

*From savage to citizen:  
Education, colonialism and idiocy<sup>1</sup>*

**Abstract**

In constructing a framework for the participation and inclusion in political life of subjects, the Enlightenment also produced a series of systematic exclusions for those who did not qualify: including ‘idiots’ and ‘primitive races’. ‘Idiocy’ emerged as part of wider strategies of governance in Europe and its colonies. This opened up the possibility for pedagogy to become a key technology for the transformation of the savage, uncivilised Other into the citizen. This paper explores the transformative role of pedagogy in relation to colonial discourse, the narrative of the wild boy of Aveyron – a feral child captured in France in 1800 – and the formation of a medico-pedagogical discourse on idiocy in the nineteenth century. In doing so, the paper shows how learning disability continues to be influenced by same emphasis on competence for citizenship, a legacy of the colonial attitude.

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Learning disability is a product of modern Western social governance. The tangle of relations of power and knowledge that constitute it trace back to the emergence of the normalising projects of Western governance. The ideas of citizenship and social being; the primacy of contract as the dominant form of social relationship; and the conquest of the natural world, including its ‘rude’ peoples, have all contributed to this emergence.

Invariably this has resulted in social exclusion linked to the matter of their putative social competence (Jenkins 1998) and consequently to techniques of pedagogy and perceptions of capacity for learning (Simpson 1999; Trent 1994). In this respect idiots shared with other marginalised groups the demand that citizenship required transformation – citizenship being both a practice and a status. As we shall see, this theme connected the emergent modern discourse on idiocy with attempts to civilise the uneducated and untamed ‘savage’ at home in Europe and abroad among the indigenous peoples of colonised lands.

The paper explores some of these interconnecting threads in order to show how the modern discourse of idiocy emerged in part from the same linguistic field as racial anthropology. It constructs an analytic framework using C.18<sup>th</sup> colonial and racial commentaries, the narrative of the savage boy of Aveyron – the study and attempted education of a feral boy at the beginning of the C. 19<sup>th</sup> – and the ‘physiological method’ in the treatment of idiocy mid-century.

**The savage other**

The word ‘savage’ derives from the Old French *sauvage*: ‘from the woods,’ from the Latin ‘silvan’: lying beyond the governed realms of towns and settlements; the largely uninhabited wooded lands beyond the short reach of the law; untamed, uncultivated and uncivilised. At a time when even the cities and towns were violent places and crime went largely unpunished (Rossiaud 1990), the medieval wilderness was a place inhabited by the ‘marginal man,’ largely absent from the recorded landscape, where the banished were treated as wolves and driven from the towns and villages and the

outlawed roamed (Geremek 1990). Interest in the ‘savage’ peoples of other lands was a consequence of the exploration and colonisation of large parts of the world by European powers since the C.15<sup>th</sup>.

‘Savage’ as an aspect of the bucolic and those living outside the boundaries of society in Europe as well as the ‘exotic’ peoples of other lands is not accidental. As Kliewer & Fitzgerald (2001) observe, at the same time as the grasp of colonial power reaches outwards and associated discourses of subjugation develop, so too does the internal nexus of governance of civil society in Europe. Nonetheless, there is a pronounced tendency in writing since the last century at least, to project contemporary usages of the word, i.e. to signify ‘animal’ violence, to refer solely to the exotic ‘other’ (e.g. Jahoda 1999; Street 1975), or indeed to see it as having a “double life” with two “different” meanings when applied at home and abroad (Williams, 2003). However, even to distinguish between the ‘domestic’ and ‘exotic’ savage involves conceptual retro-projection. The more significant and interesting question is, How were they conceived as similar?

Popular interest during the C.17<sup>th</sup> in the exotic savage was fuelled from a number of sources. Novels set in newly discovered climes, factual or fictional, and featuring the culturally alien were popular: Aphra Behn *Oroonoko* (1688), Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Jonathan Swift *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Voltaire *Candide* (1759), and so forth. Travellers’ tales were another rich, if not always entirely accurate, source of information, stemming in particular from the C.13<sup>th</sup> travels of Marco Polo to the Far East.

Of particular interest for this paper were French activities in the eastern seaboard of what would become Canada and the US. In the C.18<sup>th</sup> French colonial interests lay in two principal directions: first, and most importantly, they were centres of trade, second, they were outposts of missionary activity, most significantly by the Jesuits (see e.g. Cooper 2001; Greer 2000; Vaugh 1978). It is this second area that is of greatest interest, both because the Jesuits provided a great deal of information about the peoples among whom they worked and also because they provide a paradigm for the conversion and civilisation of the savage that parallels the interest in the wild boy of Aveyron.

The Society of Jesus placed great emphasis on the importance of education in all their activities, including their missionary activities with uncivilised peoples. Indeed, it was this very lack of a proper civilising education that defined savagery. The Jesuit missionary Paul le Jeune wrote of his time among the Montagnais in the C.16<sup>th</sup> thus:

...the well-formed bodies and well-regulated and well-arranged organs of these barbarians suggest that their minds too ought to function well. Education and instruction alone are lacking...I naturally compare our Indians with [European] villagers, because both are usually without education... (Le Jeune 2000, p. 33)

Le Jeune captures a common connection between the savage abroad and the illiterate peasantry at home. Also significant is the assertion that it is the want of education that makes the difference between the civilised and the uncivilised (Dorsey, 1998). This view was also linked to hierarchical and evolutionary views of societies:

...the Inhabitants of the great Bretagne have bin in times past as savage as those of Virginia. (Thomas Harriot, quoted in Axtell 1992, p. 68)

Towards the end of the C.18<sup>th</sup> scientific theories of race had begun to emerge also based on linear hierarchies, but rooted in the altogether more static idea of the Great Chain of Being – the deistic idea that all living and inert things occupy a place in an infinitely graduated scale designed by the Creator (Jahoda 1995). Bonnet, for example, presents a seamless scale from man down through quadrupeds, to birds, fish, and other classes of animals, to plants, stones, ending in the three primary elements and ‘more subtle matter’ (White 1799). Common to such theories was the setting out of hierarchies of human races within wider classifications of simian and other animal species, in particular, to situate the negro as a species intermediate between man and ape (Jahoda 1999). Charles White illustrates such approaches, as well as his adherence to the Great Chain principle, in his classification of species according to cranial front-angle [Figure 1: cranial classification (White 1799)].

**INSERT FIG. 1 APPROX HERE**

**Figure 1: cranial classification (White 1799)**

Notwithstanding the physiognomic aspects of race theories, the principal emphasis was on the civilising impulse. Indeed, there was no question that this was a primary duty for the colonisers, and it depended fundamentally on viewing the savage as capable of being civilised. For some, the primary

causes of physiological and physiognomic differences were to be found in environmental factors. The Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith of the American Philosophical Society noted:

...persons who have been captivated from the states, and grown up, from infancy to middle age, in the habits of savage life...universally contract such a strong resemblance of the natives in their countenance, and even in their complexion, as to afford a striking proof that the differences which exist, in the same latitude, between the Anglo-American and the Indian, depend principally on the state of society. (Smith 2001, p. 93)

Attitudes towards the innate goodness of the savage were sharply divided between those like Rousseau (1973b) who regarded the nobility of man in his natural state, and those who saw their existence in a more negative light, marked by cannibalism and depredation, such as was the Jesuit view (e.g. Chauchetière 2000). In either case, however, there was an unambiguous belief that civil life demanded a lifting out of the state of “savage solitude” (Godwin, in Rodway 1952, p. 217) by means of education. Though, of course, views on how this education should be accomplished were equally divided. Understanding the ‘natural man’ was, however, the key to formulating the pedagogy necessary (Rousseau 1973b).

Another crucial point about the place of the savage other was their role in defining the normal and acceptable. Williams (2003) observes that the process of constructing the uncivilised uneducated people of rural France was also a construction of ‘Frenchness’ itself. Said (1991), of course, makes the case for the much wider construction of the European through the process of Orientalism. Similarly, idiocy would, in due course, come to play a key role in defining the ‘normal’ child (Rose 1985).

### **From savage to Victor**

In spite of the two centuries which have now passed since the first sightings of the young *Sauvage de l’Aveyron*, the interest in the events surrounding his entry into society has remained strong. The sequence of events began with the entry of the feral boy into a workshop in a village in the Department of Aveyron in January 1800, and proceeded through his examination by some of the finest minds of the French academy, to the reports on his education at the Institute for Deaf-Mutes, Paris by Itard. Most of this concern has centred on such matters as the progress in educational theory and

method since those founding events in the history of pedagogy; or to resolve long standing psychological questions, for instance on language acquisition or intellectual development—was the savage mentally retarded, or perhaps autistic; what could his story tell us about special education, and so on (e.g. Ernet 1995; Gaynor 1972; Shattuck 1980). Above all, as Harlan Lane puts it in his detailed psychological profile,

...the wild boy was to help answer the central question of the Enlightenment, What is the nature of man? (Lane 1976, p. 19)

The theme of transforming the boy from a savage to civil being struck a chord with wider developments in philosophy, anthropology, medicine, the development of race theories and colonial expansion. Itard's efforts with the boy, whom he named Victor, thus connect with the preceding part of the paper. They also connect with the succeeding look at the descent of the discourse on idiocy, which took definite shape several decades later.

Apropos the connections between colonialism and the education of the savage of Aveyron, a look at some of the principal features of Itard's work will serve to highlight the parallels. For instance, the boy's natural selfish interests and instinctual behaviour are described in terms remarkably similar to attitudes towards savage tribes as well as to Rousseau's eponymous pupil, Emile. He was amoral and lacking in any notion of property, and therefore, theft. Despite the pessimistic initial assessment of many that the savage was an idiot, Itard believed that the savage's state signified,

...the degree of understanding, and the nature of the ideas of a youth, who, deprived, from his infancy, of all education, should have lived entirely separated from individuals of his species... (Itard 1972a, p. 99)

As such, Itard believed that a programme of instruction, carefully conceived and experimentally implemented might 'cure this apparent idiotism' (Itard 1972a, p. 99).

It is, perhaps, on this point that a full understanding of the lexical field of the savage can best be approached since it links domestic and exotic savagery. In Smith's *Essay* we find:

Every object that impresses the senses, and every emotion that riles in the mind, affects the features of the face the index of our feelings, and contributes to form the infinitely various countenance of man. Paucity of ideas creates a vacant and unmeaning aspect. Agreeable and cultivated scenes compose the features, and render them regular and gay. Wild, and deformed, and solitary forests tend to impress on the countenance, an image of their own rudeness. (Smith 2001, pp. 80-81)

The importance of sensation and experience was a key theme in European philosophy since Locke, running through even such disparate strands as the empiricism of Berkeley and Hume, the idealism of Kant, and the sensationism of Condillac. Apperception, understanding and the capacity for reason became definitive of Man in the Enlightenment. Want of these features, whether through physiological deficiency or environmental circumstance, is above all else what characterised the uncivilised. Their development marks progress from “mere private force” (Kant 1974, p. 185) dominated by animal instincts, towards the state of social being. The acquisition, multiplication and combination of ideas “distinguishes [civilised] man from...a ‘clod of the valley.’” (Godwin 1971, p. 60). The absence of manifold and complex ideas arising from reflection on sensory stimulation is a recurrent theme in discussions on the savage:

Negroes “seem unable to combine ideas, or pursue a chain of reasoning.” (Long 1774; in Jahoda 1999, p. 55)

Victor was “deprived...of all those simple and complex ideas which receive from education, and which are combined in our minds in so many different ways, by means only of our knowledge of signs.” (Itard 1972a, p. 99)

The rural dwellers [of Brittany] are more deficient in complex thoughts than are the Mohicans and the red skins of the American north... (Balzac *Les Chouans*; quoted in Williams 2003, p. 485; author’s translation)

The savage was closer to nature, whether brutish or noble – nature being the antithesis of civilisation; that which must be subordinated and harnessed, individually and globally (Gay 1977). In this putative propinquity to the natural world we find a further reason why ‘savage’ was applied equally to the feral child, those who laboured on the soil and animalistic primitive tribes.

What we have then is a constellation of views about whether, and the extent to which, physiology and capacity for civilisation are immutable for different races and individuals. What the domestic and exotic savage share, however, is the common characteristic of deficit in refined and complex ideas, which are the foundations of civil being. In the case of the asocial idiot, this is a more or less permanent state of affairs; for the pre-social peasant, it is from the want of proper education; whilst for the exotic savage or the lunatic, opinion on mutability was more divided. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, proponents of scientific pedagogy were more likely to emphasise a common and educable human nature (e.g. Poole 1825). All are solitary, if not always in the sense of physical isolation, then in the lack or impoverishment of their social relations.

Yousef (2001) contrasts Rousseau’s natural man – “isolated and autonomous” (p. 245) – with the savage who is ‘sociable’ and the animal, lacking the potential for the qualities of civilised man. For Yousef, the ‘isolation’ of the natural man pertains to development in the absence of other men. However, the ‘sociability’ ascribed to savage tribes by Rousseau and others is really no more than the gregariousness of animals. Even in the presence of others, the savage is not regarded as a social being. Rousseau explicitly identifies solitude as a defining characteristic of the savage, and uses that word to refer to primitive tribes in Africa and the Americas as well as to the physically isolated. The feral child and the primitive tribesman may be in different states, but they are both states of nature, not states of society.

Itard’s pedagogical endeavours are of particular relevance here both in terms of the symbolic as well as the practical role which education is made to play as the bridge between the savage and moral man – embodied in the actual transformation of the savage into Victor. One of Itard’s principal sources of support for his methods were the precepts of *moral treatment*, as expounded by Francis Willis, Alexander Crichton and Philippe Pinel in the treatment of insanity. Indeed, the education of the savage was itself his moralisation: “To attach him to social life, by rendering it more pleasant to him than that which he was then leading... [And to] extend the sphere of his ideas, by giving him new wants, and by increasing the number of his relations to the objects surrounding him” (Itard 1972a, p.

102). One of the methods employed by Itard to harness the desires of Victor was to repeat enjoyed activities in order to ‘convert a pleasure into a want’ (p. 113), e.g. on finding that the boy enjoyed an outing to a tavern for a meal. Before long the activity ceases to be a pleasurable treat and Victor becomes depressed and agitated when it is withheld.

Each of Itard’s objectives warrants a full exploration, pregnant as they are with all of the themes of this paper. However, we shall limit ourselves to a few key observations. First, Itard’s approach shows clear consonance with Rousseau’s method that the pupil be led to see the advantages of citizenship in terms of self-interest. Itard does not oppose the savage boy’s natural inclinations, instead these will be harnessed in the process of his moralisation. In the case of Victor, the affinity with natural events and phenomena is obviously more highly developed than with Emile or would be with other children. Nonetheless, the target remains to secure the pre-social desires and to channel them towards citizenship. Second, there is the self-evident superiority of civil life over the savage existence which is matched by colonial attitudes towards savage tribes who would have to civilise or perish (see e.g. Kriegleder 2000). The Jesuits took seriously what they saw as their obligations to protect indigenous peoples from the more ruthless treatment at the hands of financially motivated colonisers. In South America they developed their system of *reducciones*; settlements in which natives would gain protection at the price of submission (Greer 2000). Third, the pedagogical approach is heavily rooted in physiology and the education of the whole body, a point that would become especially important in the treatment of idiocy; Itard comments, “that sensibility is in exact proportion to the degree of civilization” (1972a, p. 105). Fourth, Itard aims at the creation and harnessing of desire as a pedagogical socialising instrument. It is perhaps the most crucial objective, and difficulties in accomplishing it are cited as hindering the progress of the intelligence and civility. There are to be two important parts to achieving this objective, firstly, constructing the desires of the subject and, secondly, establishing the position of the subject relative to the natural and social world. The subject is thus constructed in both his internal and external relations.

Itard concludes his first report on the education of the savage of Aveyron by noting that in the ‘pure state of nature’, isolated and with an intellect still largely dormant, man is inferior to many animals. It is only within and by means of civilisation that man is able to rise above this miserable state, and by ‘civilisation’ is meant the perpetual development of mind, primarily through imitation and the quest for new experiences. The power for such development wanes with age and, consequently, the

importance of effective pedagogy in childhood is paramount, multiplying wants, increasing the mental capacity necessary to secure them. So, whilst Rousseau and Itard differ in their assessments of the natural state of man, whether noble or brutish, civil society is at least a necessary state of being for modern man, and his education whilst still a child the only means of preparing the body and mind which will fit him to live in it.

Civilisation, then, stands in a multiple relationship to education: it provides the means, creates the need and constitutes a condition of possibility of education simultaneously. It is the means of education insofar as the experience of social being is itself one of the greatest instructors, most notably, it is only in the context of society that the intellectual faculties, and particularly the power of speech, can fully develop. This was manifested in the savage's state of mental stultification before his education, "...civilization awoke the intellectual faculties of our savage from their lethargy..." (1972b, p. 168, emphasis added). In addition, Itard accounts for the failure of his charge to spontaneously discover behaviours that would allow him to channel his growing sexual urges. The harmonious connection between human desires and sexual emotions is only "the fortunate fruit of man's education" (1972b, p. 178). It is only in the context of society that the higher feelings can develop at all, "sadness, [for example, is] an emotion belonging entirely to a civilized man" (Itard 1972b, p. 171). Lack of any social stimulus, particularly during the developmental period, results in a kind of idiocy by sensory deprivation, even in the absence of organic lesion. In this first sense, the terms education, civilisation and moral treatment are entirely synonymous. In the second instance, civilisation also creates the need for education, the need for new civil subjects to maintain and progress it. This aspect is manifest in the preceding discussions. The savage does not develop the higher intellectual and moral functions in the wild precisely because he has no need of them. Lastly, it is only in the context of civil society that it becomes possible to conceive of the man as an unnatural occurrence, as something to be moulded and produced from nature's clay, the child. From the modern, disciplined citizen more is demanded than fear and obedience. Modern society demands the active participation of subjects in their own subjection, practicing civility as though it were instinctual.

### **The pedagogical treatment of idiocy**

Contemporaneous with Itard's work was a radical conceptual rupture in theories of evolution and racial variation. The linear frameworks of development outlined above explode into the branching

genealogical economies of biology and evolution, paving the way for the evolutionary theories of Darwin (Foucault 1970). Indeed, by the middle of the C.19<sup>th</sup> theories on the inequalities of the races were rejecting any notion that all races and societies are or ever could be on the same developmental trajectory (e.g. Galton 1869; Gobineau 1970). In their place were theories predicated on natural selection (Darwin 1936).

Itard's work straddles this divide. As Rose notes, Itard's work crosses, indeed, creates, the threshold at which modern psychology can truly be said to exist (Rose 1985). The wild boy of Aveyron was by no means the first feral child to have been discovered in Europe in the C.19<sup>th</sup> and to have aroused considerable public interest (Newton 2002). What made this case different was the way in which efforts to educate him were based on systematic and rigorous observation, experimentation and measurement.

Nonetheless the conceptual framework is still influenced by the legacy of classical notions of linear development. Opinion was divided as to whether the failure in the experiment with Victor was due to lack of progress in scientific pedagogy, as Itard believed, or the congenital idiocy of the boy, as others believed (Esquirol 1965). However, what was not seriously called into question was that the difference between the savage and the civil man was education, unless there be some qualitative pathological reason for failure to develop, i.e. idiocy.

His efforts were, however, to undergo a radical reappraisal by a young protégé, Edouard Seguin. Taking the view that Itard's charge had been an idiot from the outset, Seguin began to reassess the success of Itard's methods, which, if Victor was indeed an idiot, was remarkable. Seguin set about perfecting a system of experimental pedagogical treatment for idiots in the same experimental tradition that Itard had established (Seguin 1866).

Seguin's work provides another node in the complex: the introduction of biological defect. Kliewer and Fitzgerald (2001) discuss the ideological dilemma for Europe engaged in colonisation across the globe, namely having to account for the deformed and enfeebled at home in the face of a colonial discourse premised on the European as more perfect and godly. It is within this ideological lacuna, they argue, that modern discourses of disability develop. Increasingly, the conquest of the natural world meant that the savage became less of a threat and more of a challenge of governance. The savage, the pauper, the cripple, the idiot, they argue, all signified the fundamental problem of sloth. The efforts of Seguin and contemporary pedagogues was both a response to and a cementing of

the connections between learning and liberty, most especially the ‘contract’ of humane confinement for the inability to become normal, self-governing and self-sufficient.

Seguin produced the first systematically expounded theory of education for idiot children. Although there is neither the space or advantage in outlining the method here, there are a number of features that are important. The method derived empirical and theoretical support from a number of quarters – most importantly *physiology* – in addition to those already mentioned: Itard, Rousseau and the exponents of moral treatment. Seguin’s method of *pedagogical treatment* both targeted and utilised the whole body. Idiocy came to be redefined as pathology of normal bodily functioning and not simply an organic impairment. The corollary to this view was a method that aimed at invigorating the torpid will, nervous and muscular systems of the idiot.

There are many points in Seguin’s system of physiological education that derive some degree of influence from Itard. Principal amongst these, for this paper at least, are: firstly, the development of a system of experimental pedagogy that targets the body in order to educate the mind. For Seguin this is related to another pivotal move, *viz.* the conceptual diffusion of idiocy *throughout the body*, regarding it not simply as located in the brain or mind (see e.g. Seguin 1976). Secondly, we have the medicalisation of pedagogy. Thirdly, both share the view, established for the most part by Rousseau (e.g. 1973a, 1991), that education was a process of producing citizens; “a constant ascension on the steps leading from isolation to sociability” (Seguin 1866, p. 209).

The first two of these points are closely interlinked. In addition to the already mentioned contextual points mentioned, Itard’s work also takes place against background shifts in Western medicine (Lesch 1984) towards physiology, infusing the inert anatomical body with time, life and movement. The physiological turn in medicine was profoundly important for the pedagogical systems of both Itard and Seguin. Both emphasised the stimulation and harnessing of the functional systems of the body; for Seguin, however, it was to prove even more significant. By the time Seguin produced the seminal iteration of his system in 1866, physiology not only lay at the heart of the *treatment* of idiocy, idiocy itself had come to be redefined as a physiological disorder. The physiological method was, therefore, more than merely a system for the education of idiots, it was a direct therapeutic intervention on idiocy itself (Simpson 1999). Also, in keeping with the development of a specifically *medical* science, the physiological institution advances knowledge primarily through clinical case data. Even the institution’s teachers had the duty placed upon them by Seguin to record observations on the

children each day. In this way the scientific pedagogy and treatment of idiocy would advance by the dissemination of clinical data and the “repeated tests of experience” (Seguin 1866, p. 278).

These points are best illustrated in Seguin’s concept of the ‘psycho-physiological circulus’. The idiot body is sluggish and insensitive. As a result it provides but ill-nourishment for the mind in terms of the sensory pabulum needed to form thoughts and purposive action. The physiological method, therefore, aims to stimulate the body’s muscles and senses so as to energise the senses, flooding the mind with stimuli, and bring the errant body under the control of the mind. This produces a cycle that underpins Seguin’s method: sensory stimulation–reception–apperception–will–action–sensory stimulation...

The medico-pedagogical construction of citizens also links the savage and the idiot to moral treatment, which permeates Seguin’s system just as it did for Itard’s (Kraft 1961). As with the alienists who pioneered it (Pinel 1962; Tuke 1996), moral treatment does not merely, or even principally, imply a ‘humane’ or ‘kindly’ approach; neither does it refer to the morality of the physician or educator. Moral treatment emphasises the *social relations* of the subject as the primary target of treatment (Foucault 1965), indeed it is the process of their subjection and subjectification: “the systematic action of a will upon another, in view of its improvement” (Seguin 1866, p. 214). The rationale of the moral method is quite clear for its proponents; it is proposed for reasons of its effectiveness, rather than its ethicality (Scull 1989). Seguin reiterates the same objective of the ‘moralisation’ of the idiot.

Another feature of the discourse on the savage of Aveyron that is also worth noting is the familiar connection between the savage state, social being and solitude. The idiot came to be identified with those unable to be educated by virtue of intellectual defect or deficiency. The idiot was still the idiotes (idiot), the solitary; socially cut off by the failings of his body; unable to follow the developmental path to civilisation. The idiot was not uneducable because idiotic, but idiotic because uneducable. The idiot was the one who proved unable to become disciplined, at least by means of the normal instruments of socialisation.

The savage, however, had faded from the lexicon of idiocy. The fragmentation of theories of social and racial evolution, unencumbered by the linear sequentialism of the C.18<sup>th</sup>, relied less and less on explanations of social and environmental learning to account for human diversity. Social relations among the uncivilised differ more in kind than in quantity, and the anthropological study of the exotic other splits decisively from the psychological study of abnormality. That said, recapitulation theory –

the belief that the development of the embryo in the womb follows a similar evolutionary line as the species of which it is a member (Borthwick 1994) – left open the door for the continuation of racial theories of idiocy. In Seguin’s case, idiocy constituted an arrested state of development “analogous to the...forms of the lower animals” (1866, p. 40). This opens the way for other even more sinister strategies and conclusions, such as Gobineau’s stark conclusions about the intrinsic inequality of races (Gobineau 1970).

## Conclusion

The connections between the colonial attitude and the formation of the modern discourse on idiocy were several, though largely indirect. First, as Kliewer & Fitzgerald’s (2001) observed, there is a direct link between the discourse of colonialism abroad and internal regulation of deviants at home, i.e. by standing in apparent exception to the position that ought to occupy by birth in the racial hierarchy. In the case of idiocy, their impassivity to the normal scholastic techniques of disciplinary control, implied two things. Firstly that they had to be constructed pathologically – indeed, it had to become possible to even speak of *them*. Secondly, they became subject to a form of social contract that guaranteed, however notionally, a basic level of public provision in *exchange* for the surrender of liberty: a system of domestic *reducciones*.

Second, the impact of popular and scientific interest in the exotic uncivilised peoples of the new worlds undoubtedly shaped the conditions that made Itard’s work of such relevance in Enlightenment France. Observers looked to Itard’s experiment for clues to the development of a civilising pedagogy at home and abroad. The savage of Aveyron was directly analogous to the new world savage. This connection, however, began to break down in the early C.19<sup>th</sup> as the linear models on which they rested began to give way. The residue of this attitude, however, remains in the thread of Itard’s work that runs directly into that of Seguin and the pedagogical treatment of idiocy. The education of idiots aims directly at the stimulation of their relations with the physical and social world, it is a release from the putative solitude that defines their very being.

This leads to a third connection, which is that, even after the two discourses split into ethnology and psychology and move in different directions, the ‘civilising impulse’ at home, with children and idiots, and abroad, among ‘backward’ colonised nations, continued unabated. Education was firmly established as the process of transforming its targets – child, idiot, savage – into social

subjects. Neither makes the same assumptions about equality of potential, but both see the objective of producing social beings, fitted for life according to the demands of Eurocentric culture, as an unquestionably necessary duty for teacher/coloniser and aspiration for the child/idiot/native.

Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a center for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving, instructing. (Conrad 1990, p. 29)

A fourth point of connection is the more complicated one that we find in the figure of the savage. To begin with, the wild boy of Aveyron was seen as paralleling the uncivilised peoples of the new world. Subsequently, Seguin would reinterpret Itard's work taking the assumption that Victor was after all an idiot. This connection is, therefore, one that produces a relationship defining difference, rather than similitude. The construction of the exotic savage, the domestic savage and the idiot were all linked to the project of constructing the civilised, white, European man.

In this sense the savage and the idiot share much in common with those placed at the boundaries by the Enlightenment, such as women, children and criminals; in being constructed as Other, their own voices are silenced (*cf.* Spivak 2003). They are spoken for as well as about: "The Other is silenced *because she is Other*" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson 1996, p. 10). Certainly, these events mark the beginning of a long silence for people with intellectual disabilities. However, it seems equally clear that neither the idiot nor the savage had a voice prior to the point of their construction *qua* idiot and savage precisely because to take any other view would lead us into the paradox of retrospectively incorporating voices into the Other anachronistically.

Finally, we should note that there are of course many other aspects to the racialisation of idiocy that would come later: Carl Vogt's positing of the idiot as the 'missing link' between negro and ape (Jahoda 1999); John Langdon Down's racial typography of idiocy (Kevles 2004; Wright 2004), and perhaps most significantly, eugenics (e.g. Karier 1976; Trent 1994). What this paper has demonstrated are some of the ways in which complex interconnections between race, empire, education and idiocy, can produce concepts and practices which leave a residue of imperialist thinking, even when the question of empire itself becomes silenced.

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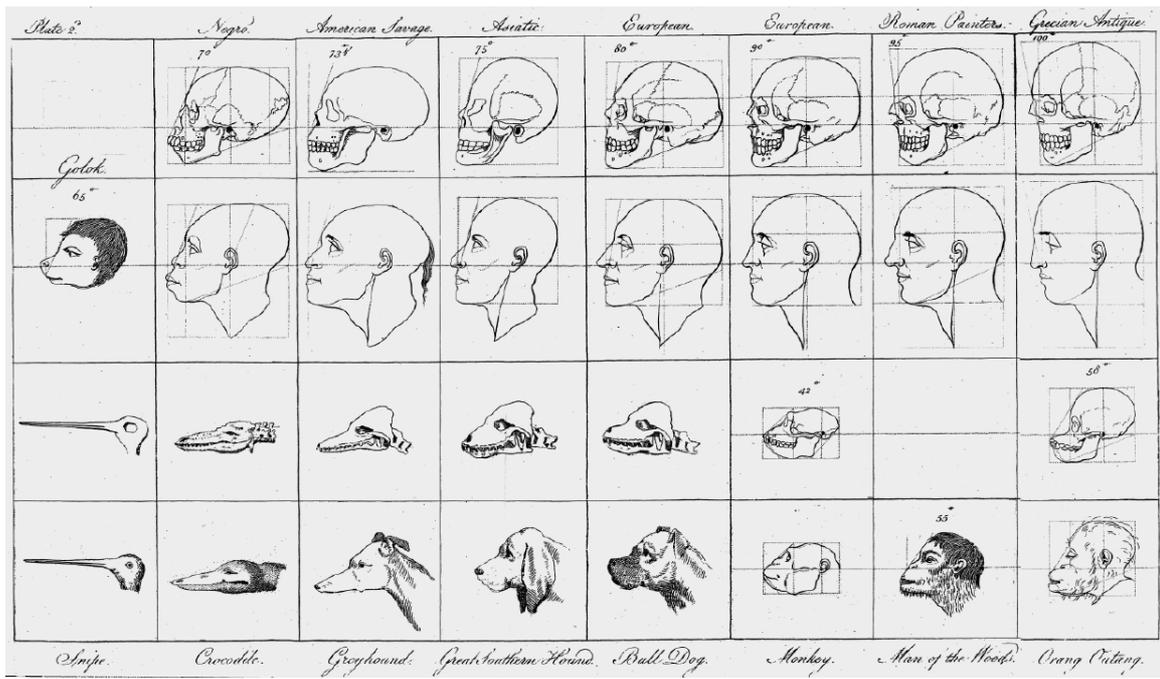


Figure 1: cranial classification (White, 1799)