


The Metaphysics of Difference: Eighteenth-Century Embryology and Chains of Being



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‘Legitimate’ – A History

From Medieval Latin, *legitimus*, past participle of *legitimare*: to declare to be lawful, to cause to be regarded as lawful offspring

Legitimate, adj.

1. Of a child: Having the status of one lawfully begotten; entitled to full filial rights. Said also of a parent, and of lineal descent. (The only sense in Johnson.)

1494 Kynge Wylliam ... dyed without issu
legyttymat. (Fabyan)

‘Legitimate’ – A History (cont’d)

Legitimate, n.

1. A legitimate child.

1583: I had rather we had many legittimats than many illegittimates. (Stubbes)

Legitimate, v.

1. *trans.* To render (a bastard) legitimate; to establish the legitimacy of (a person) by an authoritative declaration or decree.

1597: With the Popes auouch, who legitimated him. (Beard)

‘Legitimate’ – A History (cont’d)

Legitimacy, n.

1. The fact of being a legitimate child.

1691: A virulent libell...endeavouring to prove the legitimacy of the prince of Wales, is printed. (Luttrell)

2. Of a government or the title of a sovereign:
The condition of being in accordance with law or principle.

1812: I never hear an American citizen speak of the ‘*legitimacy*’ of princes without indignation or pity.
(*Niles’ Reg.*)

1817: No one...will be found in this country to maintain that mere birth alone constitutes royal legitimacy.
(Scott, *Paris Revisit.*)

Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789)

Article I.

Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be based only on public utility.

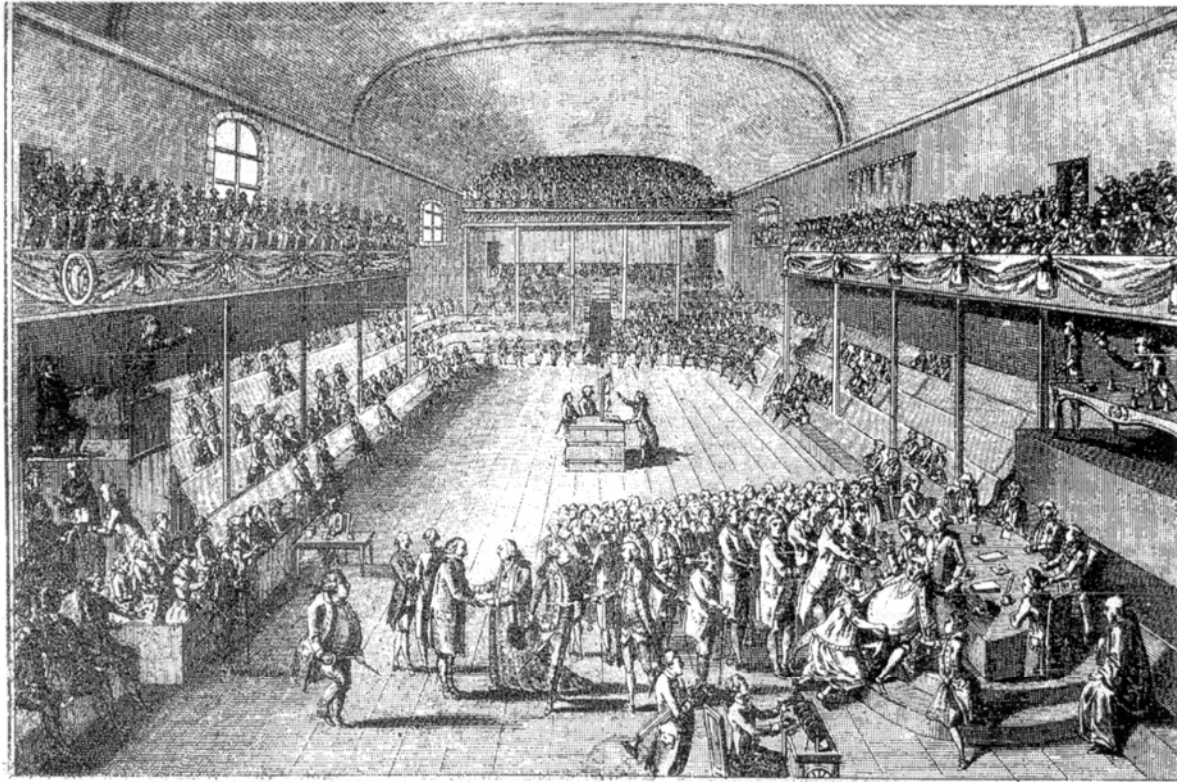
[Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune.]

Citizens born free

[*Citoyens né libre* (circa 1792-94)]



The Pains/Trials of Target [Les Douleurs de Target (1790)]



Les Douleurs de Target ou les Travaux d'Hercule, frontispiece, Les Actes des Apôtres, Volume III, 1790.
[The Pains/Trials of Target, or the Labors of Hercules]

Birth of Very High...

[Naissance de très haute... (undated)]



Naissance de très haute ..., anonymous, undated engraving.
[Birth of Very High...]

Charles Bonnet, late 18th-c preformationist

A sound philosopher has eyes that discover in every organized body the ineffaceable imprint of a work done at a single stroke, and which is the expression of that Adorable Will that said 'Let organic bodies be' and they were. They were from the beginning, and their first appearance is what we very improperly call generation, birth.

(Considerations, in Gasking 120)

Bonnet's Chain of Being (*Contemplation of Nature*, 1764; adapted from Bowler)

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| ❑ Man | ❑ Shellfish |
| ❑ Savages | ❑ Insects |
| ❑ Monkeys | ❑ Worms |
| ❑ Quadrupeds (Mammals) | ❑ Polyps (Hydras) |
| ❑ Bats | ❑ Sensitive Plants |
| ❑ Ostrich | ❑ Trees |
| ❑ Birds | ❑ Shrubs |
| ❑ Aquatic Birds | ❑ Herbs |
| ❑ Flying Fish Sea Lions? | ❑ Lichens |
| ❑ Fish ----- Whales? | ❑ Mold |
| ❑ Eels | ❑ Minerals |
| ❑ Sea Serpents | ❑ Earth |
| ❑ Reptiles | ❑ Water |
| ❑ Slugs | ❑ Air |

The Meaning in a Body

