"THE SCIENCE OF MAN"

Scientific Opinion on the Australian Aborigines in the late 19th Century
The Impact of Evolutionary Theory and Racial Myth

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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For those who believe that our study of the past must bear relevance to the circumstances and predicaments in which we presently find ourselves, the study of the historical development of race relations is especially rewarding. The melancholy story of the relations between the Europeans and the indigenous Australians has been told already. However, that story is not comprehensible without reference to the ideas which have shaped the white man's attitude to the Aborigine. Such ideas have received too little historical attention.

The evolutionary anthropological theories of the post-Darwinian era were seminal in the development of many popular myths about the Aborigines, such as the assumption of the black man's intellectual inferiority or the notion that his cultural heritage would necessarily be obliterated by the advances of European civilisation. Therefore I have chosen to make this a study of scientific opinion on the Aborigines in the late 19th century - a subject both intrinsically interesting and relevant to the present.

This thesis then is an exploration of ideas about the Aborigines. Several themes have disciplined the subject matter; the growth of Aboriginal anthropology in Australia as a coherent and autonomous academic pursuit, and concomitantly, the formative influence of anthropological theory in Britain. In the latter part of the thesis I have canvassed the validity and the historical significance of the principal themes of anthropology in the late 19th century. I hope that, indirectly, I have located some of the historical roots of racial prejudice in Australia. The chronological boundaries are deliberately imprecise to afford the necessary flexibility in prospecting an intellectual terrain both vast and varied. However, the thesis focuses on the years between 1880 and 1914.
As this study treats of anthropological theory it has a certain "scientific" bias. For one untrained in anthropology and generally ignorant of the workings of scientists this has posed several problems. Anthropologists would no doubt detect some superficiality in my understanding of theoretical problems. However I have tried to equip myself with a rudimentary knowledge of anthropological theory. In self-defence I can do no better than offer the dictum of one historian who has confronted "scientific" subjects. "It is an error," says Jacques Barzun in Science; the Glorious Entertainment "to suppose that when a physicist talks about science he is bound to be more reliable than a so-called layman who has taken the trouble to inform himself and to think." (1) Nevertheless I am aware of the limitations imposed by my naivety.

My credentials to discuss the history of anthropology are perhaps less suspect. I think it valuable that historians should tackle the history of science. "Considering the part played by the sciences in the story of our Western civilisation," writes Herbert Butterfield, "it is hardly possible to doubt the importance which the history of science will sooner or later acquire both in its own right and as the bridge which has been so long needed between the Arts and Sciences." (2) The application of anthropological theory to the Australian Aborigines is a small but interesting chapter in the story. I hope that this discussion of Aboriginal anthropology indirectly illuminates other subjects - the broader outlines of the relationship between the intellectual communities in Australia and the "Home Country", the social values and preoccupations of the Victorians, the ways in which abstract concepts and theories are put to non-academic


uses, and the development of relations between ethnic groups.

The relevant literature on the Aborigines was too formidable to examine in its entirety. I have had to content myself with a representative sample of the literature covering what seemed to be the most popular and significant themes of Aboriginal anthropology in this period. Generalisation and simplification was sometimes necessary and certainly not all the side-tracks have been charted. The study is by no means exhaustive.

I would thank John Mulvaney for his generous counsel and for access to one of his unpublished articles. I am also grateful to my supervisor for his cogent criticism and encouragement, and to Miss Carol Kiss (formerly librarian of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies) for her unfailing cooperation.
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in the text;

A.A.A.S. - Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (may refer to the Association itself or to its reports)

A.I.A.S. - Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies

Cont. Review - Contemporary Review (England)

Fort. Review - Fortnightly Review (England)

H.R.A. - Historical Records of Australia

H.S.A.N.Z. - Historical Studies - Australia and New Zealand

J.A.I. - Journal of the Anthropological Institute (England)


N'th Cent. - Nineteenth Century (England)

Proc. Roy. Soc. - Proceedings of the Royal Society of - the various states

Trans. Roy. Soc. - Transactions of the Royal Society of - the various states

Sc. Man - The Science of Man
NOTE

(i) In the 19th century "race" was a particularly nebulous term and was employed indiscriminately by anthropologists to denote cultural as well as biological groups of men. Although present opinion as to the precise meaning of the term is not monolithic, most scientists would accept the following definition;

the concept of "race" is in essence that the species *Homo Sapiens* can be sub-divided into groups equivalent to "botanical" varieties in terms of certain transmissible physical characteristics.


When outlining the anthropological theories of the 19th century I have tried to use the term "race" in the sense in which it was then understood. However, when evaluating those theories I have used it only in its present-day sense as a biological concept.

(ii) The words "Aborigine" and "Aboriginal" have often been used synonymously in recent years. I have used the former as a noun and the latter only as an adjective.

(iii) All titles of books, and all words italicized in their original context have been underlined in the text. Generally the form of the thesis follows the rules outlined in J.A. La Nauze's pamphlet *Presentation of Historical Theses* (Melbourne, 1966). It is about 16,000 words in length.
Since the first contact between the Europeans and the continent's earliest occupants, the Aborigine has been the subject of feelings ranging from euphoric romanticism to profound contempt. He has been cast in various roles; the "Noble Savage"; a figure of fun; a harmless and infantile creature; an embodiment of all that is morally repugnant in man's nature; an anthropological relic; a biological curio; a victim of the Creator's displeasure with mankind; a social misfit. The changing pattern of popular European attitudes to the natives provides the backdrop to the present study.

The seventeenth-century attitude of most Europeans towards natives such as the Australian Aborigine tended to be contemptuous and distrustful. However a new school of thought, compounded of both romantic and rationalistic strains effected a change in the climate of prevailing European opinion. The new philosophy centered on the nebulous but potent concept of the "Noble Savage" and was associated in the popular mind with the writings of Rousseau (1712-1778). Subscription to the "Noble Savage" myth usually rested on the philosophical notion that man was inherently good, that evil in society sprang not from the darker passions of the human heart but from ill-founded social organisation, and that to live in accordance with the dictates of Nature was man's proper condition.

The observations of mid-eighteenth century explorers on the natives of Van Diemen's Land reflect feelings of goodwill, sympathy and sometimes respect for the Aborigines. (1) Captain James Cook, one of the earliest

and most intelligent observers of the natives, exhibited a strong sympathy, even fondness for them. His philosophic observations on their way of life bear witness to the influence of Rousseau. (2) In his popular book on the Tasmanian Aborigines, James Bonwick rightly referred to the comments of the French naturalists, Péron and Labillardière, two of the earliest commentators on the Tasmanian as "blessed with the sentimentalities of Rousseau." (3) The appeal of the Australian natives in this early period "stemmed from the virtues attributed to him by 'hard primitivism' - simplicity of material wants, courage, endurance ... This material and spiritual simplicity," writes John Mulvaney, "readily became an ideal, and at a time when man linked God and man so closely, it is understandable that Natural Man attracted sympathetic attention." (4)

The official policy of the British government in regard to the natives following colonization was conciliatory. Governor Phillip was directed to open friendly relations with the Aborigines and to protect them from the felons under his charge. (5) His instructions were not atypical. Captain Colins, by way of example, received similar instructions from Lord Hobart, Secretary for the Colonies in 1803; "You are to endeavour by every means in your power to open an intercourse with the Natives, and to conciliate their good will, enjoining all parties under your government to live in amity and kindness with them...". (6) Indeed the earliest governors

(6) Quoted in Bonwick, J., op. cit., p. 19.
appear to have treated the Aborigines "with the greatest humanity and attention". (7) However, as one historian has suggested, the light musket fire levelled at the Aborigines by Cook during their first encounter on the East Coast portended a less happy association between European and Aborigine. (8)

Amity and kindness soon gave place to less lofty sentiments. The realities of primitive society and the degraded condition of life in the penal colonies awoke in the Europeans feelings neither romantic nor sentimental. Captain Watkin Tench's observations on the natives testify not only to a familiarity with the writings of Rousseau but to physical realities with which he was confronted - the cruelty to which Aboriginal women were subjected for example. (9) However his observations, while free of the romantic excesses of some of his predecessors, are kindly in tone and he confessed that they were a people for whom he could not but feel "some share of affection" despite their "destitute and obscure situation". (10) The convicts were unlikely to be so charitable. Their hapless position - the physical hardships, the shortage of women, the bleak intellectual and spiritual climate, the familiarity with crimes against law and Nature - was unlikely to inspire in them ideas or sentiments elevating the dignity of "Natural Man". (11) The brutal realities of penal life were not productive

(7) Phillip to Sydney - July 10th, 1788 in H.R.A. Series I. Vol. I. p. 65

Parkinson, S.: A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas In His Majesty's Ship, the Endeavour (London, 1773), p. 134


(10) Complete Account, ibid, pp. 293-294

(11) For a vivid and pungent fictional account of life in the penal colonies [cont]
of either romanticism or moral sensitivity on the one hand or a detached, clinical interest in the natives on the other. Bernard Smith has suggested that the prevalent stereo-type of the native now became the "Comic Savage". (12) Many of the convicts were unscrupulous in exploiting the natives for their own unsavoury ends. (13)

Evangelical Christianity, fired with crusading zeal and frequently invoking the name of the Deity, provided another impetus for a fundamental reorientation of European attitudes. With widespread missionary enterprise in the Pacific came a reaction against primitivism; to churchmen of evangelical persuasion it was less than proper that pagan savages should be idealized as either noble or innocent. The "abominations of savage society" were eloquent condemnation of their estate in the eyes of God and man. (14) Some suggested that the degradation and barbarism of the Aborigines was sure sign of Divine Intervention, of the visitation of the Supreme Author's wrath. The theme of the Aborigines' moral debasement enjoyed considerable circulation in the second quarter of the century. J. Dredge, a Wesleyan and former Assistant Protector of the Aborigines, articulated a fundamentalist strain when, in 1845, he wrote of his former charges:

In the licentiousness of their lives they are as the men of Sodom, sinners exceedingly. And the prevalence of those diseases which, amongst men of every nation, constitute the established retribution of the Creator as the first punishment of such abominations -

(11) Cont'd. see Keneally, T.: Bring Larks and Heroes (Melbourne, 1967). See also Dark, E.: The Timeless Land (Sydney, 1944)


(14) See Bernard Smith, op. cit., pp. 196, 468ff and Mulvaney, D.J., op. cit. p. 16
whilst they exhibit the penalty, conclusively established the existence of the crimes of which they are the legitimate fruits. (15)

Misdirected moral fervour often prompted amongst nineteenth-century evangelicals a moral and religious distaste for the pagan customs of Aboriginal society. Many Europeans tended to judge primitive societies in terms of their own self-righteous moral code and Victorian world-view. The degradation or retrogressive theory enjoyed many adherents in the pre-Darwinian era. (16) "In an individualistic age of self-help, slothful races, who had forsaken accepted living standards and had deliberately sought the exterior darkness of the far corners of the world, excited little sympathy." (17)

The climate of opinion in England in the early and mid-nineteenth century was also becoming less temperate. The debate over the slave trade had focused attention on racial differences and Englishmen were being introduced to the first "scientific" formulations of the concept of race. Polygenetic theories of man's origin were receiving serious attention from men such as Cuvier, the eminent zoologist. Monogeneism, or belief in the single origin of mankind, had usually been accompanied by a faith in the moral and spiritual equality of all men. Its corrosion removed another prop to racial tolerance and opened avenues for new racialist themes. (18)

It was not without consequence that England should witness in the 1850s not only the publication of Darwin's epochal work, but the first spate

(15) Dredge, J.: Brief Notices of the Aborigines of New South Wales (Geelong, 1845), p. 12, per Mulvaney, D.J., op. cit., p. 21

(16) This theory will receive more detailed treatment in a later chapter.


of genuinely racist literature; from Thomas Carlyle (1849), Robert Knox (1850), Nott and Gliddon (1854) and Bulwer-Lytton (1854). (19) Biological theory and racist myths were to be fused in a dangerous amalgam which left its unhappy imprint not only on the European consciousness but on many areas of intellectual endeavour, not the least significant of which was the newly emerging discipline of anthropology. (20)

II

By the 1850s the European attitude to the Aborigines was not clearly defined; not yet entirely free of a lingering 18th century romanticism but more immediately influenced by uncharitable evangelical pronouncements, by direct physical and cultural contact in the colonies, by a new emphasis on racial concepts and classifications, and by the changing tenets of biological sciences. During the first half of the century there had developed a considerable body of written information about the Aborigines. Professor Elkin has denoted this period as "a phase of casual or incidental anthropological observation" by administrative officials, explorers, surveyors, escaped or lost convicts, settlers, travellers and missionaries -


(20) It was no accident that racism was to thrive throughout Europe and America in the latter decades of the century. The story of the new forces of racism is outside the circumference of this essay. However the development of German and American racial myths, in particular, sheds light on the English scene. For penetrative general works on the subject see Mosse, G.L.: The Crisis of German Ideology (London, 1966) [on German race theory] Massing, P.: Rehearsal for Destruction (New York, 1949) [on German race theory] Hofstadter, R.: Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915 (Philadelphia, 1945)
7.
in short, by those who came into some contact with the natives and who were likely
to record their observations. (21) These early writings tended to focus on
the physical characteristics, the visible way of life, and the beliefs and
languages of the Aborigines. "Generally speaking these were questions of a
frontier situation in the nineteenth century. They were based on the need,"
writes Elkin, "of working out a modus vivendi between intruders and the
indigenous occupiers of the land." (22) Many early writers were descriptive
and anecdotal rather than critical or analytical. Generally they failed to
achieve genuine insight into Aboriginal psychology or to grasp the cohesion
and complexity of native society. Official investigations were no less
superficial. (23) "Incidental" anthropology lacked any scientific impetus
or direction; the many-sided influence of Darwin's evolutionary theory was
soon to provide it.

The Origin of the Species was published in 1859. It exercised an
immediate impact on English anthropology; the most obvious symptom of

(21) The explorers were likely to be the most productive in this area as they
were often the first to come into contact with isolated groups of
Aboriginals. See, for example;
Eyre, E.J.: Journals of Expeditions of Discovery 2 Vols. (London, 1845)
Missionaries such as Mrs. J. Smith, Threlkeld, Schulze provide us with
the same type of "incidental anthropology" well into the latter half of
the century.
Smith, Mrs. J.: The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines...
(Adelaide, 1880)
Schulze, Rev. L.: "The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Fink River..."

(22) Elkin, A.P.: "The Development of Scientific Knowledge of the Aborigines"
in Australian Aboriginal Studies (Melbourne, 1963), edit., H. Sheils, p. 5

(23) See "Report of Select Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria" -
Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council 1858-1859 - referred to
in Mulvaney, D.J.: "Anthropology in Victoria" - pp. 47ff
Darwin's persuasive influence was the theory of unilinear evolutionism. The primitive races, it was asserted by the unilinear evolutionists, represented an early phase in a direct evolutionary line along which the higher races had further progressed. Both the backward culture and the physiological peculiarities of the Aborigines were attributed to this racial lack of evolutionary development.

In 1865, E.B. Tylor and Sir John Lubbock, two eminent British anthropologists published works enunciating unilinear theories. (24) Their ideas were to saturate the intellectual atmosphere in which the Aborigines were studied. The Australian natives were to be brought well within the precincts of Darwinian controversy. (25)

The last three decades of the century mark a new phase in the Aborigines' position in the European world-view and in scientific research. From about 1870 onwards, with the idea that the natives were dying out came a new sense of urgency in compiling and collating facts about their physical condition and culture. (26) It was a phase in Aboriginal research adorned by ambitious works aiming at a comprehensive coverage: E.M. Curr's *The Australian Race*, (4 vols., 1886), R. Brough Smyth's *The Aborigines of*

Lubbock, J.:  *Pre-Historic Times* (London, 1865) 
- See also Lubbock, J.:  *On the Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London, 1870)

(25) The subject of unilinear evolutionism and its effect on attitudes to and the study of the Aborigines forms the substance of Chapter 3.

(26) E.M. Curr reflected this sense of urgency when he wrote in the "Introduction" to *The Australian Race*, "As raison d'etre for this publication then, it may be pointed out that when the author drifted into his undertaking, many tribes were passing away, leaving no record behind them, and no one seemed likely to step in and do what was necessary for ethology." - Curr, E.M.:  *The Australian Race; Its Origins, Customs etc.* (Melbourne, 1866) - See the "Introduction" esp. pp. xiv, xv.
Victoria, (2 vols., 1878) and the works of men like Dr. J. Frazer, Taplin and Worsnop. It was also, however, a period of widening horizons and new problems; the extensive work on the origin and antiquity of the natives and the currency of unilinear theory testify to the more coherent and direct influence of English anthropological theory. Aboriginal anthropology became a focus-point for anthropologists throughout the world. Anthropology established itself as a respectable academic discipline in Australia. The establishment of an anthropological society and journal were obvious symptoms of a newly-emerging and recognizable anthropological fraternity.

III

The first great landmark of scientific, post-Darwinian anthropology in Australia was the work of the country's first significant anthropological team; A.W. Howitt and the Rev. Lorimer Fison. Their work in the 1870s and 1880s ushered in a new era. Their experience and their recorded work illuminate the preoccupations, the problems and the changing directions of anthropology in the late 19th century.

Howitt was born in England in 1830 into a well-known literary family. He received his education in England and later at Heidelberg. It was a happy day for Australian anthropology when his father, attracted by the lure of the gold-fields, arrived in Australia in the 1850s, bringing young Howitt with him. The mystery of the Australian outback rather than the prospect of easy fortune cast an immediate spell on the younger Howitt. He soon established a reputation as an explorer of the Lake Eyre district and as the leader of the expedition which recovered the mortal remains of Burke and Wills. The study of the Aborigines enjoyed no place in his early pioneering. In 1863 he was appointed police magistrate and
warden of the Gippsland gold-fields where he again achieved distinction with some sophisticated geological studies. Some years later he held office as Secretary for Mines. (27)

Howitt's early experiences in Australia provided no hint of the vast contribution he was to make to the study of the indigenous inhabitants of the country he so enthusiastically explored. Indeed he seemed the victim of typical mid-19th century racial prejudices. "It may seem very dreadful to you," he wrote to his mother in 1859, "this hunting of blackfellows but they are so treacherous..." (28) Sometime later, in another moment of vexation, he wrote "I think my 'black children' will drive me out of all patience... you can't make a silk purse out a sow's ear, or a sober, industrious... member... out of the immediate descendants of a long line of savages." (29) Doubtless it would have surprised him to know that some years later Professor Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen would dedicate their definitive work on the tribes of North Australia to Howitt and a certain Rev. L. Fison "who laid the foundation of our knowledge of Australian Anthropology". (30)

However, increased familiarity with the Aborigines eventually extinguished Howitt's feelings of superiority and contempt. Moved by

- Howitt, M.E.B. "The Howitts in Australia", Victorian Historical Magazine 3.9
- The Victorian Naturalist April, 1908

(28) A.W. Howitt to Mary Howitt - October 4 and 10, 1859
See also Howitt to M. Howitt - September 10, per Mulvaney, D.J.: The Ascent of Aboriginal Man: Howitt as Anthropologist (unpublished article), p.5

(29) A.W. Howitt to Mary Howitt - August 10, 1873 per Mulvaney, D.J.: ibid., p. 6

higher passions he became a strenuous champion of the natives' welfare. An anthropological interest in the Aborigines was quickened in him by a reading of the classics of mid-19th century biology and anthropology - the works of Darwin, Lubbock, Galton and Tylor. (31) Further stimulus soon came from the Rev. Lorimer Fison.

Two years after Howitt's birth, Lorimer Fison was born in Suffolk. After studying for a brief time at Cambridge, he abandoned academic pursuits and, like Howitt's father, succumbed to the enticing Australian gold-fields. After an unrewarding expedition, he settled in Melbourne. Purged of the passion for gold he experienced a new calling and in 1864 was ordained into the Methodist Church. His vocation took him to Fiji where the native culture excited in him considerable interest. In 1870 he started a correspondence with Lewis Henry Morgan, the world-famous anthropologist; their intellectual intercourse did much to shape the future of Australian anthropology. Fison returned to Australia in 1871, to Fiji in 1875 and back to Melbourne in 1884 when he took over the editorship of The Spectator. In 1894 he visited England where he met E.B. Tylor, Max Muller and J.G. Frazer - significant men in the history of Australian anthropology. (32)

Lewis Morgan corresponded with persons all over the world who were in a position to observe primitive peoples. Thus he collected data for his theories on kinship and marriage customs. Such information and the results of his own field research amongst American Indians was incorporated


in his written work. (33) In his magnum opus, Ancient Society, Morgan outlined a unilinear hypothesis on the evolution of social institutions. For Morgan, as for many of his contemporaries, Western European culture represented the highest point of civilisation yet attained. He detected three phases in man's history - savagery, barbarism, and civilisation; the Australian native he placed in the "lower status" of savagery. (34)

Fired by Morgan's stimulus, Fison devoted himself during the 1870s to an intensive study of the Kamilaroi tribe of N.S.W. Subsequently, wishing to balance his observations on the Kamilaroi group with a study of another tribe, he enlisted the aid of Howitt as a student of the Kurnai tribe in Victoria. Their industry bore fruit with the publication of Kamilaroi and Kurnai. "The publication of Kamilaroi and Kurnai in 1880 was a landmark in Australian Anthropology because it revealed the significance of Aboriginal social organisation for theory, and the importance of theoretical interpretation for the understanding of that organisation." (35)

1887 was another historic year for Australian anthropology; Baldwin Spencer arrived from England to occupy the Chair of Zoology at the University of Melbourne. Spencer had been born in Lancashire in 1860, and had first studied at the Manchester School of Art, then at Oxford, where his lively intelligence earned him a First in Natural Science. No less important, he enjoyed the guidance and friendship of E.B. Tylor. He was a man of many talents. Amongst his non-professional achievements, his long

(34) Stern, B.J.: Lewis Henry Morgan - p.133

(35) Elkin, A.P., op. cit., p. 12. We shall return to Fison and Howitt in some detail in the next two chapters. See Fison, L. and Howitt, A.W.: Kamilaroi and Kurnai (Sydney, 1880)

presidency of the Victorian Football League ranks high. (36)

Soon after his arrival in Australia, Spencer became interested in the Aborigines. His scientific training and sharp critical apparatus allowed him to recognize the significance of Fison's and Howitt's work and he never lost a deep respect for them, particularly Howitt. Later, he wrote in one of his many letters to Sir James Frazer, "Howitt is a splendid man, and has done more toward the elucidation of anthropological problems in Australia than any other man..." (37)

Spencer served as zoologist to the Horn Expedition to Central Australia in May, 1894. Fate smiled kindly and Spencer met F.J. Gillen, the Alice Springs postmaster. The two were to form a partnership even more productive than that of Howitt and Fison. Gillen's rare intimacy with the natives and Spencer's rigorous intellect and academic training proved a unique combination. Over the next decade, the two worked together on the first deliberately organized and financed fieldwork research projects in the short history of Australian anthropology. The appearance of The Native Tribes of Central Australia in 1899 was a landmark no less prominent than Kamilaroi and Kurnai. Spencer and Gillen had produced a pulsating account of tribal organisation, social custom and ritual. It was perhaps the first great account of the dynamics of Aboriginal society and had been shaped not simply by casual observation but by exhaustive study with theoretical interpretations always well in mind. (38)


(37) Spencer to Frazer June 7, 1902 in Spencer's Scientific Correspondence (Oxford, 1932), edit. R.R. Marett and T.K. Penniman — p. 72

(38) As well as Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J.: The Native Tribes of (cont.)
By the 1890s, a coherent anthropological community was emerging in Australia; Fison, Howitt, Spencer, Gillen, W.E. Roth, R.H. Mathews and J. Mathew were all immersed in important research and were in communication with each other. W.E. Roth, one-time fellow student of Spencer at Oxford, came to Queensland in the 1890s as Protector of Aborigines and Medical Officer. His work as an anthropologist was to outlast his efforts as either Protector or healer. (39) Matthews had been born and reared in the bush, and worked as a station-hand in his youth. With Gillen he was perhaps the only student of the Aborigines whose writings were of major significance, who had not been educated in England. Both were impervious to the theoretical preoccupations nourished by the anthropological milieu in England, and both were able to make use of their understanding of the Australian environment in their study of the natives. Mathews became a licensed surveyor, and his greater mobility brought him into contact with many native tribes. He was a prolific writer whose work was published in the U.S.A. and Britain as well as in Australia. He was particularly well-versed in some of the sociological and linguistic aspects of N.S.W. tribes. (40) The Rev. J. Mathew was of Scottish birth and had come to Queensland in 1862. In 1872


(39) Roth never produced any large-scale or definitive works but his output was prolific and important in mapping previously unexplored areas of Aboriginal culture. For examples of his work see Roth, W.E.: North Queensland Ethnography; Bulletins 1-6 (Brisbane, 1901-1903) or "Notes on Savage Life in the Early Days of Western Australia" Proc. Roy. Soc. Qld. XVIII, 1902, pp. 45-69

he offered his services to the Queensland Education Department, afterwards studying for an M.A. at Melbourne University. Many years later, in 1922, he achieved distinction as Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church. His efforts as a minor poet were less distinguished. Contact with the natives in Queensland had quickened an interest in their ethnic origins, languages and social customs and his findings were published in *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899) and *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland*. (41)

The growing prestige and identity of Australian anthropology led, in 1888, to the establishment of an Anthropological Section of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science. Up to that time the various Royal Societies had provided the main platforms for anthropological discussion. Men of learning from non-anthropological disciplines were drawn gradually into the increasingly sophisticated debate about the Aborigines; Dr. A.G. Carroll and Ramsay Smith highlight the stimulating contribution of non-professional students of the Aborigines. Indeed it was Alan Carroll who founded the Anthropological Society of Australasia in December, 1895. By 1898 the society was producing its own journal, *The Science of Man*, which provided impressive evidence of the growing maturity of Australian anthropology in the last two decades of the century. (42) Carroll had been educated in London and Paris, receiving professional training as a doctor, before coming to Australia. (43) His work bears

(41) See Mathew, J.: *Eaglehawk and Crow* (Melbourne, 1899)
- *Two Representative Tribes of Queensland, With An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of the Australian Race* (London, 1910)
See especially the Prefaces to these two works.
See also Serle, P., op. cit., pp. 122-123


(43) For biographical detail see "In Memoriam", *Sc. Man* XIII, No. 1, May 1, 1911, pp. 1-14
witness to his erudition and to his understanding of Aboriginal culture. He was also one of the few men of the time who used the concept of race cautiously and meaningfully. (44) Ramsay Smith was a Scot by birth and had studied at Edinburgh University before coming to Australia in 1896. He was one-time government doctor in South Australia, city-coroner for Adelaide and head of the Health Department. His close study of the Aborigines in South Australia earned him distinction in the anthropological community and he was for a time the President of the Anthropological Section of the A.A.A.S.

The climate of opinion and the direction of aboriginal studies had thus undergone principal changes since the 1860s; Aboriginal studies were now pursued within a predominantly theoretical and scientific framework; theories imported from Britain and America permeated the work of some of the leading anthropologists and, no less importantly, the findings of Australians commanded much foreign attention; a well-defined anthropological fraternity with its own association and journal had emerged, providing new stimuli for research and new forums for discussion. Such a profound change in the anthropological scene was a tribute to the pioneers of scientific anthropology in Australia - Howitt, Fison, Gillen and Spencer.

(44) For Carroll's use of the concept of race and for examples of his interests and preoccupations see Carroll, A.G.: "An Introduction to Anthropology", Sc. Man XIII, No. 10, Feb. 1, 1912, pp. 203-204 and No. 12, April 1, 1912, pp. 243-245 (this article was written in 1896)
Implicit in the work of most of those who turned their attention to the Aborigines were several Victorian prejudices, often vague but rarely impotent. Cultural value-judgements produced a set of popular racial myths: the assumption of the biological and social superiority of the white man, the belief in the perfection of Anglo-Saxon institutions, the notion that the extinction of the natives was inevitable and appointed by God. (1) Such ideas imposed obvious obstacles to a genuine understanding of the black man and his society. Close personal contact with the Aborigines and a scientific spirit of inquiry did not necessarily preclude adherence to these myths. Again the example of Howitt is instructive. Throughout his research Howitt continued to subscribe uncritically to notions divorced from scientific evidence. The extinction of the coloured race was inevitable; contact with the white races was fatal, destroying the old savage virtues and producing destructive new vices. (2) In *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, he suggested that the ruinous influence of European civilisation on the Aborigines was part of a global process of the racial decline of the dark races. (3) Of their mental characteristics he had no high opinion: their intellectual development, he wrote, was arrested at a level similar to that of a white child at the age of twelve to fourteen. (4) Such non-scientific ideas were current amongst anthropologists as well as

(1) Much more will be said of these notions in the next two chapters. Brief reference to them is made here as they underly all anthropological research.


(3) Howitt, A.W.; in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai*, pp. 181-182

(4) *ibid*, p. 260
laymen.

There were other factors also often inimical to an anthropological research; the apathy and ignorance of the public, the condition of the Aborigines themselves, and the relationship between Australian and foreign anthropology.

Most Australians were little interested in the objective, scientific study of a stereotyped minority group. For many, the Aborigine was an object of derision, ribald humour, embarrassment, pity or crusading fervour; it was only for the few that his culture and his physiology were of crucial significance. The apathy of the average Australian to the researches of men like Howitt and Spencer posed a series of problems. The refusal to reply to questionnaires or the inability to understand the questions partially accounts for the paucity of second-hand information on which the anthropologists were forced to rely. In 1874 Fison and Howitt dispatched five hundred questionnaires to people whom they believed to be in contact with the natives; by March 1876, fewer than 5% had been returned and less than 1% yielded useful results. (5) In a letter to Morgan, Howitt lamented the "utter apathy" of the population on those questions he was studying. (6) It was difficult to enlist reliable informants and vexing to have to depend on second-hand information. (7) Such frustrations were not sufficient to dampen Howitt's enthusiasm; "indeed," he wrote to Morgan in 1877, "when I think of the vast amount of information here daily going into annihilation through the dying out of the aboriginal race and with them the knowledge of their customs, I feel

(5) Stern, B.J.: "Letters of Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt", p. 259
Mulvaney, D.J.: Howitt as Anthropologist - p. 28

(6) A.W. Howitt to L.H. Morgan - Feb. 28, 1876
- Stern, B.J.: "Letters of Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt", p. 259

(7) Corris, P., op. cit., pp. 14-15
doubly, trebly urged into renewed efforts." (8) Nor were governments usually sympathetic; like most governments they were oblivious to the financial demands of a small but important and not inexpensive area of intellectual endeavour. "It was in this arid intellectual climate that Howitt and Fison worked, and their aims, methods and achievements must be assessed within the horizons of this environment." (9)

The condition of the Aborigines themselves was also a critical factor in narrowing those horizons. Their illiteracy provided tangible difficulties. Aboriginal dialects were not only difficult to master but so diverse that it took many years of untiring study before one could hope to communicate directly with a significant number of the natives. (10) Perhaps even more serious than the linguistic barriers were the disintegration of tribal life and traditional culture patterns, and the psychological gulf between Aborigine and European. By the late 19th century most Aborigines were at least a generation removed from the old way of life. As many commentators noted, the encroachments of the Europeans had a disintegrative effect on Aboriginal society. "The most unfortunate thing in regard to our Australian natives," wrote Baldwin Spencer to Marett, "is that most that has been written in regard to their beliefs has been gained from civilized natives. Even Dr. Howitt's natives were fairly well-civilized... and it is extraordinary how rapidly they pick up 'white' ideas." (11)

(8) A.W. Howitt to L.H. Morgan - July 27, 1877
- Stern, B.J.: "Letters of Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt", p. 264

(9) Mulvaney, D.J.: Howitt as Anthropologist, p. 1

(10) See for example, Fison, L. and Howitt, A.W.: Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 186
Corris, P., op. cit., p. 9
Mulvaney, D.J.: Howitt as Anthropologist, p. 27ff
Spencer, B.: Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, pp. 75, 79, 85, 122, 157

(11) Spencer to Marett - June 13, 1913 (Cont'd)
anthropologists were thus studying a bastardized society.

Spencer's correspondence yields many examples of the difficulty of communicating with the natives. One letter to Balfour accents a common problem:

The more one knows of the natives the more one sees that it is impossible to gain any real knowledge about them except by living amongst them for a long time. You can collect their weapons and implements, but in regard to their customs and beliefs, you must be thoroughly well-known to, and trusted by them, before you get any reliable information... at home you hardly realize the fact that it is simply impossible for a man, however good he may be as an observer, to come out here and get into the confidence of the natives. To do this he must simply live amongst them for years... (12)

Few had Spencer's patience and sensitivity; most were content with a superficial understanding of Aboriginal psychology.

II

Spencer complained in his correspondence of the lack of intellectual stimulus in Australia; after a time in Australia, he told Frazer, one became "fossilized". (13) Thus the Australian anthropologists, for the most part, often looked to Britain to find the impetus and direction of their work. The relationship of the disciplines and the anthropological communities of Britain and Australia poses several teasing problems. To what extent was Australian anthropology derivative? How did foreign theory affect Australian opinion and field-work?

(11) Cont'd. See also Spencer to Frazer - July 12, 1897 in Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, p. 158 and p. 3


(13) B. Spencer to J.G. Frazer - Sept. 13, 1911, Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, p. 121
The British background of many of the important figures of the period is not without significance; Curr, Fison, Howitt, Mathew, Roth, Spencer, Ramsay Smith, Carroll and Bonwick were all educated in Britain where many enjoyed at least a casual acquaintance with men like Tylor, Frazer, Max Müller, Balfour, Marett and T.H. Huxley. Apart from the bush-bred Gillen and R.H. Matthews it is difficult to identify any notable Australian anthropologist who was free of the influences of a British education and who was unfamiliar with the predominantly Darwinian milieu of the natural sciences. As has been noted Darwin's work provided a keen stimulus to the theoretical study of primitive man, of whom the Aborigine was seen as the most striking representative. (14)

Most Australian anthropologists used foreign theories as a whetstone for their researches: Fison and Howitt, for example, were particularly indebted to Lewis Henry Morgan (the only American to exercise a formative influence on the discipline in Australia in this period); Spencer owed much to Tylor and Frazer. (15) Frequent correspondence between Australian and British scholars, the publication of much Australian research in British journals (especially the Journal of the Anthropological Institute), the currency of definitive Australian works in British circles, gestures of mutual respect (such as dedications), and generous reference to the work of those across the seas, all testify to an intimate relationship. The effects of such a relationship were threefold: Australian research

(14) The impact of evolutionary theory on attitudes to and the study of the Aborigines will be scrutinized in the next two chapters.

(15) See references to correspondence between Fison and Howitt and Morgan in preceding chapter.
See also L. Fison to L.H. Morgan - July 22, 1881 and Morgan to Fison quoted in Stern, B.J.: "Letters of Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt", p. 159ff
- Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J.: "Preface" to The Northern Tribes of Central Australia (London, 1904), pp. xv - xvi
paralleled the development of theory in England (and to a lesser extent, the U.S.A.); consequently many aspects of Aboriginal society were neglected; and thirdly, a creative two-way intercourse of ideas flourished. Both the strengths and the weaknesses of Australian anthropology are intelligible in the context of this relationship.

Australia was perceived as a gigantic laboratory offering unique facilities for studying primordial man and for confirming or testing theories about the origin and antiquity of mankind, and the growth of social institutions. The influence of Lewis Henry Morgan crystallizes some of the central preoccupations of the period. Morgan failed to differentiate cultural and biological phenomena, and, like many of his colleagues, applied the evolutionary scheme and methodology to social institutions. Ancient Society offers a singularly naive catalogue of human cultures; the Australians are afforded a humble position in the scale of civilisation. Morgan and his disciples were interested in pristine cultures primarily to construe patterns of the past. Indeed, Howitt's interest in the Aborigines was nurtured by the belief that they represented a very early phase of man's social development. They could throw "unexpected light on the most obscure practices of antiquity...". (16) In the different communities of the Australian natives, it was possible to trace the gradual development of primitive society which had elsewhere progressed through the status of savagery to barbarism, and ultimately to the present position of the civilized races. (17) In Kamilaroi and Kurnai, Fison and Howitt applied Morgan's social evolutionism to Australian conditions and later supported him

(17) Howitt, A.W.: "Anthropology in Victoria", p. 20
Compare with Morgan, L.H. "Prefatory Note" to Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 7
in acrimonious debate with McLennan, Lubbock and Andrew Lang over the significance of kinship systems. (18) Fison and Howitt were thus concerned to verify, or at least test Morgan's hypothesis. They thereby inherited many of his shortcomings; the assumption of the psychic unity of man, his common origin and unilinear social development. Their preoccupations were essentially academic, theoretical and specialized. They were less interested in understanding the Aborigines than to combat the social problems of the present and the future. Many aspects of Aboriginal culture and the political and economic systems were neglected. Howitt's "motivating interest" in social evolution prevented him from confronting psychological, moral and pragmatic problems threatening the existence of native culture.

Howitt's theoretical preoccupations may have caused him to pre-judge his material or to search only for information confirming his theories. However, he does appear to have made strenuous efforts to obtain reliable information. On occasion he demonstrated his intellectual independence by questioning or repudiating some of Morgan's ideas. (19) Australian anthropologists exhibited some sensitivity to the accusation that their work lacked objectivity. It is at least a tribute to their integrity that they were mindful of this problem. (20)

(18) L. Fison to L.H. Morgan - April, 10, 1879 - Stern, B.J.: "Letters of Lorimer Fison and A.W. Howitt", p. 419
McLennan, Lubbock and Lang were eminent British scholars who rejected some of Morgan's basic premises. See Burrow, J.W.: Evolution and Society - A Study in Victorian Social Theory (Cambridge, 1966), pp. 228-236


- Matthews, R.H.: "Ethnological Notes", p. 204 - Fraser, Dr. J.: The Aborigines of Australia; Their Ethnic Position and Relations,
Just as Howitt's work was in large part shaped by Morgan's theories, so Spencer's work was often guided by Frazer's theoretical speculations, and to a lesser extent, by those of E.B. Tylor. In correspondence with Frazer, Spencer constantly offers his services and indeed the Englishman plied him with many queries. (21) Spencer did not reject Frazer's ideas when they did not comply with the facts. (22) His work does not seem to have been as restricted by theoretical preoccupations as was Howitt's.

It would be naive to assume that because men like Howitt and Spencer were dependent on foreign theories they were devoid of intellectual creativity or that their researches were wasted on theoretical problems. They both (and indeed many others - Fison, Mathews, Mathew, Roth) fertilized anthropological theory and harvested much previously unknown ethnographical and anthropological information about the Aborigines. (23) Howitt had pioneered new questionnaire techniques, ethno-musicology and the field study of native rituals, and had given new pertinence to the theories of Morgan and Tylor. "His theories are demonstrably untenable, his methods questionable, and his interpretations fallacious. Even so, this neither

(20) Cont'd. (London, 1888), p. 36
Baldwin Spencer seems to have been acutely aware of the demands of objective research; B. Spencer to J.G. Frazer - July 12, 1897.
B. Spencer to Halfour - Sept. 20, 1897 - Jan. 28, 1898 in Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, pp. 10, 136, 138
Sir James Frazer too was aware of the pitfalls of depending on theory for impetus to research. "Indeed," he wrote to Spencer, "I incline to think that the usefulness and value of books like yours is rather impaired by the importation of general theories and discussions. What we want in such books... is a clear and precise statement of facts... that and nothing else." Frazer to Spencer - Aug 26, 1898, ibid., p. 23

(21) For instance see - Spencer to Frazer - Nov. 14, 1897 - Frazer to Spencer - Jan. 13, 1898 - Frazer to Spencer - Sept. 15, 1898 in Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, pp. 15, 17-18, 16-27

(22) Spencer to Frazer - March 18, 1904, ibid., pp. 102-103

discounts the value of much of his information, nor detracts from his sway." (24) The work of such men did not go unrecognized by those to whom they owed so much of their inspiration. Morgan paid high tribute to the work of Fison and Howitt. (25) Of Spencer's work, Frazer wrote: "...his writings will long survive him for the enlightenment of a distant posterity and for a monument, more lasting than any of bronze or marble, to his fame." (26) Marett's praises were no less stintless. (27)

Several problems and inherent limitations then, defined the outer boundaries of Aboriginal anthropology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the currency of negative European prejudices, public and governmental apathy, the illiteracy of the natives, the disintegration of traditional culture patterns, the psychological gulf between the investigators and the investigated, crude anthropological techniques and the dominant influence of imported theories. Because of theoretical preoccupations, many administrative, economic and moral aspects and problems of Aboriginal society were left unattended. There was, obversely, the tendency to place the natives in an historical and theoretical framework rather than to study them as members of a dynamic and organic society.

(24) Mulvaney, D.J.: Howitt as Anthropologist, p. 4
I

In November, 1859, Charles Darwin published his "magnum opus". By 1876 The Origin of the Species had sold 16,000 copies in England. (1) Although as a sober scientific thesis it was unexpectedly popular amongst the British public, its sales seem surprisingly small, disproportionate to its pervasive and animating influence on the country's intellectual life in the late 19th century. Darwin's theory effected a profound re-orientation of the central tenets of biological and geological science and generated heated religious controversy. Pre-Darwinian notions about man's origin and antiquity proved to be combustible. Darwin had "rendered evolution inescapable as a fact, comprehensive as a process, all-embracing as a concept." (2) Darwin's theory became a potent weapon in a scientific assault on a whole family of disciplines - anthropology, ethnology, geography, history, archaeology and biblical philology all shook under the impact of Darwinian theory. (3) One of the keys to the "Darwinian Revolution" can be discovered in the acceptance of the evolutionary scheme and method by men eminent in a great variety of scientific and sociological disciplines. (4)


(3) For a detailed and cogent discussion of the impact of Darwinian theory see Himmelfarb's book-passim. Darwin's immediate influence in the U.S.A. was less direct. The reasons are outside the scope of this study but are discussed in Hofstadter, op. cit., See esp. C. 1. "The Coming of Darwinism", pp. 1-17

(4) See the various articles in Seward, A.C. (edit.): Darwin and Modern Science (Cambridge, 1909)
By the 1870s evolutionary theory had impregnated the thinking of most of Britain's leading anthropologists. Two symptoms most relevant to this study were the theories of unilinear evolutionism and social Darwinism (or cultural evolutionism, as it is sometimes called).

Amongst the leading English unilinear evolutionists were E.B. Tylor and Lubbock. Their capital doctrine was that primitive groups, such as the Australian Aborigines, represented an early stage in a common line of human development - both physiological and cultural. As has been noted earlier, these "evolutionary ethnologists" (5) first applied the unilinear theory to anthropology in 1865. (6) Over the next thirty years unilinear evolutionism (applied to both physical and social categories) became orthodox anthropological theory in both Britain and Australia, and coloured the study of, and attitudes to, the Aborigines. (7)

Scientists and sociologists nowadays tend to eschew such terms as "inferior", "superior," and even "progress", as they realize that such notions reflect evaluations rooted in moral and philosophical reasoning and shaped by the values of the particular society in which they live. They are not terms based on absolute or scientific premises. 19th century laymen and anthropologists alike, on the other hand, tended to think in terms of a hierarchy of cultures. The concept of race and theories such as unilinear evolutionism, which made much use of race as a determinant of physical and cultural development, seemed to provide the key to that hierarchy. Evolutionary theory was to prove particularly helpful in establishing a direct

(5) Hofstadter, R., op. cit., p. 74

--- Kardiner, A. and Preble, E.: They Studied Man (Mentor, 1963), pp. 50-68
(7) There were dissenters to the unilinear approach. See Appendix II
relationship between race and culture. Unilinear evolutionism appeared as a legitimate scientific theory; it was based on an evolutionary scheme and rooted in biological sciences, such as craniometry, which depended on scrupulous and exhaustive measurement of physical indices.

II

Edward Burnett Tylor, with Morgan, Frazer and Herbert Spencer, was a figure much revered by Australian anthropologists in the late 19th century. His unilinear theory gave currency to certain distinctive themes in the study of the Aborigines. Tylor was born into a devout Quaker family in Camberwell, England, in 1832. The unorthodoxy of his religious beliefs later proved valuable although they cost him a classical university education. He was a tall, attractive man, endowed with a quiet humour, immense reserves of patience and a lively curiosity. His precarious health took him on a trip to the United States and to Cuba in 1856. By a happy vagary of Fate and by way of his Quaker background, Tylor and one Henry Christy met aboard a Cuban bus. Christy was a prosperous businessman and a reputable archaeologist. He was attracted to Tylor and persuaded him to participate in an archaeological expedition to Mexico. "Although it was of much shorter duration (six months), Tylor's expedition in Mexico played the same role in his career that the Beagle voyage played for Darwin; it shaped once and for all the course of his life's work. His life was henceforth to be devoted to the founding of a science of culture." (8) Tylor's mind was now possessed by a relentless desire to understand and explain the origin and diffusion of cultural institutions.

In 1861, Tylor published Anahuac, an account of the Mexican expedition, but it was his Researches in the Early History of Mankind,

(8) Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., p. 52
produced four years later, which established him as a force in British anthropology. *Primitive Culture* (1871) elaborated his theory. In 1884 Tylor was appointed to the new Readership in Anthropology at Oxford, and in 1895, to the first Chair. (9) Over the years he established the evolutionary method of investigation as a basic technique of the social sciences.

Tylor's theory rested on two central notions: the psychic unity of mankind, and the priority of 'Primitive Man' in the chronology of human development. These ideas allowed him to develop a theory of progressive, unilinear, cultural development as opposed to the degenerationist scheme which was being advanced contemporaneously. (10) By positing the common social development of the human species and thus reducing the complexities of various cultures to a few central principles, Tylor eased the burden of anthropological study.

The Australian Aborigines fitted comfortably into Tylor's unilinear scheme. His observations on the Tasmanians reflect the temper and tone of his work:

If there have remained anywhere up to modern times, men whose condition has changed little since the Early Stone Age, the Tasmanians seem to have been such a people. They stand before us... illustrating man near his lowest known level of culture. (11)

Tylor saw Tasmania as an invaluable anthropological laboratory where the Aborigines could be studied as living museum pieces, unchanged remnants from

(9) Burrow, J.W., *op. cit.*, p. 235
Kardiner, R. and Preble, E., *op. cit.*, p. 68

(10) Burrow, J.W., *op. cit.*, pp. 236-249

(11) Tylor, E.B.: Preface to Roth, H. Ling, *The Aborigines of Tasmania* (Halifax, England, 1899; 1st edition, 1890), p. v. Elsewhere he wrote "it will appear that the savages there... were representatives of stone age development..."
- "On the Tasmanians as Representatives of Palaeolithic Man" *J.R.A.I.* XXIII, 1893-1894, pp. 147-148
a long distant past. He lamented the "unhappy fate" of the Tasmanians less for humanitarian reasons than because of the great loss to science.

Essentially then, Tylor's theory concerned the evolution of cultural institutions. Australians, however, allied it with Darwin's biological theory and produced a confused unilinear theory which perverted the ideas of both Tylor and Darwin. By the 1880s it is not difficult to identify persistent strains of a type of unilinear anthropology which gave rise to four main themes in the study of the Aborigines; the backwardness of Aboriginal culture (a notion quite in accord with Tylor's findings); the physical inferiority of the Aborigines as a race; their psychological deficiencies; and the belief that physically and culturally they were an unchanging race. It was a dangerous composite of biological and social theory.

The theme of the social backwardness of the natives was, in large part, subsumed by social Darwinism. But it would be spurious to divorce it from other unilinear ideas. Howitt, for example, applauded the progression theory as a great scientific advance, and contrasted it with earlier romantic and religious ideas about the origin of the Aborigines and their present condition - ideas which he loosely labelled the "degradation theory":

The progression theory... is of modern origin, and has arisen through the scientific investigation and comparison of the social condition and customs of savage and barbarous races, of the survivals of archaic customs still met with among civilised peoples, and of the most ancient written records left to us from the past. The evidence drawn from these sources is of the utmost weight, coming to us without previous intention as to its ultimate use, and its concurrent testimony is very strong. The fundamental difference between the two rival theories, therefore, is that in the older one the unit is an individual man, while, in the newer, the unit is a body corporate, formed by an individual group of common descent. (12)

(12) Overleaf
This is an extraordinarily interesting statement. It appears to be merely to endorse the unilinear theory of social development expounded by both Tylor and Morgan. However it goes further in that Howitt affirms race ("group of common descent") as a key to the decipherment of man's history and his present condition. Such unilinealist reasoning thus equated cultural and physical development. (13)

Aboriginal physiology now became the subject of avid anthropological research. The application of the unilinear method to the Aborigines' physical nature rested, naturally enough, on the assumption that they were more akin to the apes than to white races who had long since passed through that phase of development. "They who accept the evolution doctrine as applied to the physical origin of man," wrote James Bonwick in 1886, "regard the Australians as, in some respects, nearer than most existing peoples to the anthropoid apes." (14) A Western Australian commentator noticed the European habit of passing off the Aborigines as "mere baboons". (15) Another writer suggested that the natives exhibited (12) Howitt, A.W. in Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 339 (underlining mine)
See also "Presidential Address", pp. 342, 351. - "Anthropology in Victoria", p. 20

(13) We shall return to the cultural aspect and to social Darwinism in the next chapter. Presently only the physical or pseudo-biological findings of a unilinear type will be discussed.

Bonwick (1817-1906) was born in England. After a modest education he obtained a teaching position at the Normal School in Hobart in 1841. He moved to Victoria as an inspector of denominational schools and was later appointed N.S.W. government archivist. Bonwick had no training in the natural sciences but he was a man of much energy and erudition, and a keen and sympathetic observer of the Aborigines. For biographical detail see

a physical inferiority unsurpassed by any other known race. (16) Ramsay Smith, President of the Anthropological Section of the A.A.A.S., conceded that "simian features are not all concentrated in any single race," then continued, "It has been allowed, however, that the Australian aboriginals have furnished the largest number of ape-like characters." (17) A few years later he made the classical application of unilinear doctrine to Aboriginal physiology, when he told the A.A.A.S.:

Centuries ago nature 'side-tracked' a race in Australia... It is capable of casting light on the evolution of human races in a way and to an extent, that probably no other can equal... It supplies us with data regarding the bodily variations occurring in primitive races, and the place and value of variations in estimating the zoological stratum or horizon to which races belong. (18)

Tylor had suggested that the pristine condition of Aboriginal man could shed light on man's cultural development; Ramsay Smith, like Howitt, extended this notion to cover man's biological development.

Implicit in the belief in the primeval nature of Aboriginal man were two assumptions which often appeared as corollaries to the unilinear interpretation: the notions of the natives' psychological inferiority and of their unchanging nature. Many unilinear evolutionists applied their theory to mental as well as physical and social development. The inferior intelligence of the natives seemed biologically indisputable, and intimately linked to their psychological peculiarities and rudimentary culture. The apparent psychological differences between white and black races were determinants, not products, of their cultures and derived from their race. Descent was decisive in determining a man's mental capacity.


(17) Smith, W. Ramsay: "The Place of the Aboriginal in Recent Anthropological Research" A.A.A.S., XI, 1907, p. 574. Like Bonwick, Smith was by no means an unsympathetic observer of the natives.

(18) Smith, W. Ramsay: "Australian Conditions and Problems from the standpoint of Present Anthropological Knowledge" A.A.A.S., XIV, 1913, p. 374
Lewis Morgan extended the unilinear technique of explanation to man's mental development. Assuming, as did Tylor and Lubbock, the basic similarity of men's minds, he wrote of the primitive races, "We are thus enabled to trace, by its uniformity, the operations of the human mind, in its upward progress from savagery to civilisation..." (19) The natives' psychological inferiority was a complementary doctrine. The thoughts of a savage, Morgan believed, were "feeble in degree and limited in range..." (20)

Earlier writings in England had prepared the way for this notion. One commentator told the learned gentlemen of the Anthropological Institute:

To speak, however, of intellectual phenomena in relation to the Australian aborigines is somewhat of a misnomer... it is evident that the Aborigines of Australia, as compared with the races who have made further progress in mental culture, are yet in the condition of children. (21)

The application of unilinear theory, with concomitant assumptions, to psychological categories became common practice in Australia. Calvert, the West Australian, noted that the Aborigines had been represented as "mere baboons possessing an innate and incurable deficiency of intellect rendering them incapable of instruction or civilisation..." (22) The comparison with baboons, and consequent assumptions about the natives' intelligence, bore the signature of evolutionary ideas. Indeed, the Rev. D. Macallister, a Melbourne clergyman, suggested that the Aborigines were more akin to the apes than to white humanity. "The lowest existing races of men," he wrote, "stand intellectually much nearer to the apes on the one side, than they do to the higher races of men on the other." (23) Elsewhere

(19) Morgan, L.H.: "Prefatory Note" to Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 7 (underlining mine)
(20) ibid., p. 20
(21) Wake, C.S.: "The Mental Characteristics of Primitive Man, as Exemplified by the Australian Aborigines" J.A.I., I, 1872, p. 74 and p. 82. - See esp. pp. 80-83. Again we see the identification of race and mental development and the notion that the whites had progressed much further along the common line of psychological evolution.
(22) Calvert, A.F., op. cit., p. 55
(23) Overleaf
he depicted them as the "very lowest link of the long chain embraced by mankind." (24) For his compilation on the Tasmanians, H. Ling Roth found many assertions of the natives' mental inferiority. As the observations of most important students of the Tasmanian aborigines are represented in his book, it provides a useful barometer to the anthropological climate. (25)

The assumption of the natives' psychological inferiority was not uncommon early in the 19th century, and not all later manifestations of it derive from unilinear theory. Often there is no evidence by which its origins can be determined. Mathew, the Queensland anthropologist, wrote of the Queensland tribes, "the mental faculties of the people were not of a high order." (26) This conclusion appears to have been based on direct observation but it would be rash to suggest that Mathew might not have been influenced by current unilinear ideas or that they did not confirm him in his opinion.

The supposition of the Aborigines' psychological limitations found currency outside anthropological precincts. (27) Mrs. J. Smith, the wife of a South Australian missionary, recorded that it was "a general opinion among Europeans" that the blacks were "too low intellectually and morally, to


(26) Mathew, J.: Eaglehawk and Crow (Melbourne, 1899), p. 76

(27) This study is not directly concerned with popular opinion at large. Nevertheless, brief references to crude, non-scientific attitudes and opinions are useful in indicating the general European approach to the Aborigines. As has been noted, the anthropologists themselves were not immune to green Victorian prejudices.
be either Christianized or civilized." (28) Goodman, an historian of the Victorian church during Perry's episcopate testified: "As to the mental calibre of the Australian blacks... The native... is limited in this respect." (29)

Another persistent theme stressed the racial stagnation of the earliest occupants of the continent's arid interior. Tylor himself wrote of "men whose condition has changed little since the Early Stone Age." Ramsay Smith talked of a "side-tracked" race still fettered in a "primitive condition." The idea was not uncommon. A Victorian observer reflected that they were a people who appeared "to have come to a standstill in some remote age..." (30) Another commentator's observations were somewhat more facile: "Since the earliest record of the race, over three centuries ago," he claimed, "no change... has been observed in them." (31)

The lines of reasoning leading to this conclusion are often unclear. Sometimes the argument is circular, as when stagnation was seen as the natural condition of primitive man; presumably he remained primitive because of it.

Neither Tylor nor Ramsay Smith explain why the Aborigines had stagnated. Others resorted to tautology and suggested that the Aborigines were a static race because they were non-adaptive. Rarely was this spelt out to give content to the notion of non-adaptability. One comparatively sophisticated observer, Noetling, believed that the Tasmanian's were mentally

(28) Smith, Mrs. J., op. cit., p. 33


(30) Beveridge, P.: The Aborigines of Victoria and Riverina (Melbourne, 1889), p. 105

The Tasmanian race had already reached their highest point of evolution; it was impossible for them to go further; they could not conceive new ideas, or make new inventions, and had the race still existed for another thousand years, at the end of that period they would have exactly been where they were at its beginning. It is questionable that the incapability of the Tasmanians to adapt themselves to new ideas or surroundings accelerated its extinction. (32)

However, the salient questions were left unanswered; why were the Tasmanians non-adaptive? Was it because of the physical environment, or because of the lack of cultural contact with other races, or for other reasons? Some social Darwinists offered new explanations for the alleged stagnation of the Aborigines and wedded the notion to belief in their inevitable racial extinction.

III

One by-product of assertions about the Aborigines' physical and mental backwardness was the preoccupation with physical indices and the abortive attempt to employ them as a guide to psychological development and potential. Phrenology as such seems to have excited little attention amongst Australian anthropologists. Nevertheless there were attempts to define a relationship between physical and intellectual development. In 1910, K.S. Cross, an Australian doctor produced an article under the imposing title of "On a Numerical Determination of the Relative Positions of Certain Biological Types in the Evolutionary Scale, and of the Relative Values of various Cranial Measurements and Indices as Criteria." (33) The title reflects the theoretical preoccupations mentioned in earlier chapters,


and points to an enthusiasm for numerical methodology. (34) Craniometry was particularly popular. (35)

In his article, Dr. Cross urged that "Attempts should... be made to determine as accurately as possible certain standard positions in the evolutionary scale. Anthropoid apes and certain highly and lowly developed races of modern man could have their various average measurements determined to a considerable degree of accuracy." (36) In short, he believed that evolutionary development could be graphed by reference to physical indices. Others employed the numerical method in trying to establish the origin, the evolutionary status and the peculiarities of racial physiology.

After painstaking study of 388 Melbourne criminals, 33 of whom had been executed, Berry and Büchner concluded that there was some correlation between the cubic capacity of the skull and the intelligence of the brain housed in its interior. Their conclusions were singularly imprecise. (37) In the belief that evolutionary development was determined primarily

(34) A random glance at the leading anthropological journals or standard texts of the time will uncover a multitude of charts, graphs, tables and the like. See for example, the measurement of cephalic indices in Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J.: The Northern Tribes of Central Australia, p. 62ff.


(36) Cross, Dr.K.S.: "On a Numerical Determination...", p. 75

by racial characteristics, Berry, Cross and A.W.D. Robertson devoted themselves to a tireless study of Aboriginal crania. (38)

Others were less scientific. G.T. Bettany, a non-professional commentator, saw an "ungainliness and coarseness" in the outlines of the Aboriginal skull which suggested kinship with the animals. He claimed that the average skull capacity of the Aborigines was 20% less than that of the white man, and then went on to say, implying a direct connection: "In mental power he is inferior to most savage races... Many observers agree that the Australians are to a large extent in the mental position of children". (39) Many believed that the various races exhibited their own physiological peculiarities in brain structure. (40) One writer suggested that from infancy to youth the blacks were the intellectual equals of white children, but then "the sutures are ossified, and the power to learn and to keep pace with the whites is lost." (41)

The assumption of psychological inferiority, then, was based not merely on mere theorizing or on vague suspicion, but also on the measurement of various physical indices. The idea thus enjoyed the apparent confirmation of biological science.


- Berry, R.J.A. and Cross, K.S.: "Biometrical Study of the Relative Degree of the Purity of Race of the Tasmanian, Australian and Papuan"

(39) Bettany, G.T.: The Red, Brown and Black Men of America and Australia and Their White Supplanters (Melbourne, 1890), pp. 201-202

(40) See "Civilisation" in Sc. Man VI, No. 6 - July 24, 1903 and "Craniometry as Applicable to the Lower Animals, and to Each Human Race" Sc. Man I, No. 2 - March 21, 1898, pp. 35-36

(41) "Savages and Civilised Men" - Sc. Man VI, No. 2 - March 21, 1903, p. 52
Darwin's evolutionary scheme was erected on a biological theory dependent on the principle of natural or "intra-social" selection, and relevant only to the individual members of various species. However, Darwin became an "intellectual Pandora"; (1) his evolutionary scheme and methodology were appropriated and applied to non-biological categories. The social Darwinists were conspicuous amongst those who pillaged Darwin's work.

As a term "social Darwinism" does not denote any precise technical concept of anthropology or sociology, or any coherent and rigid theory; it refers rather to the technique of applying evolutionary biological methods and concepts to social and historical phenomena. Social Darwinism, in its various manifestations, bore only superficial resemblance to Darwin's theory. It dealt not with the single biological unit of man or beast but with larger groups, such as races and nations, which were not necessarily defined by any meaningful biological criteria. The social Darwinists propounded the principle of "intra-social" selection which pointed to co-operation within certain cultural and ethnic groups; the desire to compete with other similar groups stimulated such cooperation. From this concept they extracted certain political and social imperatives. As Himmelfarb has noted "More than most theories, Darwinism lent itself to such stratagems of persuasion, enjoying not only the prestige and authority attached to science, but also the faculty of being readily translated into social terms. That this translation was rather free and loose was an added advantage, since it gave licence to a variety of social gospels." (2)

(1) Hofstadter, R., op. cit., p. 73
(2) Himmelfarb, G., op. cit., p. 340. Darwin himself did not always (Cont'd)
The original authors of social Darwinism were E.B. Tylor and Herbert Spencer. The earliest formulation of their theories preceded the publication of Darwin's epochal works. Thus, in its early form at least, social Darwinism was not an illegitimate offspring of Darwin's theory but rather a distant and elder cousin who later exploited the family name. The technique of applying the conceptual apparatus of natural science to the study of man and his society was, of course, not new. Adam Smith, for example, had employed Newton's concept of nature as a law-bound system of matter in motion to illuminate the dynamics of a society in which a collection of individuals pursued their self-interest in an economic order governed by the laws of supply and demand. (3) The most salient innovation introduced by the social Darwinists was the use of scientific concepts for analytical and prescriptive as well as descriptive purposes.

In 1852 Herbert Spencer published Development and Hypothesis, a paper in which he perceived society as an organism subject to evolutionary processes not unlike those which Darwin was soon to detect in the world of nature. (4) Over the next half-century Spencer expanded and elaborated his theory so successfully that it became the cornerstone of a new approach to history and society.

Spencer was born in Derby, England, in 1820. From his earliest youth until his death in 1903, Spencer exhibited both a persistent interest in the natural sciences and a no less persistent indifference to classics,

(2) Cont'd. differentiate man and animal sufficiently clearly. In some cases, he also failed to distinguish traits which were culturally rather than biologically transmitted. Such weaknesses in his work lent disproportionate authority to the pronouncements of the social Darwinists. See Huxley, J., op. cit., p. 31ff


(4) Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., p. 36
history and literature. This imbalance is not insignificant in understanding a man obsessed with classification and synthesis, and impatient with the irregularities and the apparent irrationalities of history. Spencer had a keen sense of observation and a speculative intellect overwhelmed by the need to catalogue the world around him into a neat and all-embracing system. His imagination knew no boundaries and his intellect baulked at nothing. (5)

Our only concern amongst Spencer's ponderous output of systematizing theory on a host of subjects is his theory of social evolution. (6) Pivotal to much of Spencer's work was his principle of universal evolution from "incoherent homogeneity" to "coherent heterogeneity", or in simpler terms, from crude simplicity to sophisticated complexity. "Whether it be in the development of the Earth, in the development of life upon its surface, in the development of Society, of Government...", he wrote in 1857, "this same evolution of the simple into the complex, through successive differentiations, holds throughout." (7) In this aspect Spencer's theory was "progressive" (rather than degenerationist) and optimistic. The psychological, as well as physical, evolution of the human species was an accessory doctrine to Spencer's social Darwinism. (8) The writings of Morgan and


(6) The vast dimensions of Spencer's life-work and the specific details of his many theories still appear to await definitive historical treatment. Indeed, it would be a demanding and bewildering undertaking.

(7) Spencer, H. - per Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., p. 36 (underlining mine)

Howitt have already demonstrated the later currency of such ideas.

It was Herbert Spencer rather than Charles Darwin who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest"; he invested it with social as well as biological significance. It became a social Darwinist doctrine which placed a premium on competition and which had conservative political implications. (9) "Herbert Spencer and his philosophy were products of English industrialism... Spencer's was a system conceived in and dedicated to an age of steel and steam engines, competition, exploitation and struggle." (10)

When the Darwinist ideas of Spencer are merged with Tylor's unilinear theory, their relevance to the Australian Aborigines becomes more obvious. As already noted, Tylor postulated the psychic unity of mankind and the unilinear development of human cultures. He succumbed to the apparently plausible but dangerous notion that contemporary primitive cultures were comparable to those of pre-historic times:

Such being the position of the Tasmanians as modern tribes in the lowest Stone Age, the study of their culture affords valuable though imperfect guidance to the formation of opinion as to the earliest distinctly recognizable period of human civilisation. (11)

Spencer's suggestion that a society's evolutionary development could be gauged by its degree of complexity seemed to buttress Tylor's

Eliot, H., op. cit., pp. 92-180, 233-249
Burrow, J.W., op. cit., p. 186ff
Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., pp. 36-49

(9) These will receive some attention in Chapter 5. See also Appendix III.

(10) Hofstadter, op. cit., p. 22, See pp. 18-36

assessment of Aboriginal culture and his unilinear theory.

Spencer's theory of social evolution overlapped with unilinear evolutionism. The real significance of Spencer's theory lay not so much in its originality - Tylor's was more sophisticated and persuasive - but in its popularity and its relevance to a wider range of social issues. His audience was larger than that of the more cautious and academic Tylor. Spencer's cultural evolutionism was apparently scientific in derivation, all embracing in scope, easily comprehended by the layman, and a reassuring theory of progress readily accommodated in Victorian minds. The doctrine of social evolution, the "survival of the fittest" principle and related ideas about competition and progress were marshalled to explain the backward condition of the Aborigines.

II

It was not without consequence that the deities reverenced by Australian anthropologists in the late 19th century - Tylor, Lubbock, J.G. Frazer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and to lesser degree Herbert Spencer - were all cultural evolutionists. (12) As we have seen, their ideas percolated into Australia and circulated amongst anthropologists and natural scientists.

The comparison of Aboriginal and archaic cultures was recurrent and the natives' low status in social evolution axiomatic. Howitt's researches disclosed to him a "remarkable conformity" between the customs

(12) As well as their own works, which have already been cited, see Lienhardt, G., op. cit., p. 26
Penniman, T.K., op. cit., pp. 178, 186, 312ff, 160-163, 163-167
It may seem curious that Spencer, one of the greatest apostles of social Darwinism, should be less highly esteemed. The reason was, of course, that he was not an anthropological specialist. His influence outside the anthropological community was probably greater than that of men like Tylor and Morgan.
of existing savages and those of man's ancestors, and between the structures of their societies. (13) Spencer and Gillen believed that the dark inhabitants of the continent's arid interior had retained the most primitive forms of customs and beliefs. (14) Ramsay Smith told the A.A.A.S, that the black man's society supplied "materials for a critical study of the origins and development of folklore, art, writing, language, mental emotions, morality, religion and marriage. The primitive pages are here in abundance...". (15) The point needs no labouring. (16)

This type of social Darwinist assessment thus sanctioned negative cultural judgements. It confirmed the suspicion that Aboriginal society was inferior to the white man's civilisation in much the same way as the apes were inferior to "homo sapiens". It was often asserted that the natives were "low in the scale of civilisation". (17) The words "low" and "scale" are significant, suggesting a vertical and qualitative grading of cultures. Naturally the tableau of the "primitive pages" was exciting to the

(13) Howitt, A.W. in Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 339

(14) Spencer, B. and Gillen, F.J.: The Northern Tribes of Central Australia, p. xii. A year earlier Spencer had written in a letter to Frazer, "I am convinced that just as animals have developed along certain lines, so certain savage tribes have developed along certain lines." B. Spencer to J.G. Frazer - Sept. 22, 1903 in Spencer's Scientific Correspondence, p. 93

(15) Smith, W. Ramsay: "Australian Conditions and Problems...", p. 374

(16) See also Fraser, Dr. J., op. cit., pp. 5-21
Howitt, A.W.: "Anthropology in Australia", p. 20
Beveridge, P., op. cit., pp. 105-106

(17) See, for example, Walker, J.B., ibid.
Mathew, J.: Eaglehawk and Crow, p. 78
anthropologist and reassuring to his world-view. However, it relied on concepts fallacious in their premises and sinister in implication. (18)

Having asserted the backwardness of Aboriginal culture, some felt obliged to offer an historical explanation. Here the notions of the social "struggle for survival" and "survival of the fittest" had some utility. Spencer himself had written in *The Principles of Sociology*:

> Not simply do we see that in the competition among individuals of the same kind, survival of the fittest has from the beginning furthered production of a higher type; but we see that to the increasing warfare between species is mainly due both to growth and organisation. Without universal conflict there would have been no development of the active powers. (19)

This "competition principle" was translated, in grandiose style, into a scenario picturing a grim struggle, not between species, but between ethnic groups and nations. Karl Pearson, the English scientist, in 1893, offered a classic enunciation of the "competition principle" thus applied:

> ...the scientific view of a nation is that of an organised whole kept up to a high pitch of internal efficiency by insuring that its members are substantially recruited from the better stocks and kept up to a high pitch of external efficiency by contest, chiefly by way of war with inferior races... the continual progress of mankind is the scarcely recognized outcome of the bitter struggle of race with race." (20)

Two ideas seemed to follow from this equation of efficiency and competition; Aboriginal culture had stagnated because of the lack of

(18) See Chapter 6
(19) per Hofstadter, R., *op. cit.*, p. 69
competition, and now that they were in competition with other races that had occupied the Australian continent, the natives were doomed to extinction. Sir James Frazer's observations on the subject bore a social Darwinist signature:

In the struggle for existence (he wrote) progress depends mainly on competition; the more numerous the competitors, the fiercer the competition, and the more rapid consequently its evolution. In Australia, the smaller area of the continent combined with its physical features, notably the arid and desert nature of a large part of the country, has always restricted population and retarded progress. (21)

This explanation was straightforward and plausible enough. However, other commentators revealed the endemic confusion between Aboriginal society as a cultural unit and the natives as an ethnic group. (22) Lewis Henry Morgan wrote in 1880 that the Australian natives were disappearing even more rapidly than the American aborigines "before the touch of civilisation; they were able to offer less resistance because of their "lower ethnical position". (23) Thus the seeds of destruction had germinated not only in


(22) This type of confusion between racial and cultural units persisted well into the 20th century. Sir A. Keith, for example, wrote in 1931 "A nation always represents an attempt to become a race; nation and race are but different degrees of the same evolutionary movement." Ethnos, 1931, per Banton, M., op. cit., p. 43. Not only is the confusion between race and nation significant but the ill-defined concept of the "evolutionary movement". Nationalism and racism became closely related dynamic historical forces in the late 19th century; the "organic" relationship of these two phenomena warrants further historical study if either is to be understood fully in either the European or the more specifically Australian context. An article on Australians and the Boer War provides one study of the inter-relationship of the forces of nationalism, imperialism and race-feeling. See Penny, B.: "Australia's Reaction to the Boer War - A Study in Colonial Imperialism" Journal of British Studies VII, No. 1, Nov. 1967

(23) Morgan, L.H.: "Prefatory Note" to Kamilaroi and Kurnai, p. 2
their cultural backwardness but in their racial characteristics; both factors precluded success in the struggle.

Of all the "natural laws" applied to the Aborigines, the most explicit and most persistent was that which prescribed their inevitable extinction. The evidence demonstrating the almost universal currency of this belief is too formidable to allow reference to more than a representative sample.

James Bonwick, that erudite and humane observer, suggested that only a few miserable remnants lingered on..." The Australian aborigines are descending to the grave. Old races everywhere give place to the new." (24) Another commentator told the South Australian Royal Society, that the natives, like all other indigenous and inferior races, were disappearing before the "advancing civilization"; the law of the "survival of the fittest" was asserting itself to their detriment. (25) E.M. Curr predicted "the total extinction of the aborigines at no very distant date." (26)

Nearly all students of the Aborigines predicted extinction but few exhibited any clear understanding of the distinction between cultural disintegration and racial decline. Similarly few indicated whether their predictions were prompted by biological or social considerations. (27) They

(27) For a cross-section of opinion see;
Howitt, A.W.: "Anthropology in Australia", p. 22
Mathew, J.: Two Representative Tribes, pp. 81-82
Macallister, D.: "Man's Relation to Other Animals", p. 111
The Dawn of Civilisation (pamphlet), (Melbourne, 1891), p. 15
Calvert, A.F., op. cit., p. 9
were content to refer to the disintegrative effect of contact with "superior races" and the "advancing civilisation". Race was rarely employed as a scientific concept, but often as a loose descriptive and all-embracing explanatory term.

Just as belief in the psychological inferiority of the blacks had not always depended on unilinear theory, the "extinction doctrine" was not always nourished by social Darwinism. Vague natural law or the design of Providence was more frequently invoked than rational argument. Politicians, often seeking justification for their policies with respect to the natives, found refuge in the notion of their inevitable extinction. One West Australian M.P. looked forward to the "happy day" when the country was free of the kangaroos and the natives. He urged that "in dealing with this matter all maudlin sentiment should be abolished." (28) Mr. H.J. Wrixon, one-time Attorney-General of Victoria, summoned "the design of Providence" to support his prophecy of doom. The fate of the natives was sealed, not only by that law whereby "the inferior inevitably makes way for the better" but because they had abused the country in which the Creator had placed them. It did not seem a matter of regret to him that such worthless occupants of the continent should perish. (29) C.H. Pearson, the Victorian politician, hoped that the whites would not blind themselves to the fact that "weak races... seem to wither away at mere contact with the European." (30)

The observations of G. Goodman, the church historian, capture a

(29) See discussion of Greville's paper, op. cit., p. 47. See also p. 35
perverse logic characteristic of the period, and are worth quoting at some length:

...the aborigines of the country have a claim upon our Christian efforts, because we have taken possession of their hunting grounds, and by that inevitable law which attends the contact of civilized with uncivilized races, are consigning them to gradual but certain destruction. They learn our vices, contract our diseases, and as the inferior race fade away from before us. It is for the dying remnant that the appeal is made, and the least we can do for them is to give them the Gospel before they go hence and are seen no more. (31)

The seizure of land and the devastation caused by the vices and diseases of the "superior" race were not sufficient explanation; the "inevitable law" had to be introduced. (32)

The development of the racial myth of "yellow peril" is not directly relevant to this study. However it is interesting to discover a note of alarm, viz-a-viz the Asians, in some of the literature on the Aborigines. A few realized that the "survival of the fittest" doctrine might have ominous portents in view of the growing power of the Asian countries, particularly Japan. (33) Bonwick feared that the British race, "after the

(31) Goodman, G., op. cit., p. 349

(32) This tendency to look beyond the immediate situation towards some theoretical law was common practice. Some believed extinction to be inevitable but didn't acknowledge that it was the white man's treatment of the natives which made it seem so. See for example, two books by Willshire, a police trooper accustomed to shooting "the cannibals". It is not surprising that he should call them "a doomed race". Willshire, W.H.: The Aborigines of South Australia (Port Augusta, 1888) and The Land of the Dawning - Being Facts Gleaned from the Cannibals in the Australian Stone Age (Adelaide, 1896)

Bonwick's plea for the aborigines is a refreshing exception. "If the Natural Law of Selection," he wrote, "necessitates the destruction of inferior races, as History has illustrated thus far, is there not in Humanity, a Higher Law, better recognized in our day, which should and could be employed, by moral force, to resist this fearfully selfish struggle for existence." in "Preface" to The Lost Tasmanian Race. There were few who dared to pit moral force against the inexorable processes of Nature. Many tried to equate the two.

(33) The fictional literature on the "yellow peril" theme has not yet been thoroughly explored by historians. See, for interesting examples,
'survival of the fittest' doctrine", were someday to be supplanted by a more overwhelming people. (34) The oracular C.H. Pearson envisaged a time when those races now regarded as servile would thrust aside the whites. (35) The treatment of the Aborigines when juxtaposed with the "racial threat from the north" awoke a sense of dread in the heart of at least one clerical Australian: "with the teeming millions of Asia at our door who shall say no day of retribution will come upon Australia?" (36) However, the "yellow peril" phenomenon was not really absorbed into the national consciousness until shortly before the Great War, (37) and appears to have exercised no more than peripheral effect on 19th century attitudes to the blackman.

In concluding this brief discussion of social Darwinism and the Australian Aborigines, the words of G.T. Bettany in 1890 recall some of the most popular and persistent themes:

...whether we contemplate the Australians who survive or the Tasmanians who are extinct, we are impressed by the kinship of man to the animals, the slowness of their elevation, the bitterness of the strife that has arisen between the aborigines and the lower members of the European races, and the inexorable operation of the laws of natural selection and the survival of the


Roydhouse, T.R. ("Rata"): The Coloured Conquest (Sydney, 1904).


(35) Pearson, C.H., op. cit., p. 90


fittest to cope with the circumstances, that, is, the best equipped and strongest in one way or another. (38)
"The original sin of anthropology... consists in its confusion of the idea of race, in the purely biological sense... with the sociological and psychological productions of human civilisations." (1) Those subscribing to unilinear and cultural evolutionism were usually guilty of the original sin. They failed to recognize cultural diversities as social phenomena unrelated to the biological make-up of ethnic groups. The approach of many British and Australian anthropologists to the Aborigines' society was not directed by a desire to understand the dynamics, complexities and regional peculiarities of a contemporary (albeit alien) civilisation. Rather it was dictated by evolutionary schemes in which the Aborigines had been allotted a preconceived position by "laws of Nature". As Levi-Strauss has written of this type of European mentality, "anything which does not conform to the standard of the society in which the individual lives is denied the name of culture and relegated to the realm of nature." (2)

Most theorists confused race as a biological classification with race as an apparent determinant of culture. They used social criteria to determine a man's race and racial criteria to assess native cultures. However as Franz Boaz, the eminent American anthropologist, has written, "How little the biological, organic determinants can be inferred from the scale of culture appears if we try to realize how different the judgement of

(1) Levi-Strauss, C.: Race and History (Paris, 1952), p. 5. John Mulvaney (well-equipped to assess both historical and anthropological scholarship) has suggested to me that Levi-Strauss is perhaps the most widely respected of contemporary anthropologists.

(2) ibid., p. 11
racial ability would have been at various periods of our history." (3)

The chronic confusion in the late 19th century, between race and culture made several notions seem scientifically tenable: the physical and psychological inferiority of the natives, the stagnation and inevitable extinction of the coloured race and its pristine civilisation, the superior evolutionary development of European culture. These ideas were not without implications which transcended their theoretical significance. How valid were the most persistent themes of the period and what were their social and philosophical implications?

The doctrine of the white man's physical superiority enjoys no credence amongst scientists today; nor does unilinear evolutionism as applied to mankind's physiological or psychological development. Racial descent plays a comparatively insignificant role in determining a man's physical capabilities or intelligence. (4) It has been demonstrated that the hereditary physical and psychological differences amongst humans vary far more between individuals than between ethnic groups. As Ruth Benedict maintains, "No race has a monopoly of evolutionary end products, and no argument for superiority can be based on single traits selected just because they favour the white race." (5) If, for example, hairiness or lip structure should be taken as the crucial criteria in determining race,

(3) Boaz, F.: Race, Language and Culture (New York, 1940), pp. 247-249
For an assessment of Boaz's work as an anthropologist see Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., pp. 117-139

(4) Snyder, L., op. cit., p. 7

rather than skin pigmentation or cranial geography, it would be assumed that the Europeans were more akin to the apes than were the Aborigines.

The belief that the physical peculiarities of the Aborigines implied their mental inferiority, or that a scientific formula existed to equate physical indices and intellectual capacity, was also ill-founded. Men like Cross and Berry had failed to realize that "none of the anatomical features which have been used in racial classifications have any meaning as clues to mentality." (6) They failed to distinguish the need to explain physical characteristics in biological and mental characteristics in cultural terms. (7) Many anthropological theorists went further by attempting to relate the Aborigines' culture to his racial make-up.

The assumption of the natives' psychological inferiority also lacked scientific grounding. No man is limited in intelligence or social potential by inherited characteristics which are common only to his ethnic group. However, in the 19th century it was often impossible for men to distinguish their value judgements from scientific propositions. Men such as Howitt, Curr, Fraser and Mathew do not always seem to have realized that the social behaviour of the natives was determined not by their membership of an under-developed race but by their cultural environment. "The evidence from the biologists, "Professor Banton tells us," indicates that the socially significant group differences are culturally and not genetically transmitted. Cultural differences therefore occupy a central place in the study of race relations whereas, on present evidence, genetical factors are peripheral to


(7) See Banton, M., op. cit., p. 54
the analysis of social systematics." (8)

The static nature of the black man and his society was, of course, another myth. Max Müller, a contemporary scientist, was perceptive enough to enunciate an idea now undisputed: "wherever we seem to lay hold of primeval savages who are supposed to represent to us the unchanged image of primeval man, the evidence of their having been autochthonous in the places where we now find them is very weak, the proofs that they never changed are altogether wanting. (9) The work of men like Elkin/Stanner has since demonstrated the fluidity, complexity and dynamism of Aboriginal culture. (10)

II

Such assumptions among anthropologists did much to fashion popular attitudes to the Aborigines and were not devoid of moral and social implications. Non-scientific opinion on the Aborigines is not within the ambit of the present study. But it is useful to sketch in some of the effects of scientific opinion on popular attitudes.

Most religions and the great historical declarations of the human rights affirm the equality and brotherhood of all men. From a moral or philosophical viewpoint, there is no necessity for a belief in equal human dignity and rights to depend on scientific sanction. Nevertheless Scientific research into the "race question" suggests that there is no evidence to support notions of general racial superiority or inferiority. By definition, races exhibit physical and cultural differences, but no group can lay claim to general biological or cultural superiority as an ethnic group, on any criteria of superiority widely accepted at present. (11)

(8) ibid., p. 4
(9) Müller, M. *cit., p. 123
(10) See Appendix I
(11) "Different types, areas, social stratas and cultures exhibit marked (Cont'd)
Moral or philosophical affirmations of equality, however, did nothing to explain to 19th century Australians the obvious differences between Europeans and Aborigines. Unilinear evolutionism and social Darwinism not only explained those differences but affirmed the superiority of its adherents: It was a seductive theory. So it became less likely that men would consent to the idea of racial equality. A contributor to the Science of Man in 1903, for one example, reflects the confident belief in the whites' overall superiority:

The idea that all men are equal is one of those errors that will soon be corrected by a residence and observations in Australia, for on the one hand will be seen the savage aboriginals and on the other civilized white people. These two varieties of peoples differ from each other in all particulars. One of them is from a black race, the others from white ones. (12)

Skin pigmentation thus became a factor of crucial importance.

Such a negative atmosphere tended to corrode the central tenets and principles of Christianity, liberalism and humanitarianism. Indeed, one clergyman much impressed by Darwin's work, concluded that the Australian blacks were less than human. He conceded that though they were related to white men by descent from a common animal progenitor, they were surely "far less distinctly human than animal; they had not, in fact, had time to be evolved from their animal beginning to that level where humanity becomes distinct, and begins its independent progress". (13) The physique, habits and fate of the Aborigines, he believed, constituted a powerful argument for Darwin's theory.

(11) Cont'd. differences in physiological and mental function. A dogmatic assertion that racial type alone is responsible for these differences is pseudo-science." Boaz, F., op. cit., pp. 247-248

(12) "Savages and Civilised Men" Sc. Man VI, No. 2, 21 March 1903, p. 34

By asserting the physical and mental inferiority of Aborigines, pseudo-scientific theory rationalized and justified the white man's antipathy to what he saw as the abnormalities of the black man and his society. It camouflaged racial prejudices and provided a rationale for discrimination. A physical repugnance to the colour, odour and cast of countenance of the Aboriginal, a moralistic condemnation of their "satanic ideas" and their parasitism, and fantastic myths about miscegenation (14) all blended with scientific theories to give the Europeans a feeling of superiority, and to justify certain policies and proprietary claims to Aboriginal lands. (15)

Sociologists have located many motivating forces behind racial prejudice: such prejudice rationalizes economic exploitation and political domination and it provides the members of the "superior" race with a sense of identity and group position. (16) How is this relevant to scientific opinion in the 19th century?

The same sociologists have identified traditional historical

(14) See, for example, Mathew, J.: Two Representative Tribes, pp. 80-81
     Bonwick, J.: The Lost Tasmanian Race, p. 198
     Hasluck, P., op. cit., pp. 167-168

     Calvert, A.F., op. cit., pp. 9, 17

     Stanner, W.E.H., op. cit., pp. 4-6
elements in racial prejudice: the belief that group differences result from hereditary biology, that miscegenation produces social degeneration and that racial differences imply positions of superiority and inferiority; the disparagement of the peculiar characteristics of inferior races; the formulation of racial stereotypes; recurrent accusations of the laziness, dishonesty, stupidity and unreliability of the "inferior group". (17) While the theories of Australian anthropologists and natural scientists were not in themselves racial prejudices, it is not difficult to imagine how they were able to encourage and buttress prejudice. (18) Even a brief glance at intermarriage - one very narrow aspect of inter-racial relations - shows now popular opinion could be affected by scientific opinion. The logical implication of the Aborigines' alleged physical inferiority was that racial admixture would be disadvantageous to whites. 19th century anthropologists seem generally to have evaded this question. However their reticence did not prevent laymen from elaborating their own theories. One letter to The Bulletin in 1902 provides a model example of the absorption of scientific ideas, crudely understood and expressed, into the public consciousness, and to what effect:

The white race, having developed on certain lines to a position which promises... the evolution of a higher human type, has an instinctive repugnance to mixing its blood with peoples in other stages of evolution... This may not be good ethics. But it is Nature... If he were to stoop to dally with races which would

(17) See especially Rose, A.M., op. cit., p. 223
Blumer, H., op. cit., p. 220
Comas, J.: "Racial Myths" in The Race Question in Modern Science, pp. 16-17

(18) Prejudices are built on ideas or emotions incompatible with the known facts. It is essentially irrational. This cannot be said of the work of men like Howitt, Spencer, Ramsay Smith, Mathews and their colleagues - it was objective and scientific in spirit and did not contradict or ignore known facts. The point is that their ideas could easily be appropriated and perverted by less disinterested parties and thus become absorbed into the mythology of racial prejudice.
ennervate him, or infect him with servile submissiveness, the scheme of human evolution would be frustrated. (19)

In fact no credible evidence has been adduced to suggest that mixture produces harmful biological results. (20) The adverse results of inter-marriage, however unfortunate, have been due to social rather than racial causes.

Professor Banton has commented perceptively on the social significance of racial ideas:

Beliefs about the nature of race - whether true or false - still have considerable social significance, and when a category is labelled in the popular mind by racial terminology rather than by religious or class criteria, certain predictable consequences ensue. The social significance of the racial label compared with other identifications is a matter that properly forms part of the study of intergroup relations. (21)

Unilinear evolutionism invested the racial label with a significance not previously obtaining by asserting, with scientific authority, the physical, psychological and cultural inferiority, and the unchanging nature of the Aborigines. It was an intellectually respectable theory acceptable to the most enlightened men, but also a potential bulwark of racial prejudice.

For similar "evolutionary" ideas see Lane, W.: The Boomerang (Brisbane), Nov. 19th, 1887 and Feb. 4, 1888 per Clark, C.M.H.: Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900 Vol. II (Sydney, 1966), pp. 564, 566
James, S.: Cannibals and Convicts (Melbourne, 1886), p. 326
For other references to miscegenation see Bonwick, J.: The Lost Tasmanian Race, p. 198
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(20) D. Klineberg, op. cit., pp. 76-77
Comas, J., op. cit., p. 24
Shapiro, H.L.: "Race Mixture" in The Race Question in Modern Science

(21) Banton, M.: Race Relations, p. 4 (underlining mine)
See also Banton, M.: "Sociology and Race Relations" Race I, No. 1, 1959, pp. 3-4
Why was social Darwinism so pervasive an influence in the late 19th century? How did it effect the assessment of Aboriginal culture?

Social Darwinism provided a new and simple key to the interpretation of history and social change. It had an attractive oracular flavour. (22) The nation or the race (often synonymous terms) now became the operative units of social dynamics. (23) The social Darwinists (and indeed many others) utilized this unit in applying a modified theory of evolution, with its concomitant principles such as natural selection, to society. Race was accepted by many Australians as the most critical factor in the spread of European civilisation. (24)

Before discussing its relevance to the Aborigines, it is necessary to pinpoint the basic inadequacies of social Darwinism as a general theory and as a technique. It was unsatisfactory for two very obvious reasons: biological theory was applied indiscriminately to fields where it had no scientific validity, and secondly, its terms of reference were circular. The fittest were the survivors and the survivors the fittest. This prompted an equation of strength with superiority without any assessment of the values which supported such an equation. Walter Bagehot, for

(22) Like the oracle of old, the social Darwinists were anything but infallible. Similarly they were often ambiguous in their forecasts and imprecise in their terms of reference. (Science rather than Apollo was the apparent source of authority).

(23) Jose, for example, could write without fear of widespread contradiction, "Everywhere it is the race; not the state as such, that has done the permanent work of colonisation..." Jose, A.W.: The Growth of Empire (London, 1912; 2nd edition), p. vii.

example, asserted that "those nations which are the strongest tend to prevail over the others, and in certain, marked peculiarities, the strongest tend to be the best." (25) The theory had no analytical or prescriptive value but provided a simple formula, easily grasped and credible at the time. It failed to detect the distinction between the biological functions of evolution and the non-genetical transmission of culture. Its scientific validity was more illusory than real.

One of the most satisfying aspects of social Darwinism was its affirmation of the cultural superiority of the Western Europeans. It pandered to the cardinal sin of the 19th century Anglo-Saxon - the racial arrogance fed by the belief that the British had developed the greatest civilisation ever known to man. Related to this racial pride was the doctrine of the Anglo-Saxons' "natural right" (by way of their superiority) to rule the rest of the world. Obversely social Darwinism sanctioned negative judgements about primitive cultures such as that of the Australian Aborigine.

The comparison of the culture of the Aborigines with those of prehistoric times was almost invariably based on untenable unilinear theories and on facile technological comparisons. Similar comparisons of less tangible cultural phenomena, such as language, art and beliefs, tended to be even more factitious. (26) Boaz and Levi-Strauss have focused attention

(25) per Banton, M.: Race Relations, p. 37
T.H. Huxley, in his Romanes Lectures, rejected this type of equation. See Hofstadter, K., op. cit., p. 74 (See Bibliography for some of Huxley's work)

(26) See reference in Chapters 3 and 4 to the cultural evolution of Aboriginal Society.
See also Tylor, E.B.: "On a Method of Investigating the Development of Institutions; Applied to Laws of Marriage and Descent" J.A.I. XVIII, 1889, pp. 245-274
Levi-Strauss, C., op. cit., pp. 16-17
on the fallacies of this "orthogenetic" approach. Writing of unilinear cultural evolutionism, Boaz has said:

...the hypothesis implies the thought that our modern Western European civilisation represents the highest cultural development towards which all other more primitive cultural types tend, and that, therefore, retrospectively, we construct an orthogenetic development towards our modern civilisations. It is clear that if we admit that there may be different ultimate and co-existing types of civilisation, the hypothesis of one single line of general development cannot be maintained. (27)

19th century anthropologists and laymen alike could not countenance the idea that in some respects the Aboriginal society was more sophisticated than the European. (28) "Few realized that an uncouth savage may adhere to a more rigid and more complex code of behaviour than a Victorian clubman. To claim that group marriage preceded monogamy or that maternal kinship systems were followed by paternal systems, was merely an imposition of Victorian value judgements about the best possible worlds." (29) Similarly to claim that "the first evolution of man from his primeval state was contemporaneous with the introduction of clothes" reflected a narrow, ethnocentric assessment of alien cultures. (30)

The claim that Aboriginal society was stagnant rather than progressive was likewise a function of a Victorian world view. Levi-Strauss has discussed the question of social progress in terms of "stationary" and "cumulative" cultures, the former being those which Europeans have compared with those of primordial man and whose inferiority seemed axiomatic. Recalling the assumptions that the black man's society was lacking in

(27) Boaz, F., op. cit., p. 282
(28) See Appendix I
(30) James, S., op. cit., p. 375
evolutionary development, static and doomed to extinction, Levi-Strauss' comments are enlightening:

We should thus tend to regard as 'cumulative' any culture developing in a direction similar to our own, that is to say, whose development would appear to us to be significant. Other cultures, on the contrary, would seem to us to be "stationary", not necessarily because they are so in fact, but because the line of their development has no meaning for us, and cannot be measured in terms of the criteria we employ. (31)

The white man tended to judge Aboriginal culture by essentially materialistic and technological criteria. He placed a premium on the mechanical harnessing of energy and on industrial development - on economic vitality and sophistication. In this context, the Aborigines indeed rated low in the "scale of civilisation". If success in adaption to environment or the achievement of harmonious social relations had been employed as the criteria of judgement, they would have ranked above the Europeans./ Progress, as the Victorians understood it, meant no more than progress in the direction determined by Victorian values and interests. (33) Evolutionary theories were well-attuned to the Victorian ideal of Progress. (34)

IV

Finally we turn briefly to the social and political implications of unilinear and cultural theories and of the attitudes they promoted. It added much misunderstanding to a whole range of social problems that men


(32) A Spanish novelist has recently written a magnificent novel which treats of the "primitivist" virtues of backward cultures. The novel is set in South America but the society which it pictures, is, in some notable respects, not unlike the old tribal culture of the Australians. - Carpentier, A.: The Lost Steps (London, 1956). See esp. pp. 124, 149-150, 172-173, 247ff

(33) See ibid., p. 40

thought that the psychological and social differences between the Aborigines and the Europeans were a function of race rather than of differing cultural traditions and physical environments, and that the native race stood in a position of inferiority. As Paul Hasluck has said in a lucid history of the treatment of the Western Australian natives:

...aboriginal life was apt to be regarded not as the outcome of an organisation which had a cogency of its own but as something which led to 'crime' against white society, helped to 'foment trouble and cause dissatisfaction' and was manifested in 'superstitions'. (35)

This negative viewpoint was not the only response to Aboriginal society. The picture of the native as "stone-age man" and as a stagnant anthropological curio, rather than as the custodian of a rich cultural heritage and complex social system, produced attitudes ranging from the callous and inhuman through the humanitarian and sentimental to the conservative and apathetic.

In Cricket Walkabout, John Mulvaney has referred to the popular phrase "to smooth the pitty of a dying race", often used in commendation of humanitarian activity. He has gone on to point out, "The harsh reality therefore, is that... European tolerance may have stemmed from feelings of security and indifference." (36) The white man could afford to be kind to

(35) Hasluck, P., op. cit., p. 171
It is not difficult to imagine how the initiation rites and mutilation ceremonies of the Aborigines, for example, could arouse feelings of repugnance and contempt. Only a sensitive and luminous intellect, such as Baldwin Spencer, or a man with an intimate personal experience of the natives, such as F.J. Gillen, could grasp the significance of the more alien aspects of Aboriginal customs.

(36) The phrase was probably coined in an editorial in The Age in 1858
Mulvaney, D.J.: Cricket Walkabout (Melbourne, 1967), pp. 15-16
the "dying remnant". (37) The faulty ethical foundations of such "humanitarianism" apart, it is not difficult to see how this notion could have nourished sentimental and paternalistic attitudes. Russell Ward has located in the literature of the late 19th century new strains of tolerance and of sentimentality in attitudes towards the Aborigines. (38) A certain respect for primitivist virtues again reappeared in literature.

As we have seen many Europeans regarded the extinction of the Aborigines as inevitable. A few realized that it was the vice and disease - alcohol, gunpowder, syphilis and the "acquisitive urge" - introduced by the whites and the break-up of tribal cultural patterns which produced the

(37) See, for example, earlier references to G. Goodman, the church historian.

(38) "There is, of course, overwhelming evidence," writes Ward, "that the usual overt attitude to the Aborigines continued to be almost as brutal and contemptuous at the end of the nineteenth century as it had been earlier, but underlying this attitude and qualifying it, there grew up, often in the same person, an awareness of indebtedness to the first nomads... There are some hints in the ballads and elsewhere, that after the Aborigines had ceased to be dangerous... folk memory tended to acknowledge, perhaps to sentimentalize, this indebtedness..." Ward, R.: The Australian Legend (Melbourne, 1966; 2nd edition), p. 201.

Mrs. Aeneas Gunn's novels capture some of the ambivalent attitudes to the Aborigines - respect for their ability to track in the bush and to find water, an awareness of the injustices done to them, a certain patronizing tolerance and a sense of amusement.

See Gunn, Mrs. A.: We of the Never-Never (London, 1966; 1st pub. 1908) esp. pp. 80-81, 200-201
- The Little Black Princess (London, 1905)

For other samples see references to Aborigines in Collins, T. (Furphy, J.): Such is Life (Sydney, 1948; 1st pub., 1903)
Turner, E.: Seven Little Australians (London, 1894)
Favenc, E.: "The Parson's Blackboy" (1894) in Australian Short Stories, pp. 19-24
desolation of Aboriginal society. (39) Their remedies however were usually impracticable and undesirable. Mathew, for example, suggested "complete detachment from Europeans". (40) Another observer suggested that as the natives were dying out, they ought to be rounded-up and used as a military regiment. (41)

Perhaps more dangerous than either a falsely-based and often sickly humanitarianism or misguided attempts to protect the natives was the belief that all social welfare was futile in view of Nature's irreversible processes. They were marked by the hand of Nature for extinction. It was futile to try to protect, integrate or assimilate them. "Even where the most humane measures have been adopted," wrote one commentator," it seems the fiat of some inscrutable power that the savage race must cease to exist." (42) "The Aboriginal cannot now aid in forming a nation," wrote another. (43)

Spencer's social theories were often appropriated for ultra-conservative purposes. Of the various human groups who competed in the social struggle for existence, Spencer himself had written:

If they are sufficiently complete to live, they do live, and it is well they should live. If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die. (44)


(40) Mathew, J.: Two Representative Tribes, pp. 80-81

(41) "What Can Best Be Done with the Black Men of Australia" Sc. Man I, No. 8, 21 Sept., 1898, pp. 173-174

(42) Calvert, A.F., op. cit., p. 9

(43) Greville, E., op. cit., p. 35

(44) Spencer, H.: Social Statics, pp. 414-415 per Hofstadter, R., op. cit., p. 27.
See also quote in Kardiner, A. and Preble, E., op. cit., pp. 46-47 "Inconvenience, suffering, death... suspending the progress."
It was a classic example of the circular terms of reference and of the laissez-faire tone of most social Darwinist writing. Darwin himself had, on occasion, sanctioned complete social laissez-faire, allowing Nature to build up the race through the processes of natural selection. (45)

Some went further and advocated an intervention to accelerate Nature's processes. This was an ominous principle. H.K. Rusden, for example, writing in the Melbourne Review in 1876, confidently asserted that "The survival of the fittest means that might - wisely used - is right. And thus we invoke and remorselessly fulfil the inexorable law of natural selection (and of demand and supply) when exterminating the inferior Australian and Maori races..." (46)

The political and social uses to which social Darwinism was put are many. (47) Suffice it here to note that the assumptions fostered by social evolutionism were inimical to a genuine understanding of Aboriginal culture and to a responsible policy of social welfare. By sanctioning negative judgements about the Aborigines with a sense of scientific authority and moral righteousness, social Darwinism militated against a spirit of cultural and racial tolerance.

(45) "We civilised men," he wrote in The Descent of Man, "do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick; we institute poor laws; our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of everyone to the last moment... Thus the weak members of society propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man." Darwin, C.: The Descent of Man (London, 1874) pp. 151-152 per Hofstadter, R., op. cit., p. 173. However this can be matched with many humanitarian and ethical texts in Darwin's work. (Hofstadter, p. 74) For discussion of Darwin's response to social Darwinism see Stern, B.J. in Science and Society VI, 1942, pp. 75-78


(47) See Appendix III
CONCLUSION

Australian Aboriginal anthropology was profoundly transformed in the last three decades of the 19th century. The study of the natives was infused with a more coherent, scientific and theoretical spirit of inquiry than had characterized the casual and sporadic observations of earlier times. Ideas inspired by romantic myths or by Evangelical fulminations did not evaporate in this period but they were afforded little credence within the anthropological community.

The Darwinian revolution in intellectual life in Britain marks the point of departure for the new "science of man" in Australia. The social sciences grew not only out of an emulation of other sciences (such as biology) but out of the collapse of religious and philosophical theories whose explanations of man's origin and development were no longer credible or palatable. Evolutionary theory flourished at a time when Progress was the order of the day. The Australian Aborigine seemed to provide a concrete point of reference for such theory.

The main currents of Australian research thus emanated from a milieu saturated with evolutionary theory. The theories of men like Tylor, Lubbock, Herbert Spencer and Morgan were a seminary for scientific opinion concerning the Aborigines. The Darwinian approach to these representatives of primitive man gave Aboriginal anthropology a new discipline and purpose, and prompted a creative intercourse between Australian and British scientists. The publication of Tylor's and Lubbock's unilinear theories, the formative influence of Morgan, the pioneering work of Fison and Howitt, the conversation between Baldwin Spencer and J.G. Frazer and Tylor, the fertile partnership of Spencer and Gillen, the establishment of the Anthropological
Section of the A.A.A.S. and of the Anthropological Association, and the publication of *The Science of Man* were conspicuous signposts in the growth of anthropology in Australia.

The predominantly theoretical perspective of many Australian anthropologists fostered a certain antiquarianism; the more pragmatic and socially relevant aspects of the black man's society often found no place in their work. Theoretical preoccupations prescribed the outer boundaries of their work but there were also other factors inhibitive to a genuine understanding of the Aborigines' condition; negative racial prejudices, government and public apathy to scientific research, the illiteracy, psychology and disintegrating tribal culture of the natives, and imperfect anthropological techniques. However, men like Howitt and Spencer explored a new and more refined field methodology and their findings ensured that the constructions of responsible British theorists (about primitive cultures) bore some reference to reality.

In physical and social anthropology, the unilinear theme marked an attempt to account for physiological and cultural diversities by treating them as different phases in a single line of human development. By positing a few central principles, such as the psychic unity of man, unilinear evolutionism allowed for an easy accommodation of diverse physical and social facts in an all-embracing and reassuring theory of progress. It thus lightened the burdens of anthropological research.

The Australians not only looked to foreign theories to define the guidelines of their research but they inherited certain assumptions about the Aborigines. Amongst the shibboleths of orthodox evolutionary theory were the doctrines of the black man's physical and psychological inferiority, the primordial nature and stagnation of his culture, and the inevitability of
his extinction. Such ideas carried the authority of science, though many Europeans were not averse to invoking the designs of Providence to lend more weight to their assertions and predictions.

It is often more difficult to trace the pedigree of such ideas back to social Darwinism. However social evolutionism was implicit in the unilinear scheme and slogans such as the "scale of civilisation", the "struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest" were confidently enlisted in the discussion of the Aborigines. They were rarely related to detailed and practical evidence and few recognised the complexity and dynamism of Aboriginal society. Evolutionary doctrines were often compounded with racial and social prejudices to suggest that the physical and cultural differences between the Europeans and the natives were a function of race, that miscegenation was harmful, that the whites were generally superior and that social welfare policies could at most, "smooth the pillow of the dying race". It is difficult to locate any genuine concern over official native policy or any deep-seated humanitarianism amongst anthropologists in their work with the Aborigines though a few exhibited some concern about their lot in the hereafter.

Equipped with the findings of scientists and sociologists we can now see that the unilinear theory was both biologically and socially invalid; that terms such as the "survival of the fittest" have no analytical or prescriptive value in either history or anthropology; that there is no equation between physical geography and psychological capacity; that race is neither a determinant of culture nor a key to man's place in the "scale of civilisation"; that assessment of alien cultures is too easily based on narrow value-judgements.
Generally the scientific spirit and integrity of the anthropologists is not in question. However they were heirs to ill-founded theories, practitioners of crude methods, victims of social and racial prejudices, and disciples of the Victorian deity of Progress. Their evidence was often fragile, their theories untenable, their understanding superficial. It is not surprising then, that the Aborigines were not accorded their rightful place in the brotherhood of man.
Because of the widespread and persistent ignorance of some of the highly original aspects of the Australian Aborigines' culture, I offer here a passage from Levi-Strauss which was too long to incorporate in the text:

In all matters touching on the organisation of the family and the achievement of harmonious relations between the family group and the social group, the Australian Aborigines, though backward in the economic sphere, are so far ahead of the rest of mankind that, to understand the careful and deliberate systems of rules they have elaborated, we have to use all the refinements of modern mathematics. It was they in fact who discovered that the ties of marriage represent the very warp and woof of society, while other social institutions are simply embroideries on that background... The Australians, with an admirable grasp of facts, have converted this machinery into terms of theory, and listed the main methods by which it may be produced, with the advantages and drawbacks attaching to each. They have gone further than empirical observation to discover the mathematical laws governing the systems, so that it is no exaggeration to say that they are not merely the founders of general sociology as a whole, but are the real innovators of measurement in the social sciences.

(C. Levi-Strauss: Race and History, p. 28)
The Australians who rejected all or some of the theoretical tenets and central findings of the unilinear and cultural evolutionists tended to come from one of three broad groups: dissent was usually prompted by personal observation and experience of the Aborigines, by alternative ontological and religious theories, or by contradictory scientific theories. Brief reference to each group will map in the main areas of dissent.

(a) **Sympathetic Observers:** Those who came into close personal contact with the Aborigines sometimes recognised and admired the success with which the black man had adapted himself to the harsh physical environment. They were impressed by his physical skills and were therefore skeptical of any suggestion of the natives' physical inferiority. E.M. Curr, for example, wrote of the Aborigine, "He is never awkward, and generally free from those disproportions of the person which are so prevalent amongst civilised nations. The senses of the Australians - hearing, smell, and especially sight - are decidedly keener than amongst ourselves." (*The Australian Race*, pp. 40-41)

Others recognized the complexity of their languages and social customs and the sophistication of certain skills. The primitivist virtues of the natives could still awaken admiration. One comment on the Tasmanians is worth quoting as it reflects the reserve with which observers often treated the assertions of the psychological inferiority and cultural naivety of the natives:

The aborigines of Tasmania have been usually regarded as exhibiting the human character in the lowest state of degradation... If we look, however, to the methods they devised of procuring shelter and subsistence in their native wilds; to the skill and precision with which they tracked the mazes of the bush; and to the force of invention and of memory which is displayed in the copious vocabulary of their
several languages, they claim no inconsiderable share of mental power and activity.
(quoted in H. Ling Roth: The Aborigines of Tasmania, p. 24)

Generally speaking, such observers were more likely to understand Aboriginal society than the other dissenters whose objections were not directly related to the Aborigines themselves.

See; J. Bonwick: "The Australian Natives", pp. 207-210
Mrs. J. Smith: The Booandik Tribe... esp. p. 33
J.G. Withnell: The Customs and Traditions of the Aboriginal Natives of North Western Australia (Roebourne, 1901)

(b) Religious Critics of Evolutionism. Orthodox religious teaching on the origin and history of man was the parent of another group of dissenters. Men of the cloth in both Britain and Australia were distressed that pagan savages in a naked and ungodly state should be the earliest representatives of God's human creation. Churchmen had traditionally accepted Genesis as the basic document of pre-history and operated on a time scale marking the year 4004 B.C. as the beginning of man's existence. To combat the heresies of the evolutionists, men of orthodox religious persuasion advanced the degeneration (or degradation) theory. Amongst the most vocal apostles of this theory in England were Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin, and the Duke of Argyll. They suggested that all men had been created in a civilized and moral condition but that some branches of the human family (such as the Aborigines) had degenerated into their savage and pagan state. In explanation of the process they often invoked Biblical texts or referred to the visitation of the great Designer's wrath on those who had abused their original state of grace. The Australian natives were often condemned as "the justly punished dregs of heathen antiquity."
(D.J. Mulvaney, "Anthropology in Victoria", p. 48)
Such dissent from evolutionary theory thus derived not from any understanding of its scientific fallacies or from any insight into the condition of the Aborigines but from religious superstition.

For a smattering of the literature of this aspect see;

Duke of Argyll: "The Unity of Nature" (10 articles) in Cont. Review XXXVIII July-Dec. 1880 and XXXIX Jan-June, 1881

C.S. Wake: "The Mental Characteristics of Primitive Men...", pp. 82-83

Dr. J. Fraser: The Aborigines of Australia..., p. 23


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Rt. Rev. C. Perry: Science and the Bible (Melbourne, 1869) (A lecture delivered by the Lord Bishop of Melbourne at the Academy of Music, Sept. 20, 1869)

A Kardiner and E. Preble: They Studied Man, pp. 53-54

P. Hasluck: Black Australians, pp. 167-169

(c) Dissenting Theorists. The scientists and anthropologists in England and Australia who rejected some of the theoretical principles of men like Tylor, Lubbock and Spencer, can be classed in two groups; those who recognized some of the scientific shortcomings of the unilinear theory and of cultural evolutionism, and secondly, those who subscribed to alternative theories.

In England several men eminent in the scientific community, including Sir William Turner, Max Müller and T.H. Huxley, realized that the evidence supporting the unilinear scheme was fragile and that the technique of applying Darwin's biological theory to cultural categories was pseudo-scientific. They detected some of the limitations imposed by a sketchy
understanding of Darwinian theory, the rudimentary state of genetical studies, and crude historical and anthropological techniques. (See T.H. Huxley: *Ethics and Evolution* (Romanes Lectures for 1893), Max Müller: "The Savage", Mulvaney, D.J.: "The Australian Aborigines...", p. 39) Probably under the influence of such men some Australian scientists were mindful of the pitfalls of various evolutionary theories. C.C. Henderson, one such scientist, attacked the social Darwinist technique when he told the A.A.A.S. in 1911;

> Physical evolution, or evolution in the organic world is one thing; psychical evolution, or evolution of human life and affairs is another and very different thing... you cannot apply the current theory of organic evolution to the history of the English people or for that matter any other race of human beings.


Such critics of social Darwinism were moved by theoretical conclusions rather than by the discrepancies between evolutionary theory and the history and actual condition of the Aborigines.

The retrogression theory found some adherents amongst Australian anthropologists, not because of their religious world-view but because of their own theorizing and observation. One student of the Australian natives told the A.A.A.S. that prior to the European migration into Australia, the ancestors of the Aborigines had been "imbued with a much higher culture than now exists, and that through stress of circumstances, and diversified conditions, their mental, and also in some instances their physical calibre [had] become reduced..." (R. Helms: "Anthropology", p. 252. See also Mackie, R.C.: "Anthropological Notes of Fifty Years Ago" Proc. Roy Soc. Queensland XXIII, 1911, p. 109) The stress of circumstances rather than the hand of God held the key to the natives' present degradation.
APPENDIX III: The Functions of Social Darwinism

Social Darwinism was a singularly imprecise school of thought and was hence easily modified to support a great variety of social and political doctrines. Virulent capitalists invoked the "survival of the fittest" to excuse the less palatable aspects of economic exploitation and competition; ultra-conservatives marshalled the same doctrine in support of a social and economic philosophy of absolute laissez-faire; Angol-Saxon imperialists made full use of suggestions that European culture was more progressive and more developed than that of the coloured races; the eugenists deduced from the "survival of the fittest" principle, the curious notion that the unfit should be wiped out or at least prevented from propagating; the apostles of racism and nationalism, particularly in Germany and the U.S.A., stressed the alien and inferior nature of the non-European races. In brief social Darwinism came to be used, in one form or another, to justify or to consolidate many of the less attractive aspects of nineteenth century life.

See works referred to in the text by Himmelfarb, Banton and Burrow (Britain) Hofstadter (U.S.A.) and G.L. Mosse (Germany). See also:


c.o.


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   (a) Primary   (i) articles
                (ii) books
   (b) Secondary (i) articles
                (ii) books

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