Szydlo, 170 years before. There is no single point of discovery, because it all depends on the relation between events (in this case experiments) and the understanding of events in the context of systems of knowledge. Most textbooks credit either Scheele or Priestly with the 'discovery' of oxygen, but Scheele and Priestly defined their experimental results in terms of the (erroneous) phlogiston theory. Lavoisier's supporters point out that only he had a reasonably correct theory of oxygen, as an element within air required for combustion (see, e.g., Donovan 1996).

It is much the same with the invention of hunting-and-gathering society. An accepted set of theoretical premises is required before the concept becomes truly meaningful. That is why, in my view, the best definition of that invention comes through the community of scholars who made up the Scottish Enlightenment – and not with any specific precursor who may have, in passing, remarked on the facts of hunting and gathering, on the sociality of peoples who hunted and gathered, or even on the nature of society in its earliest hunting-and-gathering state. Indeed, common beliefs among pre-Scottish Enlightenment thinkers (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) were either that natural man was a-social, or that natural man was social and tended livestock and grew crops. Insofar as production was meaningful at all for seventeenth-century thinkers, then primeval sociality or society was conceived of in terms of a herding and cultivating lifestyle. ('Sociality', incidentally, is a seventeenth-century concept: *socialitas* in seventeenth-century Latin, usually translated in eighteenth-century Scotland by the word 'sociability'.)

Seventeenth-century precursors

In an article in the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Hunters and Gatherers* (Barnard 1999), I traced ideas on the 'hunter-gatherer' through European social thought from the seventeenth-century Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius, to the contemporary anthropology of writers like Richard Lee, Irven DeVore and Tim Ingold. Let me begin here with some of the examples I used there to suggest seventeenth and early eighteenth-century European philosophers had, at best, only the dimmest idea of an existence based on hunting and gathering.

Before the middle of the eighteenth-century there was virtually no notion of a kind of society comparable to what we call 'hunting-and-gathering society'. Instead, the concern was with the dichotomy 'natural man' versus either the state or civil society; or with individualism versus sociality; or with the influence of climate on temperament and culture. What scholars sought was an explanation of the innate,

natural human existence, whether it was ‘ original’ or simply embedded deep in the human psyche. Compared to the debates on whether humankind was innately good or evil, naturally social or naturally solitary, mode of subsistence was inconsequential.

Consider first the great Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, who had perhaps the clearest notion of the ‘ hunter-gather’ of any major seventeenth-century writer. In times before the biblical Flood, he said, all humankind lived exclusively by food-gathering: ‘ They lived easily on the fruits which the earth brought forth of its own accord without toil’ (1949 [1625]: 79). ‘ But’ , Grotius continues,

in this life of simplicity and innocence men did not long continue. . . . The most ancient arts, agriculture and pasturage, appeared with the first brothers, along with some interchange of products. But from these differences in occupation arose rivalry, even murder. At length the good men became corrupted by their association with the bad, and the kind of life that giants live, that is, one spent in violence, appeared. (Grotius 1949 [1625]: 79)

Several things are noteworthy in this brief passage. The food-gathering or foraging state was short-lived. Food production was an early invention in human history, and it brought with both the beginnings of commerce and the first occurrences of violence. The reference to giants is not as odd as it might seem today. In the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth centuries, belief in ferocious ‘ giants’ was commonplace among intellectuals. Some such intellectuals even doubted the empirical existence of the less hierarchically-developed and more peaceable ‘ pygmies’ of Africa and Asia. In any case, Grotius seems to have regarded the foraging existence as one of common ownership of all property. In contrast, he viewed the early phases of domestication as marked by individual ownership of livestock, with communal, tribal ownership of land. This was followed, in his view, by the development of family ownership of land (1949 [1625]: 79-80). Grotius is not usually thought of as an evolutionist.

Samuel Pufendorf followed Grotius in many of his concerns, and went much further in arguing the innate ‘ sociality’ (*socialitas*) of humankind. Pufendorf seemed to make no distinction between a civilized individual being placed in a state of nature, and humankind in general at the family level before the development of society or the state. However, he does suggest that all humankind lived in patriarchal families, before migration and population expansion created small associations or ‘ societies’ (*societates*), and later larger ‘ states’ (*civitates*) (Pufendorf 1991 [1673]: 132). He saw humankind’ s natural state as one of ‘ the reign of passions’ , with ‘ war, fear, poverty, nastiness, solitude, barbarity, ignorance, savagery’ . By contrast, civilization was characterized by ‘ the reign of reason’ , with ‘ peace, security, wealth, splendour, society, taste, knowledge, benevolence’ (1991: 118). However, another of his assertions, that ‘ the earliest men sought to fill the empty world and to find more ample living space for themselves and their cattle . . . ’ (1991: 116; emphasis added), suggests that he failed to understand the evolution of subsistence activities.

Perhaps the most famous seventeenth-century description of humankind’ s natural condition was that of Thomas Hobbes:

In such a condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is

uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth [cultivation] . . . ; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes 1973 [1651]: 64-65).

Yet it is important for us not to read too much into a definition without reflecting on the fact that the author's purpose was so different from our own. His concern was with a hypothetical 'Naturall Condition of Mankind' and not with the nature of a specific known type of human existence. There is no evidence that that Hobbes meant this description to apply to real hunter-gatherers, whose existence in his own time may indeed have been unknown to him. Rather, he simply imputed that before the social contract (when men agreed to band together for their own protection), there would have been no cultivation.

One late seventeenth-century author who came closer to an understanding of hunter-gatherers was John Locke. The closest he came was in his discussion of property in the 'Second Treatise of Government' (paragraph 46):

The greatest part of things really useful to the Life of Man, and such as the necessity of subsisting made the first Commoners of the World look after, as it doth the Americans now, are generally things of short duration; such as, if they are not consumed by use, will decay and perish of themselves. (Locke 1988 [1690]: 299-300)

Locke adds that everyone had an equal right to gather acorns or apples. If a person gathered too many things that might perish before they could be eaten, that person thus deprived others of their rightful share. So, property existed once things had been taken, but the taking of another person's potential property was theft. In this hypothesised state of nature, hoarding was both foolish and dishonest. Locke's description here sounds both economically rational and ethnographically accurate. However, he reveals his ignorance of the idea of a foraging economy when he adds that his hypothetical 'natural man' might eventually come to invent money and that he possessed sheep:

. . . if he would give his Nuts for a piece of Metal, pleased with its colour; or exchange his Sheep for Shells, or Wool for a sparkling Pebble or Diamond, and keep those by him all his Life . . . (Locke 1988: 300).

It is possible that Locke envisaged these sheep as wild ones, but in his next paragraph he speaks of an imaginary island on which are put sheep, horses and cows, and an imaginary piece of American land, 'ready cultivated, and well stocked too with Cattle' (1988: 301). What is clear, whatever notion he may have had about hunter-gatherers, is that the evolution of subsistence activities was irrelevant for his notion of the state of nature.

Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Turgot

All this changes in France in the middle of the eighteenth century. In that time and

place, we come much closer still to a vision of hunting-and-gathering society we would recognize today. Yet still subsistence, and more broadly production, are undervalued in contrast with the way they are treated in later times. Hunting-and-gathering society may exist in the writings of francophone intellectuals of the mid-eighteenth century, but it is not perceived as a fundamental type by the two chief protagonists: Montesquieu (writing in the 1740s) and Rousseau (in the 1750s). Turgot may have originated the idea of three stages of society in terms of subsistence (hunting, herding, and farming) as early as the late 1740s, but it is difficult to assess his influence, particularly given that it was not published until long after his death (cf. Meek 1976: 68-76). (He died in 1781, and his key essay was published in 1808.) Let us take each very briefly in turn.

In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu (1989 [1748]: 290-92) has really very little to say about hunter-gatherers. His main purpose, of course, was to classify societies according to political system (republican, monarchical, and despotic) rather than according to subsistence. In general, he lumps hunters and herders together as a single type: 'peoples who do not cultivate the land' (*les peuples qui ne cultivent point les terres*). Yet he does distinguish 'hunting peoples' (*les peuples chasseurs*) from 'pastoral peoples' (*les peuples pasteurs*) in that hunters, such as those of Siberia, could not feed themselves if they were to unite like the Tartar hordes with their livestock. Rather, hunters live in small camps or bands, each of which itself forms a small 'nation'. For reasons that are not entirely clear to me, he sees hunters as living mainly in marshy forests.

In the year of Montesquieu's death, 1755, Jean-Jacques Rousseau published his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. In this we see the emergence not only of a hunter-gatherer but, arguably, even a kind of 'original affluent society' (cf. Sahlins 1974: 1-39) – except that for Rousseau there was yet no society. Rousseau describes his natural man as 'satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook . . . and, with that, all his wants supplied' (' . . . et voilà se besoins satisfaits') (1973 [1755]: 52). According to Rousseau early people lived scattered in the forests, without society. Because humans are more intelligent and adaptable than animals, each could use his or her ingenuity to extract food from a great variety of resources.

Hobbes's solitary 'savage' was intrepid and warlike, but Rousseau's was timid, afraid of wild animals, and peaceful. Then, according to Rousseau, civil society began – as a result of a chain of events. Advances in technology had occurred in order to cope with long winters and years in which food was scarce. People invented fishing tackle, bows and arrows, and the means to harness, and later create, fire, and use it in cooking (Rousseau 1973: 84-5). Population increased, and individuals began to claim land as property. Rousseau saw the invention of agriculture, along with metallurgy, as the 'revolution' that ended the idyllic existence of those early times. He also remarked that the idea of agriculture was known long before it was put into practice, but that once in practice it brought about the distribution of land and the ensuing inequalities which necessitated the development of civil institutions (e.g., 1973: 92-94). Some of Rousseau's points are very similar to those of the Scottish intellectuals who followed. Yet it is important to remember the difference: for Rousseau all this describes an age before society, not a type of society.

Arguably, the first truly to think of 'hunting-and-gathering society' as a clearly-defined stage of social evolution was Anne-Robert Jacques Turgot. His

incomplete, posthumous treatise *On Universal History* was sketched out in the late 1740s and early 1750s, and was later edited and first published (in French) in 1808. Yet even here, it is difficult to know whether the 'nations' (*les nations*) of hunters he describes are in fact societies in the sense of later Scottish or modern anthropological discourse. Turgot's hunting stage begins after the biblical Flood, when all humanity was but a single forest-dwelling family with no fields to cultivate and presumably no possession over the animals released from the Ark.

Without provisions, and in the depths of forests, men could devote themselves to nothing but obtaining their subsistence. The fruits which the earth produces in the absence of agriculture are not enough; men had to resort to the hunting of animals, which, being limited in number and incapable in a given region of providing many men with food, have for this very reason accelerated the dispersion of peoples and their rapid diffusion.

Families or small nations widely separated from one another, because each required a very large area to obtain its food: that was the state of hunters. (Turgot 1973 [1808]: 65)

For Turgot, the hunting way of life required vast territory, and the dispersal of families and nations. Herding developed in order to make life easier, as individuals laid claim to the animals they would previously have hunted. Turgot's ideas undoubtedly anticipate those of Adam Smith and others among the Scots, and indeed French writers such as Condorcet, Quesnay, Helvétius and Goguet (Meek 1976: 91-98). Yet it is with the Scots, and their belief in economics as the driving force of social being and social evolution, that 'hunting-and-gathering society' becomes a significant concept.

Hunting-and-gathering society in the Scottish Enlightenment

The Scottish tradition, unlike the French, was built upon a strong foundation of economic concerns. These related to recent periods of economic as well as social instability (in the early eighteenth century), and to a time when farming practices as well as other economic concerns were undergoing great change. Several of the key protagonists, such as Lord Kames and Adam Smith, were active in their advocacy of specific reforms in farming practice and commercial practice. There was also a key interest, held collectively among Scottish intellectuals, in progress, or as it would later be called, social evolution. Montesquieu was the figure the Scots most admired. Indeed, a French edition of *The Spirit of the Laws* was published in Edinburgh two years after it first appeared in Geneva, and several English editions were published in the eighteenth century in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Berwick-upon-Tweed, as well as in London. However, while Montesquieu, like his nineteenth-century successors, saw progress in terms of a transition from savagery to barbarism to civilization, the Scots tended favour a line more akin to that of Turgot, from hunting to herding to farming, and in some cases (most famously Adam Smith), to commerce.

The first Scot to consider the idea of hunting-and-gathering society was Sir John Dalrymple, in his *Essay Towards a General History of Feudal Property in Great Britain* (1758 [1757]). Like Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke, his understanding of the stages of progress is embedded in a theory of property (cf. Meek 1976: 101). However,

unlike almost all of his predecessors, including the French, he states clearly that he is talking about a kind of society: In the second (corrected and enlarged edition), he writes:

The first state of society is that of hunters and fishers; among such a people the idea of property will be confined to a few, and but a very few moveables; and subjects which are immovable, will be esteemed to be common. In accounts given of many American tribes we read, that one or two of the tribe will wander five or six hundred miles from his usual place of abode, plucking the fruit, destroying the game, and catching the fish throughout the fields and rivers adjoining to all the tribes which he passes, without any idea of such a property in the members of them, as makes him guilty of infringing the rights of others, when he does so (Dalrymple 1758 [1757]: 75).

His second stage is of 'pasturage', when the hunting and fishing life proves inconvenient and dangerous. His third (and arguably, final) is a stage of agriculture, induced through population expansion and insufficient resources.

The second Scot to comment on the problem, a year later in his *Historical Law Tracts* and subsequently in several other publications, was the famous judge Lord Kames. Yet interestingly here, Kames, like Ingold in our own time, holds back on calling the hunting way of life a 'society'.

Hunting and fishing, in order for sustenance were the original occupations of man. The shepherd life succeeded; and the next stage was that of agriculture. These progressive changes, in the order now mentioned, may be traced in all nations, so far as we have any remains of their original history. The life of a fisher or hunter is averse to society, except among the members of single families. The shepherd life promotes larger societies, if that can be called a society, which hath scarce any other than a local connection. But the true spirit of society, which consists in mutual benefits, and in making the industry of individuals profitable to others as well as to themselves, was not known till agriculture was invented. (Kames 1758: 77)

Later Kames was to argue that hunting preceded fishing: 'Water is not our element; and savages probably did not attempt to draw food from the sea or from rivers, till land-animals became scarce' (1778: 88). Typically among Scottish thinkers, he argued that the sense of property is not the exclusive preserve of humans, it being found also among beavers, sheep and monkeys. For Kames, the practice of hoarding was inherent in human nature. From this, hunter-gatherers, or more accurately hunter-fishers, developed barter. And from barter, commerce eventually developed (1778: 116-27). Later too, Kames seems to have come round to the idea of early hunters as having society, for he refers to hunting, fighting and love as 'the sole occupations of men in the original state of society' (1779: 244).

Kames' most vociferous opponent in many matters was his judicial colleague, Lord Monboddo. Whereas Kames regarded Native Americans as a different 'species' as Europeans, Monboddo regarded even orang-utans and chimpanzees as members 'of the human species' (see Barnard 1995). Monboddo's main interest was in the origin of language, which he argued could not exist until after the invention

of society. Rightly or wrongly, he regarded the ‘Orang Outang’ (including the chimpanzee) as a gregarious and even a societal human being, but one without language. And unusually for his time, this led him to speculate (though attributing the idea to ancient Greek writer Plutarch) that gathering preceded hunting:

Man did not become carnivorous till he became a hunter, and he could not be a hunter till he had invented some kind of arms; and not even immediately after that; for the Orang Outangs, though they use sticks, do not hunt, but live upon the natural fruits of the earth. It is therefore necessity which drove man to this unnatural diet, and luxury has continued it . . . (Monboddo 1774: 225).

Interesting though Monboddo’s arguments were, and as important as he was among Edinburgh’s literati, his views were not those of mainstream Scottish thinking. With hindsight, the most important of all the Scots (at least on economic progress) was, of course, Adam Smith. He, and those who followed him, wrote of four distinct ‘Ages’ of human society: those of Hunters, of Shepherds, of Agriculture, and of Commerce (or sometimes: hunting, pasturage, farming, and commerce). The first published treatment of these was in *Wealth of Nations* (1776), but the earliest and fullest source in his writings comes to us through his *Lectures on Jurisprudence* as recorded by his Glasgow students in the academic year of 1762-63. Indeed, it has been suggested that he may have given some of this material in Edinburgh lectures on ‘Rhetoric and Belles Lettres’ as early as 1748, which would probably place him prior to Turgot in the development of ‘four-stage theory’ (Meek 1976: 110; cf. 1977). At any rate, let me quote from Glasgow lectures of 1762-63.

If we should suppose 10 or 12 persons of different sexes settled in an uninhabited island, the first method they would fall upon for their sustenance would be to support themselves by the wild fruits and wild animals which the country afforded. Their sole business would be hunting the wild beasts or catching the fishes This is the age of hunters. (Smith 1978 [Dec. 24, 1762]: 14)

In the age of hunters it is impossible for a very great number to live together. As game is their only support they would soon exhaust all that was within their reach. Thirty or forty families would be the most that could live together, that is, about 140 or 150 persons. These might live by the chase in the country about them. They would also naturally form themselves into these villages, agreeing to live near together for their mutual security. (1978 [Feb. 22, 1763]: 213)

In the age of hunters there can be very little government of any sort, but what there is will be of the democratical kind. A nation of this sort consists of a number of independent families, no otherwise connected than as they live together in the same town or village and speak the same language. With regard to the judicial power, this in these nations as far as it extends is possessed by the community as one body. (1978 [Feb. 21, 1763]: 201)

‘Regular government’ emerged after the appropriation of animals as property, and it gave rise to inequalities, with some individuals acquiring more than their neighbours. Property in the age of hunters existed in only a very limited, and transient

sense. Smith's famous example, later repeated in *Wealth of Nations*, was that of a man chasing a hare over a period of some time who would acquire an exclusive privilege to hunt that hare (1978: 17-18). For Smith, a key difference between hunting and herding societies is in their respective attitudes towards theft. Hunters (he cites Amerindians) have almost no notion of property, and theft is of little concern. Herders, in contrast (he cites the Tartars), punish theft by immediate death. Smith concedes that cultivation of the soil may follow directly from a hunting-and-gathering existence (in parts of North America), but his central argument on the origin of property is that it evolved as part of the transition from hunting to herding. He does attribute both a division of labour and an incipient form of commerce to those in the age of hunters, for example in suggesting that a good arrow-maker might exchange arrows for venison (1978: 348).

Adam Ferguson (1966 [1767]: 81), an Edinburgh professor (of various subjects), also noted that some 'savage nations' subsist 'hunting, fishing, or the natural produce of the soil', though their existence, for his argument, was far less important it was for that of Smith. Ferguson did take more account of contemporary ethnographic descriptions than Smith, but Ferguson's comments on the age of hunters, or as he preferred to see it, 'the rude nations prior to the establishment of property', was still more conjectural rather than ethnological. He saw their existence as useful for armchair conjectural historians, like himself, in order that such men might better speculate on the origins and pre-history of society. Ferguson noted that those who subsisted by hunting and fishing had only the property they carried with them, and had not yet appropriated food as property. In his words:

The food of to-morrow is yet wild in the forest, or hid in the lake; it cannot be appropriated before it is caught; and even then, being the purchase of numbers, who fish or hunt in a body, it accrues to the community, and is applied for immediate use, or becomes an accession to the stores of the public (Ferguson 1966 [1767]: 82).

In other words, food not caught is not property, though once acquired it becomes what later thinkers would describe as 'communal property' (as opposed to 'individual property').

The great historian of the age, and long-time Principal of the University of Edinburgh, was William Robertson. Working from several hundred sources in various languages, Robertson outlined the existing ethnography of the Americas in his four-volume *History of America*. Like Rousseau, he gave prominence to the individual over society. He regarded Amerindians as averse to labour, especially for men. He saw those in the more primitive states as essentially nomadic. In opposition to Kames, he believed that fishing preceded hunting, and that 'as the occupations of the former do not call for equal exertions of activity, or talents, with those of the latter, people in that state [fishing] appear to possess neither the same degree of enterprise nor of ingenuity' (Robertson 1809 [1777]: 101). His sequence was: gathering (including small animals), fishing, hunting, agriculture. He added that 'hunting nations' were mainly 'strangers to the idea of property', and that 'The forest or hunting-grounds are deemed to be the property of the tribe, from which it has a title to exclude every rival nation', while 'no individual arrogates a right to any district of these in preference to his fellow citizens' (1809: 115). Interestingly, in light of

twentieth-century discoveries, Robertson's hunter-gatherers lived a 'free and vagrant life' (1809: 107) in preference to the drudgery which agriculture entailed. According to one recent historian (Wood 1995: viii), Robertson's emphasis here on subsistence and more generally economic relations, coupled with David Hume's (1987 [1748]) insistence on moral over physical causes, marked a move away from the previous dominance of climate as the prime cause of human diversity.

At any rate, John Millar, Smith's friend and colleague at Glasgow, was (a few years before) the first major thinker to consider the importance of property with respect to sex and gender relations (Millar 1806 [1771]: 14-16). Millar's idea of hunting-and-gathering society was that it entailed great hardship and afforded few pleasures:

A savage who earns his food by hunting and fishing, or by gathering the spontaneous fruits of the earth, is incapable of attaining any considerable refinement in his pleasures His wants are few, in proportion to the narrowness of his circumstances (1806: 14-15).

Hunters and gatherers had little 'refinement' in courtship, and consequently little sexual passion, because, he argued, passion is derived from the difficulty of obtaining what one seeks. By this reasoning, we may imagine that hunting, rather than sex, was the more passionate pursuit of the male forager. At any rate, what is significant for Millar is that both gender hierarchy and other aspects of social differentiation emerged along with the development of agriculture and the increase in importance of property.

James Beattie, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Marischal College, Aberdeen, like others grouped hunting, fishing and food-gathering together, and saw this as the first stage, preceding the stages of herding, of agriculture, and of commerce. However, he was unusual in suggesting that geographical variation should be such an important factor that this scheme might only be applicable in some countries. In others, e.g., those by the sea, he noted that fishing may dominate and that commerce from the sea may exist without the introduction of either herding or agriculture (1817 [1793]: 96-97). Agriculture, Beattie claimed, depended on combining several skills, such as woodwork or metallurgy (to make ploughs), which implies that such arts began in a food-gathering state (1817: 93-94).

Some conjectural historians, such as Gilbert Stuart (1797 [1791]), make no mention of hunter-gatherers because their chief concerns lie with later stages of society, while others ignore subsistence in favour of other topics of the time such as the history of language and its relation to communication and intellectual development. For example, James Dunbar, Professor of Moral Philosophy at King's College, Aberdeen, writes very much in the spirit of the four-stage theorists yet makes no explicit mention either of the age of hunters or of any other of the three stages of production. Instead, he conjectures that 'Man may have subsisted, in some sort, like other animals, in a separate and individual state' (1781 [1780]: 2). His second stage was one of a linguistic proficiency which conflicts with the equality, freedom and independence of the earlier stage; and his third and final, a stage developing from 'slow and imperceptible transitions' to 'the protection and discipline of civil government' (1781: 2-3). Dunbar couples this Rousseauian argument with, among others, a Montesquieuan essay 'Of the relation of Man to the surrounding elements' that influence language, art and intellect (1781: 321-47).

David Doig, a Stirling schoolmaster who coupled antiquarianism with religious conservatism, added a new twist: an emphasis on degeneration (degeneration was implicit in Dunbar and Monboddo, but to a lesser degree). Like Dunbar he shunned hunting, herding, cultivating and commerce in favour of savagery, barbarism and civilization. In his *Two Letters on the Savage State Addressed to the Late Lord Kaims* (sic) (1792) he argues that progress is not inherent in human nature and that chronological sequences reveal degeneration as well as progress. According to Doig's account, while contact of peoples of lower stages with civilization may sometimes yield advancement, this is the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, he questions the truth of Ancient Greek and Roman sources which hint that wandering, fruit-and-herb-gathering savages populated the earth before the dawn of civilization. He suggests, against Ancient writers and their eighteenth-century admirers, that such views stand 'contrary to our natural ideas of the divine beneficence' (1792: 9). God would not create savages without also creating some in a state of civilization. Given this, as well as his assumption that when disasters came some with superior knowledge would survive to pass the knowledge on, he argues that 'the empire of the Savage State could neither have been universal, nor of long duration' (1792: 23). The argument in Doig's treatise is complex and difficult to follow, if not say convoluted and obtuse. Nevertheless, it should stand as a reminder that opinion in eighteenth-century Scotland on these issues, and other issues, was divided.

Finally, consider the Rev. John Adams of Ayre, little known today but widely read in his time. He was essentially a compiler of the ideas of others. Adams borrows heavily from many writers, both those named in the title of his book (Kames, Monboddo, Dunbar, and Montesquieu) and often as not, others as well (such as Robertson, Ferguson, and Smith), often without citation. Following Montesquieu he saw man as a 'social creature', but argues too that society was first established in order for 'self defence' (1789: 6-7). His comments on climate are interesting in light of the fact that living hunter-gatherers, then as now, in fact tend to occupy the least fertile parts of the world: 'In fruitful countries, and benign climates, men may live in the natural state; but in rude climates, and barren countries, they cannot subsist at all without society and arts' (1789: 8). He repeats this claim several times, arguing always from first principles rather than from example. However, he does argue from implicit example (though he mentions no specific societies), that:

With respect to hunting it may be observed, that as it becomes less and less necessary in the progress from cold to hot countries, the appetite for it keeps pace with that progress. It is vigorous in very cold countries, where men depend on hunting for food. It is less vigorous in temperate countries, where they are partly fed with natural fruits; and there is scarce any vestige of it in hot countries, where vegetables are the food of men, and where meat is an article of luxury. (Adams 1789: 11)

Adams also does say explicitly that 'it is probable' that hunting preceded 'planting, sowing, or any kind of culture of the ground', as well as the taming and breeding of flocks and herds (1789: 11). For Adams, agriculture generally precedes pastoralism. He cites (erroneously, of course) a lack of agriculture in North America as the reason why the Indians there have not developed 'the pastoral life'; though he suggests that the Laplanders, and to a lesser extent the Tartars, are forced into 'the

shepherd-state' because of their harsh environments (1789: 12). Following a brief general discussion of 'the shepherd-state', Adams makes the point that hunting societies require more land, and therefore have smaller populations, than other kinds of society. Where he disagrees with most of his contemporaries is in his assertion that a sense of property predates the transitions from hunting and indeed is prevalent both in human nature and in the nature of some animals, including beavers and sheep (1789: 15-18).

The idea of a hunting-and-gathering society, or in the language of the eighteenth century, a society of hunters, is an economic idea. The basis of four-stage theory was economic. However, it is true that not all envisaged the progress of humankind in economic terms, all the time. Hume, Ferguson, and Robertson all pointed to the existence of the stages but de-emphasized subsistence or production as a prime cause of progress or social 'improvement'. Hume seemingly had little interest in the matter; Ferguson saw the transitions from savagery to barbarism to civilization as dependent at least as much on intellectual outlook and political domination as to subsistence; and Robertson consistently regarded the search for simple causes, such as means of subsistence, as inadequate in light of the complexity of human existence (Spadafora 1990: 271-02).

Yet the economics of four-stage theory taken as a whole was not merely about subsistence. It was equally, for many in Scotland in the late eighteenth century, about society and about property. As Christopher Berry has put it, four-stage theory was:

... a tool to identify certain coherences in social institutions. As such it did not explain these institutions. Nowhere do the Scots say that the mode of subsistence causes the form that social institutions take. Rather it was a device that highlighted the central role that property played since it was how property was organised that gave coherence. (Berry 1997: 114)

Conclusion

In this paper I have, of course, been looking at the notion of hunting-and-gathering society through examples of early modern Western discourse. This may seem ethnocentric, and in a sense it is. But it is with good reason: anthropology as an academic discipline is in theoretical continuity with eighteenth-century Scottish moral philosophy, through Smith's disciple Dugald Stewart at Edinburgh, and to his students James Cowles Prichard and Thomas Hodgkin, the founders of organizational anthropology in Great Britain in the early nineteenth century (see, e.g., Augstein 1999). Also, Marx read Smith; Lewis Henry Morgan read Kames; and Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown, who saw the Scottish Enlightenment as inspiration, read and applauded the works of the Scottish conjectural historians despite their disagreements with them about their methodology (see, e.g., Barnard 1992). Ingold's problem on hunter-gatherer society versus sociality owes its problematic nature to the conception of society formulated in the Scottish Enlightenment and handed down in social theory to the present day. This was a conception of society based on material as well as social concerns, and indeed one in which economic concerns began to overtake the more simply political ones of the preceding century. The theoretical positions of our contemporaries Sahlins, Lee, Testart, or Woodburn would not seem that out of place in an Edinburgh tavern of the 1770s. The same could be said of discussions of empirical

interests in the transition from hunting and gathering to herding and cultivation. Examples in my own ethnographic region would include writings by Kalahari ethnographers such as Tanaka, Sugawara, Osaki and Ikeya in the Japanese tradition; or the quite different writings of 'revisionist' archaeologists such as Denbow and Wilmsen, who argue that hunter-gatherers in the Kalahari only exist as part of a larger political economy of domination by agro-pastoralist peoples.

In that regard, perhaps it is worth some reflection that the current Kalahari 'revisionist' debate began with an article by a historian on seventeenth-century subsistence strategies (i.e., Marks 1972). Later revisionists (e.g., Wilmsen 1989) have criticized modern hunter-gatherer studies for their overemphasis on the pristine nature of hunting-and-gathering society, yet they have failed to consider the possibility that the worldview of seventeenth-century Europeans might have influenced what they 'saw' in their descriptions of the Cape. The fact is that Europeans before the Scottish Enlightenment had very little idea of a 'hunting-and-gathering society'. The notion of subsistence as culturally significant is essentially a product of the eighteenth-century invention of economics. Of course there are hints of it earlier, but modern notions of hunter-gatherers are embedded in eighteenth-century four-stage theory. I am not suggesting that seventeenth-century ethnographic accounts must, by their very nature, be inaccurate. I am only suggesting that we need to interpret them just as we interpret the writings of twentieth-century ethnographers. The fact that the seventeenth century was an age of proto-revisionism does not make its ethnography a better representation of reality than that of later centuries.

To return one last time to the question of society versus sociality, it is worth reflection that this is, quite possibly, both a linguistic and a deeply cultural problem. It may be differently determined, for example, in Japanese, where 'society' and the 'social' are equated (the word *shakai*) and 'sociality' is definable simply as the essential nature of society (*shakaisei*).³ If, however, we concede that the sociality of hunters and gatherers is pre-society, then equally it is meaningful to think of it as post-society as well, in that it is today maintained in opposition to the larger state-based societies of domination.⁴ The fact that hunter-gatherer specialists around the world meet periodically for an 'International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies' (not merely '... on Hunter-Gatherers') is testimony to the endurance, rightly or wrongly, of this Scottish idea.

My main argument has been simply that it is meaningful to think of hunting-and-gathering society as an eighteenth-century Scottish concept. It is in Scotland and in the eighteenth century that the first recorded debates on the nature of hunting-and-gathering society are to be found. No doubt in the course of this paper I have violated any number of lesser historiographical principles as laid down by historians (e.g., Elton 1991), not to mention the warnings about 'presentism' of historian of anthropology George Stocking (1965). I make no apology for this; mine is a practitioner's history. My purpose has not been to explore the past while pretending not to be aware of the present. Nor has it been it merely to go back in time and capture some essence of the eighteenth century and put it into a bottle – to be released in 2002. Rather my purpose has been to challenge commonplace myths about hunter-gatherers and hunter-gatherer studies. Equally, it has been to help us think about our own presuppositions as developments, transformations or reflections of an earlier set of ideas whose implications continue to have relevance in contemporary

social theory.

Notes

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² For example, there is a widespread notion in 'traditional' Africa of hunter-gatherers as the original peoples in lands they now share with pastoralists and cultivators. Indeed this notion sometimes features in the symbolism and rituals of non-hunter-gatherers (see, e.g., Woodburn 2001: 3-5).

³ This example was suggested by Kazuyoshi Sugawara (Kyoto University) in discussion of related issues in another paper of mine.

⁴ I am grateful to Yasushi Uchiyamada (University of Tsukuba) for discussion of this point.

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