The Origins of an Experimental Society

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'Though one of the parts of the earth best fitted for man, New Zealand was probably about the last of such lands occupied by the human race.'

— William Pember Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, 1898

'These unshaped islands, on the sawyer's bench,
Wait for the chisel of the mind … .'

— James K. Baxter, 'New Zealand', 1969

'She drives … thinking about the past and how it is carried within us and cannot be ignored, no matter how much we might wish it otherwise.'

— Fiona Farrell, *Limestone*, 2009

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Introduction

The islands of New Zealand were colonised by two seafaring peoples, the Polynesians from around 1350 and the Europeans from the early 1800s. Within a hundred years of their arrival, the Polynesians also discovered and settled not only the three main islands and adjacent ones, such as the Three Kings, but also every archipelago within 800 kilometres.[1] In 1642 the Dutch sailor Abel Tasman arrived. Had his first brief contact with Māori led on to further European arrivals in the same century, New Zealand's history would have been very different; but Europeans did not return until the late eighteenth century, in the so-called 'Second Age of Discovery', and this second arrival coincided with the intellectual transformation now commonly known as the Enlightenment. This book contends that the timing of encounters between tangata whenua and Europeans, and the European colonisation of New Zealand, has profoundly shaped its subsequent history. While that history echoed the broad shape of earlier colonial histories in other places, particularly in other settler societies, it also diverged and took its own course in important ways.

Many histories have been written about the European colonisation of New Zealand, but this one looks in depth and detail at the particular intellectual and political belief systems of the Europeans at that historical moment; at the ways the Pacific in turn influenced their ideas about human nature and human history; and how those ideas shaped the interconnected history of these two peoples. This book, in short, is about 'tangata Pākehā', a people of European stock changed by their encounters with 'tangata Māori' and their land, just as they too are changed.[2] By paying careful attention to what went on in the minds of the Europeans who came here, I attempt to show how subjects usually considered the domain of intellectual or religious historians, or even art historians, shaped the main events in New Zealand's post-contact history, the lives of its peoples and the emergent culture.[3] In short, the history of New Zealand as a new nation increasingly dominated by settlers from the British Isles is distinctive precisely because it became entangled with the ferment of ideas generated by the Enlightenment and

the scientific revolution, both of which stressed the ability of humans to use reason to manage the world and improve both themselves and their society.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment was thus fundamental in shaping New Zealand's history as a settler society. The *philosophes* and savants of the Enlightenment were sceptical of all forms of traditional authority, and believed that knowledge was to be gained through the use of reason and first-hand experience: *science* rather than tradition. The Enlightenment shaped not only the purpose of almost every European expedition to enter the Pacific between Cook's first voyage in 1768–71 and the Frenchman Dumont d'Urville's in 1837–40, but also the way in which the first European arrivals imagined the possibility of creating a new society which incorporated the indigenous people. Their values and beliefs – as well as the desire to expand European wealth and dominance – drove their voyaging and migrating. Shaped by its timing, the colonisation of New Zealand by Europeans, most of them British, was constructed as two experiments: the first, an attempt to ensure that the indigenous peoples were not driven to extinction by their exposure to 'civilisation', as had happened so often since Columbus's so-called 'discovery' of the Americas; and the second, an attempt to create a more fair and just society for the colonists, a 'Better Britain', that would also, assuming the first experiment's success, assist tangata Māori to complete their journey to 'civilisation'. Lofty as their aims may have been in the context of those times, these experiments became entangled with the history of Britain's drive to achieve global dominance.[4]

The idea of New Zealand as an experiment arrived with the colonists of the 1840s but was first used as an historical theme by William Pember Reeves in two works: *The Long White Cloud: Ao Tea Roa* (1898) and *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand* (1902). Reeves congratulated the British government on its enlightened humanitarian policies towards Māori, and the New Zealand government for its experimental uses of the state to promote the welfare of its citizens.[5] While official policy and legislation will feature in my argument, as they did in Reeves's, it was in fact not a government but two religious organisations and a private company that initiated the two experiments. The Church Missionary Society, strongly supported by the Wesleyan Missionary Society, took on the task of ensuring the survival, salvation and civilisation of Māori, and the New Zealand Company assumed that of building a 'Better Britain', although it also subscribed to the evangelical-humanitarian campaign to 'preserve and civilise' Māori before incorporating them into the new society.[6] Both experiments may first have been conceived by savants and philosophers, but they gained ongoing support by lodging in the hearts and minds of ordinary people long before governments became interested or involved.[7] An evangelical faith and a humanitarian commitment were the names given to new ways of living. Like maxims in philosophy for John Keats, these new beliefs or ideologies were valid only when people felt them on their pulses.

This book is thus a marriage of social and intellectual-cultural history.[8] It reconfigures the customary relationship between these sub-disciplines, and several others, in order to place intellectual history at the centre, while recognising the close synergy that necessarily exists between it and social, cultural, economic and political history. I will try, in short, to show the links between core ideas and long-term shifts in the broader environment.

The events dealt with in this volume are important to New Zealand's history not only because of Britain's decision to annex the country and its reasons for doing so, but also because the influx of Europeans in the 1840s and '50s proved more formative than their small numbers would suggest. It is widely recognised in many disciplines that the first to arrive and settle – the founder population – exercise a much larger influence on the subsequent history of a society than later arrivals, even when the later arrivals are more numerous. Māori arrived first, of course, and the settlers of the 1840s often turned to them for advice on matters such as which native plants were edible, how best to get from one place to another, and even how to cultivate such plants as potatoes in the local conditions. In many ways Māori settlement patterns also determined those of the Europeans. Yet the isolation of Māori from the other Polynesians for hundreds of years, a period in which globalisation proceeded rapidly in the rest of the world, meant that the influx of Europeans after 1840 constituted a major rupture in their lives. Under Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi, which (in British eyes) transferred sovereignty to Britain, Māori were to be part of a new society endowed with all the rights of British subjects.

Although New Zealand historians have not contributed to the international debates about what makes settler societies distinctive, they have often drawn on the more influential explanations. The frontier theory, which posited that the frontier itself transformed the immigrants, and the seed theory of European settlement, which assumed the continuity of the Old World and the New, helped shape the two most influential interpretations of our history when I first studied the subject in the 1970s: Keith Sinclair's *A History of New Zealand* (1959) and W. H. Oliver's *The Story of New Zealand* (1960).[9] Neither author seemed interested in the theory developed by Louis Hartz, the American political scientist and historian, who identified Europe's colonies of settlement as fragments of the mother country whose nature and course were determined by the values and beliefs of the 'founding fragment' when they left.[10]

Despite the widespread rejection of Hartz's view that the settler societies of the New World were imprisoned forever by the beliefs and values

of the 'founding fragment' (of Europeans), a modified version of Hartz's fragment thesis can contribute significantly to understanding the history and character of new societies.[11] In New Zealand's case, the founder effect was amplified because the leading colonisers theorised *ad nauseam* about the process and the purpose of 'systematic colonisation'. That theory, rightly considered Edward Gibbon Wakefield's, was derived from three sources: the new science of political economy, the social and moral thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, and the French Enlightenment's 'Science of Freedom' (personal liberty, equality, freedom of thought and expression, and the rejection of all claims to absolute authority, whether political or ecclesiastical).[12] These colonisers believed that their plan would shape the new society's development; it took them longer to realise that the new land and Māori would re-shape their plans. Whatever re-shapings occurred, however, the very idea that a society could plan its own future, or that individuals could do so, became foundational to New Zealand as a new settler society. Perhaps a parallel process had shaped the way the first Polynesians imagined their new society when they made landfall on these hitherto unknown islands. Their success in adapting to their transplantation from the Tropics to these temperate islands and their ongoing adaptation to the impact of the 'Little Ice Age' (*c*.1500–1900) indicates that they must have been resourceful and innovative.[13]

Given the centrality of the Enlightenment to my argument it is worth briefly sketching its significance.[14] For many of those living through it, the European Enlightenment – entangled as it was with a major scientific revolution – was widely considered to be an epochal movement which finally liberated the human mind from the tutelage of tradition and authority. In the 1960s this account of the Enlightenment generated its own critique. Instead of freeing humankind, critics argued, it focused on the activities of tiny intellectual elites living in towns and cities, mainly in north-western Europe; it was also largely a story of literate be-wigged males. Some even portrayed it as a power grab by these men who used their new knowledge and technologies to subjugate others, starting with white women and moving on to the world's indigenous peoples.[15]

While the critique cannot be dismissed, a revised version of the older view has emerged which still insists on the central importance of the Enlightenment in freeing inquiry from the shackles of tradition and authority, while recognising its limitations and the fact that it varied considerably from one country to another. In France, long considered its home, the Enlightenment constituted an attack on the privileges and authority of the Church and the feudal aristocracy which culminated in the French Revolution. In England, by contrast, it followed 'the Glorious Revolution' of 1688 which confirmed the primacy of Parliament over the Crown, transformed Anglicanism into a pillar of the Enlightenment, and established liberties that were the envy of the educated throughout Europe. In applying new knowledge to production, however, the British (in particular) launched an agricultural revolution and kick-started the Industrial Revolution (1750–1830). Self-sustaining economic growth began.[16]

It was the Scottish Enlightenment, sometimes referred to as 'the late Enlightenment', that exercised most influence in New Zealand.[17] Spearheaded by David Hume and Adam Smith, both of of whom were deeply influenced by French *philosophes*, a galaxy of talented Scots wrote books and essays that influenced the thinking of Europeans in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and well beyond. Two themes dominated: 'history' and 'human nature'. Indeed, it was the Scots who first linked them together in 'the Science of Man'. 'Our most fundamental character as human beings, they argued, even our moral character, is constantly evolving and developing [over time], shaped by a variety of forces over which we as individuals have little or no control.' Not that these changes were arbitrary or inexplicable. 'The study of man is ultimately a *scientific* study.'[18] This conclusion also led them to anatomise the social conditions necessary to maintain a free society: religious tolerance, private property, free markets in land and labour, independent schools and universities – the buttresses of a public sphere in which a vibrant civic culture could flourish.[19]

The savants of the Scottish Enlightenment thus embarked on 'a massive reordering of human knowledge' with a view to its transmission; the growth of knowledge, they believed, was essential to humanity's progress or evolution.[20] Most of them were professors or clergymen, and thus educators. Arguably the Scottish Enlightenment's most influential production, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1768–71), intended as a complete summary of all knowledge and constantly updated to incorporate the latest discoveries, was both a monument to their ambition and their legacy.[21] These Scottish savants recognised themselves as the products of a 'rude' society and so trying to improve themselves, and were of the view that their Highland kin were even 'ruder' (no doubt the source of their preoccupation with how peoples became 'refined' or civilised), yet they used the new disciplines of History and the Science of Man to affirm the common humanity and therefore capacity of all peoples.

This history, thus, is about one of the few post-Enlightenment experiments in creating a new nation anywhere in the world. To a marked degree, therefore, this volume will be an ethnography of Europeans who settled in New Zealand, tangata Pākehā, with particular attention to the role of ideas in their social and cultural context.[22] Because the Enlightenment overlapped with an ongoing scientific revolution, which spawned an agri-

cultural and an industrial revolution in Britain, the new society also inherited access to the latest technologies and knowledge while enjoying the protection of Great Britain, the world's pre-eminent naval power. It also brought access to Britain's markets and the Anglo-Australian financial system.[23]

Two specific movements, evangelicalism and humanitarianism, carried the Enlightenment's central values into New Zealand's history. While evangelicalism was once portrayed as hostile to the Enlightenment, it is now widely recognised that British evangelicalism became deeply shaped by the Enlightenment's assumptions and values. The evangelical revival of the eighteenth century was not confined to any one Protestant denomination or country, but its growth became entangled with the increasing influence of a distinctively English empiricism. In particular, British evangelicals not only privileged their own experience (including their own interpretation of the Bible) but also came to believe that the quest for empirical knowledge of God's creation would provide the key to banishing ignorance and superstition, and deepen faith as well. Nature came to be considered God's other Book, a complement to the Bible. The evangelical revival, expressed in England most dramatically by the rise of Wesleyanism and the emergence of the Clapham sect, generated social as well as religious activism – the expression of the Gospels in effort.

Its English offspring were self-improvement, social improvement, and eventually a mission to save the world's heathen and incorporate them into civilised society.[24] The idea of self-improvement and social improvement was also shaped by a widespread English faith in the perfectibility of mankind by natural as distinct from supernatural means. A succession of English philosophers – Locke, Hartley, Priestley, Godwin – argued that by applying the methods of scientific discovery it would be possible to identify how to accelerate the process of improvement. Many concluded that education, by which some meant habit-formation, was the key to this process, although others put more emphasis on the state's power to enact and enforce laws. While many practising Christians refused to abandon the orthodox belief in original sin, as the century went on they also began emphasising the possibility of improvement through education (Sunday schools and Bible classes becoming ubiquitous, together with missions to the heathen at home and abroad). Vice, in short, came to be seen as a consequence of ignorance, and those who refused to accept that mankind could ever be perfect now maintained, as the Revd Thomas Malthus famously did, that natural laws of population would limit improvement.[25] Regardless of how one decided, however, this general movement helped spawn a new belief in the value of all human lives.

The words humanitarian and humanitarianism, first used in print in the 1830s, signified an active belief in the value of all human life, expressed

in the moral imperative to relieve suffering and provide help to the less fortunate. The Enlightenment's philosophy of improvement first gave rise to the idea that the wellbeing of humanity was a worthwhile goal, although the movement towards a coherent philosophy was bedevilled by contradictions and shortcomings. In eighteenth-century Britain, for instance, people stopped attending public hangings and beheadings and lost their appetite for public torture, but only slowly, and with much opposition, began to feel that slavery was wrong. In 1807 Britain banned the slave trade and in 1832 banned slavery itself throughout its empire.[26] In the 1780s industrial servitude in Britain came under attack; in the 1830s the first Factory Acts were also passed; and by the 1850s, in the middle ranges of British society, the humanity of the labouring poor was at least acknowledged. Britain's success in abolishing slavery throughout its empire became central to the nation's sense of moral superiority, and early in the twentieth century spawned a self-congratulatory historiography which, in turn, inspired a comprehensive critique which threw out the baby with the bathwater.[27]

Since the start of the twenty-first century, the terms evangelical and humanitarian have attracted scholarly attention in Britain and North America but have not often been linked to the emergence of a discourse concerning race. That discourse, greatly stimulated by the European encounter with the peoples of the Pacific, has largely ignored the growth of two new disciplines – ethnography and ethnology. Those disciplines deeply influenced humanitarianism and shaped a concept of race which became central to New Zealand's history.

I will often use the term 'evangelical humanitarian' to emphasise that although evangelism and humanitarianism had quite different origins and appealed to quite distinct groups of people, supporters of the two movements often agreed on what ought to be done. Evangelical ideas about one's duty, and humanitarian ideas that derived not from faith but from a secular philosophy sometimes hostile to Christianity, often overlapped. The two movements shared certain values, notably the importance of manners and decency, and agreed, even if for different reasons, that slavery should be abolished, illegitimate babies rescued (rather than being abandoned to die), vicious punishments banned, and the miserable relieved. By the 1850s, moreover, it had become possible, even stylish, to explain drunkenness, crime and even poverty 'neither as a divine dispensation nor as a just punishment ... but as a stroke of misfortune or a failure of society'.[28]

The objects of humanitarian concern within Britain also began to speak for themselves in the 1780s. Three events gave it momentum: the American Revolution (1776); a radical uprising centred in London, the most democratic electorate in the unreformed House of Commons (1780s); and then the French Revolution (1789). Radical leaders such as the Wesleyan

preacher Richard Price and the atheistic Thomas Paine articulated a new ideology centred on *The Rights of Man* (1791), the title of one of Paine's bestselling books.[29] Despite the violent repression of such ideas during the wars with revolutionary and then Napoleonic France, they inspired earth-shattering revolutions and resurfaced in Britain following those wars. By then one major legacy of the Enlightenment, the use of scientific method to study the economy and society, provided the prophets of a new social order with arguments and proofs. Trades unionism, Robert Owen's new model society in Lanarkshire, and the anti-capitalist publications of a small group of socialists who used David Ricardo's labour theory of value to demonstrate that capitalism constituted theft, stimulated and to some extent legitimised waves of radical protest which culminated in the great Chartist uprising (1838–48). It too would profoundly shape New Zealand.[30]

It is equally significant that New Zealand was also settled following a major reaction *against* aspects of the Enlightenment, known widely as Romanticism in Europe or Transcendentalism in the United States. Romanticism – an era and ethos, rather than a movement – rejected the Enlightenment's faith in reason and its instrumental view of Nature while subsuming its central values. Despite significant variations within and between nations, the Romantics were obsessed with the deepest reaches of human feeling. Although Romanticism originated in France in the early stages of the French Enlightenment as a reaction against the constraints of civilisation, in the early nineteenth century the English and the German-speakers erected on those foundations a cult of Nature and the natural. The idea that what was natural was of necessity good captured the sunny optimism of the Enlightenment but transposed it into a different key. In Britain, Walter Scott, the Scottish novelist, and several poets were in the forefront – Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron and Shelley are still perhaps the best known. English painters were also deeply influenced by the new ethos, especially John Constable and John Turner.[31] As the American art historian Paul Shepard concluded after studying a wide range of contemporary diaries kept by those who came to New Zealand in the 1840s, the diarists had a vision of a world undefiled by 'civilized man', a world where men and women could return to a simpler and more natural way of life without forfeiting the gains made in becoming civilised.[32] Although that trope had its origins in the French Enlightenment, and especially Rousseau's great bestseller *Émile*, first published in English in 1763, the idea put down deep roots here.

This book is the first of three. Each volume covers a specific period and centres on the two experiments. Each also explores the influence of the Enlightenment, which here provided the foundation for increasingly rapid advances in both knowledge and economic productivity.

The first volume is the foundation on which the next two volumes stand. It covers the period from Cook's first voyage to the end of the 1850s; it is about European origins, focusing mainly on European 'discoverers' and the subsequent settlers and what they wanted, and what they managed to learn about these islands and their people. It is also about how the first New Zealanders responded to the new arrivals and the developing relationship between tangata Māori and tangata Pākehā during this formative period of New Zealand's history. Although my main focus is on providing an ethnography of tangata Pākehā, my use of this term is designed to point to the fact that the encounter between Māori and Pākehā forced both peoples to alter and adjust their thought as well as their behaviour. Neither people were homogenous, however. Māori were divided by iwi, hapū and even whānau, while Pākehā were divided by religion, nationality and class. As far as possible I try to attend to those differences and their importance. My task throughout is to untangle the evidence, rather than to judge, to explore the interconnections as well as the conflicts, but to remain focused on the dreams, the intellectual paradigms, on the importance of ideas and thought.

The second volume will begin with the wars and the gold rushes of the 1860s, the two islands having quite dissimilar histories at the start of this period. The settlers largely displaced Māori in their strongholds in the North Island while building a society and culture that embodied many of the characteristics of their imagined 'Better Britain' but in a much more beautiful country, or so most came to believe. In the South Island, by contrast, the discovery of gold allowed Otago and Canterbury to race ahead. During the 1870s Julius Vogel revived updated versions of the two experiments and reunited the country as a single polity. Following the 'Long Depression' (1878–95), the emergence and triumph of the Liberal-Labour Party saw the country become 'the social laboratory of the world', a new form of pioneering. I will end that volume with World War One, a formative event in several respects. The final volume will examine the period after the end of World War One, the formation of the welfare state, the disintegration of the British Empire and the development of an independent foreign policy based on our own values, the growth and urbanisation of Māori and the Māori renaissance, the so-called 'neo-liberal experiment', the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal, and the emergence of a politics based on identity and the quest for a new narrative in which my two experiments have become one.

In writing this ethnography of the Europeans who came to New Zealand I have spent an inordinate amount of time immersing myself both in the key texts in the intellectual history of England, Scotland and Western Europe more generally, and in the massive secondary literature relating to that broad field. In particular I have focused on the origins and early development of ethnography and ethnology, the European disciplines for

investigating and explaining cultural difference. Much of what I have to say about developments in New Zealand relies heavily on the published primary sources, such as J.C. Beaglehole's edition of Cook's journals, contemporary publications, and the published work of other scholars. Where I have taken issue with the prevailing view or felt that an important topic has been neglected, notably the ideas and beliefs that animated the colonists, especially Edward Gibbon Wakefield and Bishop George Augustus Selwyn, I have undertaken research into primary sources. However, most of my research energy has been devoted to reading books and pamphlets usually considered irrelevant to New Zealand's history, and to thinking about the relationship between events in New Zealand and intellectual developments in Europe and especially Britain. By seeking to have those two literatures engage with each other, I hope to invite reflection, contribute to self-knowledge and shed new light on our history.

Over the 25 years during which this book was written, a profound generational shift in perspectives on colonial history occurred. This is best exemplified by the objections of many, both Māori and Pākehā, to the 250th anniversary commemorations of James Cook's first visit to New Zealand on the grounds that he was a racist imperialist responsible for the evils of colonialism. In this critical discourse the heroes of the Victorian age were also demonised as racist land grabbers who robbed and subjugated the indigenous people. In extreme versions of this new narrative, the migrants came only to rob and subjugate.[33] Even people such as Henry and Marianne Williams, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, George and Sarah Selwyn, and George and Eliza Grey, major figures in the period covered by this volume, are often now dismissed as the self-seeking architects of colonisation and racist notions of racial hierarchy. Neither the older hero-worship nor the contemporary demonisation seems to me to serve our understanding of the past, or its significance for the present. Ironically, both views greatly exaggerate the power and influence of these historical figures and diminish or deny Māori agency.[34] Similarly, the contemporary focus on colonisation almost to the exclusion of all other processes deserves examination. While colonisation undoubtedly provides 'the inescapable context', as the Te Āti Awa historian Danny Keenan put it, it does not adequately explain everything. As the philosophers say, colonisation may be a necessary but not necessarily a sufficient cause. As Māori historians such as Buddy Mikaere and Danny Keenan have long argued, supported more recently by the Māori history collective Te Pouhere Kōrero, 'the seeming obsession ... with colonisation' has not only denied agency but also homogenised both ethnic-racial identities as exclusively a binary opposition.[35] However, this is not to deny, as I shall show in Volumes 2 and 3, that Māori were swamped by the tidal wave of Europeans and found themselves having to function in two worlds.

In short, my aim is to negotiate increasingly contentious versions of our past at a time when the truths of history are freighted with current issues which have been changing even as I have written and revised. Some might insist that to focus on the European origins and ideas of the European immigrants might seem irrelevant or even inflammatory. Yet this contextualised account of who these Europeans were, and the ideas that gave meaning to their journeys and their new home, provides a key to understanding how they were changed by settling in these islands, changed also by their encounter with Māori, just as the Māori response to being plugged back into the Eurasian-American world – indeed to the Pacific islands too – not only changed their ideas about the world but also contributed to the ways in which this colonial outpost itself began to change. Although these grand themes played out in different ways in different districts and regions, and over time, they contribute to our conception of how we became who we are, and indeed to our sense of who we are.