

INTRODUCTION

to

Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, by Frederick Engels

by Eleanor Burke Leacock

IN THE *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels outlines the successive social and economic forms which underlay the broad sweep of early human history, as mankind gained increasing mastery over the sources of subsistence. The book was written after Marx's death, but was drawn from Marx's as well as Engels' own notes. It was based on the work, *Ancient Society*, which appeared in 1877 and was written by the anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, who, as Engels wrote in 1884, "in his own way . . . discovered afresh in America the materialistic conception of history discovered by Marx 40 years ago." The contribution Marx and Engels made to Morgan's work was to sharpen its theoretical implications, particularly with regard to the emergence of classes and the state. Although Engels' book was written well before most of the now available material on primitive and early urban society had been amassed, the fundamentals of his outline for history have remained valid. Moreover, many issues raised by Morgan's and then Engels' work are still the subjects of lively debate among anthropologists, while the theoretical implications of these issues are still matters of concern to Marxist scholars generally.

Morgan described the evolution of society in some 560 pages. Engels' book is far shorter, summarizing Morgan's material and focusing sharply on the major differences between primitive society and "civilization" with its fully developed classes and political organization. The questions Engels deals with pertain to three major topics: (a) developmental stages in mankind's history, (b) the nature of primitive society with regard to property, rank, family forms and descent systems, and (c) the emergence of commodity production, economically based classes and the state. A fourth subject of importance to contemporary anthropological research and but briefly referred to by Engels involves primate social organization and its relevance for an insight into early man. Engels' separate but incomplete paper on the subject, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man," has been included in this volume as an appendix.

MORGAN'S ANCIENT SOCIETY

THE IDEA central to Morgan's Ancient Society, that human history could be defined in terms of successive "stages," was an old one hinted at in classical Greek and Chinese writings, and well established in 19th century thought. However, theorists have not always separated stages in the evolution of culture as a whole-the background for historical events-from historical sequences specific to a single area. The early 18th century Italian historian, Giovanni Battista Vico, proposed a theory of historical cycles which were cultural in nature in that they comprised both institutional and ideological components of society. However they were tied too closely to European history to qualify as "evolutionary." According to Vico's proposal, the "divine" stage represented by early Greece gave way to the "heroic" of classical times, which was superseded by the "stage of man" in later Greece and in the Mediterranean world. The cycle was repeated in northern Europe, with the "divine" Dark Ages and the "heroic" Medieval, leading to the 18th century "stage of man." In content, Vico's periods were suggestive of Comte's later sequence in the development of knowledge from "theological," through "metaphysical," to "scientific."

The first four stages of human history proposed by Condorcet at the end of the 18th century were fully cultural. The first was characterized by hunting and fishing, the second by herding, the third by tilling of the soil, and the fourth by commerce, science and philosophy. Condorcet's later periods, however, were more specific to European history. They were marked by the decline of Rome, the Crusades, the invention of printing, the Protestant Revolt, and the establishment of the French Republic. In the 1850s, the pioneer anthropologist Gustave Klemm, who collated ethnographic materials on societies around the world, projected an outline of man's development from nomadic, egalitarian hunting society ("savagery"), through settled agricultural society organized politically and in great part dominated by religious institutions ("tameness"), to the civilizations of the classical Arabic, Greek, Persian and Roman worlds ("freedom").

The extent to which Morgan was directly acquainted with writings such as these is not clear, but in any case, his initial interest was not in tracing the major periods of cultural development. Instead, the theory of history embodied in Ancient Society grew out of questions raised by his empirical researches. Morgan's discovery of what seemed to be an unusual system of naming kinsmen used by the Iroquois Indians in his native state of New York led him to unearth the fact that similar systems existed independently thousands of miles away. This set him to collecting information on kinship systems among other American Indians, to which he added material from around the world by writing to missionaries, traders and government agents.

The result was data on a bewildering variety of terminologies used for naming relatives in many different societies. Morgan's first attempt to reduce his material to some order was beset with difficulties and was declared unsatisfactory by the publisher to whom he presented his manuscript. As a result, Morgan worked through to a theory of sequential stages in marriage represented by differing terminological systems, a theory he pro-

pounded in his *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*, published in 1871. The assumption upon which his theory was based, that kin terms represent actual or possible biological relationships, has been superseded by the understanding that the literal biological meaning of terms are often secondary to their social implications. However, Morgan's work was of tremendous importance not only to the formulation of problems in the comparative study of social institutions, but also in setting Morgan on the track that was to result, near the end of his life, in the publication of *Ancient Society*. The question posed by his study of kinship systems stayed with him. What had been the sequence of institutional forms in man's early history? For Morgan, this problem raised a more fundamental issue. What was the basis for the emergence of new and successive social forms?

Morgan found the answer to this question in the Darwinian interpretation of biological evolution. Morgan was familiar with and very much interested in Herbert Spencer's writings on social evolution in which Spencer spoke about the growing complexity and increasing specialization and differentiation of function in social institutions. However, it was not until Darwin seized upon the Spencerian concept of functional adaptation and interpreted it as the pivotal mechanism whereby successively "higher" biological forms had evolved that Morgan found the clue he had been seeking.

Morgan had remained dubious about the hypothesis of human evolution until he met and talked with Darwin when on a European tour. After this meeting, he wrote that he was compelled to accept the "conclusion that man commenced at the bottom of the scale and worked himself up to his present status," and that the "struggle for existence" was involved. (Like Darwin, Morgan understood the term to connote a process of active adaptation, rather than the "aggressiveness" emphasized by so-called "social Darwinism.") Morgan stated in a letter at that time, "I think that the real epochs of progress are connected with the arts of subsistence which includes the Darwinian idea of the 'struggle for existence'" (Resek, 1960: 99, 136-37). In his opening sentence to *Ancient Society*, he wrote that the process whereby man "worked himself up" was "through the slow accumulations of experimental knowledge," that is, through inventions and discoveries—the human counterpart to the physical adaptations of the lower species.

"As it is undeniable that portions of the human family have existed in a state of savagery," Morgan continued, "other portions in a state of barbarism, and still other portions in a state of civilization, it seems equally so that these three distinct conditions are connected with each other in a natural as well as a necessary sequence of progress." He stated that it was the "successive arts of subsistence which arose at long intervals" which were responsible for the development of the three major stages. He proposed parallel sequences in the history of social, economic and political institutions. By implication, they were closely related to the economic sequence, although Morgan achieves this integration only in relation to the transition from "barbarism" to "civilization."

Here, then, was the discussion of early social and economic forms which Marx and Engels needed to supplement their own historical inquiries. In the first full joint statement of their dialectical materialist theory of history presented in *The German Ideology* in

1846, Marx and Engels had outlined “various stages of development in the division of labor.” Since “the existing stage in the division of labor determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labor,” these stages are “just so many different forms of ownership.” Early “tribal” ownership gave way to “ancient, communal and State ownership,” which in turn was superseded by the third major form of pre-capitalist ownership, “feudal or estate-property” (Marx and Engels, 1970: 43-45). In another manuscript, completed some 11 or 12 years later, Marx speculated about the various kinds of relationships which obtained in societies in which “the labourer is an owner and the owner labours,” and about the processes whereby these relations were later dissolved or transformed (Marx, 1965: 96). His emphasis, however, was on the classical societies of the Mediterranean and Oriental worlds, and on early societies of northern Europe. What Morgan supplied was data which opened up to view developments within the enormously long period represented by “tribal” ownership, as well as material that illuminated the steps whereby private property emerged.

And a wealth of data there was. Morgan always stayed close to the details of specific institutional forms and events. He avoided a common 19th century practice of documenting a theory with items pulled out of their cultural context. Instead he built his exposition on detailed analyses of whole cultures: Australian, Iroquois, Aztec, Greek and Roman. The commonly echoed accusation that Morgan projected a grand but mechanical scheme into which he pigeonholed different cultures could only be made by those who have read no further than the first few pages of *Ancient Society*. Morgan’s focus was on the details of social arrangements in specific societies, on the implications of historical events, on problems raised by new inventions, and on steps whereby new relations emerge. Indeed, his shortcomings lay where it came to carrying through his theoretical hunches and formulating them with consistency. His major discovery was profound and the wealth of insights gained by reading his book is enormous. But he was, and remained essentially, the pragmatic scholar, insightful, but not committed to theory. He was certainly no dialectician and was not consistent in his materialism. It fell to Engels in *Origin* to pinpoint the critical issues raised by Morgan’s work, to define sharply the distinguishing features of the three major stages in early history, to clarify the relations between the subsistence base and sociopolitical organization in primitive and “civilized” societies, and to focus on the critical steps in the emergence of class relations and the state.

THE CONCEPT OF STAGES

THE CATEGORIZATION of successive levels in the integration of matter, as a step toward understanding, is taken more for granted in the natural than in the social sciences. To a greater extent than the social sciences, the natural sciences have been able to disentangle themselves from a metaphysical attempt to put the “things” of this world in their rightful places and the disillusionment that follows when this does not work. For example, it is taken for granted that the existence of forms intermediate between plants and animals does not invalidate the categories “plant” and “animal” but illuminates the

mechanisms that were operative in the development of the latter from the former. Discovering that a whale is not a fish deepens the understanding of mammalian processes. Rather than calling into question the category of “fish,” the discovery indicates the functional level more basic to the category than living in the sea. The fact that some hunting, gathering and fishing societies have achieved institutional forms generally found only with the development of agriculture does not invalidate the significance of distinguishing between food gathering and food production. Instead an examination of such societies deepens the understanding of why the distinction is significant and clarifies some of the reasons why on the whole there are rather marked differences in social organization between hunter-gatherers and simple agriculturists.

It used to be commonplace in American anthropology, following the anti-evolutionary empiricism associated with the name of Franz Boas, to question Morgan’s sequence of stages since many groups, including some Morgan gave as instances, do not really “fit” into a particular stage. However, Morgan himself knew the limits of his scheme, which he offered as “convenient and useful,” but “provisional.” He wrote that he would have liked to base his major divisions on the “successive arts of subsistence,” which he saw as: (1) subsistence on available fruits and roots; (2) addition of fish with the use of fire, and slow addition of meat as a permanent part of the diet, particularly after the invention of the bow and arrow; (3) dependence on cultivated cereals and plants; (4) dependence on meat and milk of domesticated animals; and (5) “unlimited subsistence” through the improvement of agricultural techniques, notably through harnessing the plow to domesticated animals. However, he found himself unable to relate each new technique satisfactorily to a social stage. His aim was perhaps for too precise a fit, and he was, after all, working with limited data. “Investigation has not been carried far enough in this direction to yield the necessary information,” he wrote, so that he had to fall back on “such other inventions or discoveries as will afford sufficient tests of progress to characterize the commencement of successive ethnical periods.” These were: fish subsistence and the knowledge of fire (marking the transition from the primeval period of lower savagery to that of middle savagery), the bow and arrow (initiating upper savagery), pottery (lower barbarism), domestication of animals and the use of irrigation in agriculture (middle barbarism), iron (upper barbarism), and the alphabet and writing (civilization).¹

Engels accepted Morgan’s criteria, but he clarified and emphasized the major distinction between the periods of so-called “savagery” and “barbarism,” each taken as a whole. The former, he wrote, was “the period in which man’s appropriation of products in their natural stage predominates,” and the latter was “the period during which man learns to breed domestic animals and to practice agriculture, and acquires methods of increasing

1 The accumulation of evidence indicates that fishing was in fact not that early in the history of man (see chapter by Washburn and Lancaster in Lee and DeVore, 1968: 294). Morgan discusses his stages and the criteria for them in Chapters 1 and 2 of *Ancient Society*. I have elsewhere discussed in some detail the problems which they involve (Morgan, 1963: I: xi-xv).

the supply of natural products by human activity.” This distinction is now commonly phrased by anthropologists as that between food gathering and food production. With civilization, Engels wrote, “man learns, a more advanced application of work to the products of nature.” It is “the period of industry proper and of art.” After elaborating on Morgan’s interpretation and adding material on early Germanic and Celtic society in his discussion on the emergence of classes, private property and the state, Engels stated: “civilization is, therefore ... the stage of development in society at which the division of labor, the exchange between individuals arising from it, and the commodity production which combines them both come to their full growth and revolutionize the whole of previous society” (233).

A rather simple but often overlooked confusion has plagued subsequent discussions of historical “stages.” There is a common failure to distinguish between the definition of stages as a necessary preliminary step to asking meaningful questions about a given period, institution or event, and stages seen as themselves the answers. “Stages” define major alternatives in the structure of productive relations; they afford a conceptual framework for the study of historical process. To place a society in a central or transitional position in relation to one or more stages is a necessary preliminary step to inquiry, not a straitjacket that limits it.²

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

THE SOLUTION of theoretical problems basic to the science of society does not, of course, follow smoothly from the accumulation of scholarly time and effort. Social science has always been vexed by the political implications of one or another theory, and evolutionary assumptions have always aroused subjective and ambivalent responses. Morgan himself was no radical, but neither was he among those who used inferences drawn from past history merely to justify the social institutions of his day. He did share the belief of 19th century liberal Americans that the United States had left the class system behind in Europe and was capable of rational and continued improvement, but he did

2 For discussions of the relation between technological innovations and the emergence of new economic relations that inaugurate new “stages” of historical development, see Childe, 1944, and Semenov, 1965. Semenov writes: “The major shortcoming of Morgan’s periodization lies in the fact that it was not a periodization of the history of society itself. The entrient of productive forces is certainly the basis for the development of society, but does not coincide with it. Even major turning points in the evolution of productive forces do not lead automatically or at once to a change in the relationships of production and, consequently, in all other social relationships. As for less significant changes, they may, by merely accumulating, lead to changes in social relationships, first in the economic and then in the ideological field. Therefore it is impossible to create a true periodization of the history of society if we take as the criterion for the onset of the new state in its evolution the appearance of some one change, even a major one, in the development of the productive forces.”

not see such progress as inevitable. He was concerned about the “property career” upon which society seemed bent, and the threat it represented. Property had become an unmanageable power, he stated, which could destroy society unless checked. The powerful passage in which he projected his view of the future as “a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes,” is quoted by Engels as the closure to *Origin*.

Engels sharpened the implications of the comparison Morgan drew between primitive communal and class society, using it as an argument for socialism. Therefore, both Morgan’s and Engels’ work have had checkered careers, and opinions about them have shifted as the political atmosphere has changed. Only in recent years has renewed critical review and debate on some problems of evolutionary theory been seriously engaged in by Soviet scholars (*Soviet Studies in History*, 1966). In western academic circles second-hand knowledge of (or assumptions about) Marxist ideas are legion, but Marx’s and Engels’ works are all too seldom read. The usual practice is to set up as Marxist theory the straw man of economic determinism and then to knock it down. When more inquisitive students read some of Marx’s and Engels’ works, they commonly end up distorting the ideas they have gleaned therefrom, as they search for modes of discourse acceptable for the publications which are the means of successful entry into the academic brotherhood. Morgan’s *Ancient Society* too is seldom read, and when mentioned in college classes is often distorted and rejected out-of-hand. Further confusions arise when well-meaning scholars employ the slightly more acceptable name of Morgan as a euphemism for Marx (or Engels), and the assumption grows that their thinking was identical.

After the Russian revolution lent support to Marx’s assumption of an impending socialist “stage” of history, a plethora of studies anxiously attempted to demonstrate that the institutions of class, private property, the monogamous family as the economic unit, and even the state itself could be found in all levels of human society, and that there was basically no predictable “order” to human history. In the United States such studies were carried out in the tradition of the “historical” school associated with the name of Franz Boas that emphasized the uniqueness of each people’s individual history. In England they were conducted under the rubric of “functionalism” that decried what was considered to be a hopeless attempt to trace institutional origins and turned to “synchronic” analyses of how the various institutions in any given society interrelated.

Battles among adherents of the “historical” and “functionalist” schools, and between them and the remaining champions of “evolutionism,” often waged hot and heavy. Among the majority of anthropologists, however, a scarcely formulated, pragmatic eclecticism prevailed. Rapidly accumulating material on primitive societies raised unending detailed problems that absorbed people’s interests and enabled them to avoid many broader theoretical questions and their troublesome implications. In the long run, the eclecticism was perhaps not such a serious drawback. The fact of the matter is that only through a narrow approach can “evolutionism,” “functionalism,” and “historicism” be placed in opposition. Functional concerns are essential to a fully conceived evolutionary

theory. The hypothesis of the basic relation between economic and other institutions is itself “functional.” “Evolutionary” theory assumes economic factors to be primary, but it certainly does not deny the continual internal adjustments that take place among the various parts of a social system. Further, “evolution” cannot be studied apart from specific histories, of which it is the theoretical or explanatory element. Historical events can be recounted, but they cannot be understood without recourse to a broader theory such as that supplied by “evolutionism.”

Criticisms of evolutionary theory have characteristically emphasized the infinite variability of specific lifeways found around the world, each the historical end product of unique events and influences. Yet the accumulation of data has not merely documented diversity. Archaeological researches have yielded an undeniable picture of mankind’s development from “savage” hunters to “barbarian” agriculturalists and finally to the “civilizations” of the Ancient East, as made explicit by the British scholar V. Gordon Childe.³ Meanwhile, ethnographic data have made it increasingly clear that fundamental distinctions among societies at different productive levels underlie the variations among individual cultures. Leslie White (1945, 1947) long the foremost voice of the “evolutionist” minority, argued this point in a series of debates with Robert Lowie (1946), his most prolific antagonist.⁴

At the same time as archaeological and ethnological materials were contributing to an evolutionary view of world history, the push of world events was forcing a changed intellectual climate. In the West, the floundering of social science in the face of pressing social issues and the growing disenchantment with positivist or purely pragmatic inquiry has caused a renewed interest in theory in general, and in Marxist theory in particular. In the socialist world, the tremendous theoretical and practical problems posed by the transition from socialism to communism, which had often been seen as too automatic a process

3 Childe (1935, 1969) summarizes the results of archaeological research with regard to the prehistory of Europe and the Middle East, and traces the initial development of urban civilization in the latter area in the late fifth millennium B.C., as well as the much later developments in the Mediterranean world that are discussed by Morgan and Engels. Childe retains the terms “savagery” and “barbarism” that have fallen out of use on the whole, due to their pejorative connotations. Contemporary terminologies generally refer instead to major productive techniques, such as “food gathering” (“savagery”) and “food producing” (“barbarism”). Food gatherers are usually referred to as “hunters and gatherers” (although they also fish). Food producers are divided into an initial “horticultural” phase, also called “hoe agriculture,” “slash and burn agriculture,” or “swidden agriculture,” and a more developed agricultural phase involving the use of the plow and/or systematic fertilization and/or irrigation. For a recent discussion of archaeological levels, see Robert J. Braidwood, “Levels in Prehistory: A Model for the Consideration of the Evidence,” in Tax, 1960.

4 For Robert Lowie’s discussion of Morgan, see *The History of Ethnological Theory*, 1939. Leslie A. White’s major works are *The Science of Culture*, 1949 and *The Evolution of Culture*, 1959

of planned change, has shown how serious an obstacle a doctrinaire approach to Marxist theory can be, and how pressing is the need for its growth and expansion. Meanwhile, the former “primitive peoples” studied by anthropologists are emerging as new nations that are seeking social and economic forms in keeping with both industrial technology and their own traditions. This development renders it ridiculous to treat such societies as isolated self-contained enclaves that can be described without a theory of economic effects on social and political structures.

All of this has contributed to the growth of an active and influential “neo-evolutionary” wing of American anthropology, and a wide acceptance of the fact that broad evolutionary trends have given form to mankind’s history.⁵ The result, however, has not been entirely salutary. “Evolution” has been and continues to be many things to many people. The conscious application of dialectics to a materialistic view of history is a far cry from the strong current of economic determinism characteristic of contemporary evolutionism in the United States.⁶ Nor have issues been clarified by the popular but theoretically flabby formula of “multilinear” evolution, a supposed correction to the straw man of “unilinear evolution” ascribed to Morgan (and by implication Marx and Engels). However, the stage has at least been set for the redefinition and reexamination of issues. Some scholars have given serious consideration to arguments against Marxist hypotheses, and, rather than simply reasserting earlier arguments, they have contributed new data and insights to the interpretation of history.

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PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM

MAJOR SUBJECTS for debate raised by the Boasian school of anthropology have pertained to the nature and existence of a primitive collective. Morgan had referred to the “liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes” and had written that the “passion” for the possession of property did not exist in the early stages of society. In defining the relations of production that obtained in such societies, Engels wrote that they were “essentially collective,” and that “consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities” (233). The sole division of labor was by sex, and society was not as yet divided into classes of exploiters and exploited. Lands were held in common and tools and utensils were owned directly by those who used them. Political organization, continued Engels, did not exist apart from the social group. By comparison with the political leader who poses “as something outside and above” the society, the gentile chief “stands in the midst of society” (230). The par-

5 General statements of contemporary evolutionary theory from somewhat different points of view, in addition to the works of Childe and White already cited, are those of Steward, 1955, and Sahlins and Service, 1960.

6 This view has been put forth most explicitly by Harris, 1968a. Harris writes (1968b: 519) that “Hegel’s notion of dialectics” was a “crippling heritage” from which “Marxism has never recovered.”

participation of all adults in public affairs was taken for granted; to ask an American Indian whether it was his “right” or his “duty” to take on social responsibilities would seem as absurd, Engels wrote, as to question “whether it was a right or a duty to sleep, eat, or hunt” (217).

As supposedly definitive proof that a stage of primitive communism could not in fact be demonstrated, the work of Frank G. Speck posited that the Montagnais Indians, hunters of the Labrador Peninsula, divided their lands into tracts or “hunting grounds,” which Speck stated were individually owned and were passed down from father to son. Early records for the area, Speck argued, (1926; and Eiseley, 1939) indicate that this had been the case prior to the penetration of Europeans into the New World, and a review of literature on other hunting peoples suggested to him that similar forms of land ownership were worldwide and ancient. This supposed finding became a standard reference to be found in anthropological texts and journals. Speck and Eiseley wrote that such discoveries “must inevitably be troubling to those who, like Morgan, and many present-day Russians, would see the culture of the lower hunters as representing a stage prior to the development of the institution of individualized property” (1942: 238).

However, the assumption that privately held hunting tracts were aboriginal was questioned by the Canadian anthropologist Diamond Jenness (1935: 4-41; 1937:44) on the basis of his work among the Ojibwa and the Sekani Indians, and by Julian Steward (1941: 501), who found evidence of their late development among the Carrier. Detailed archival and field research by the present author (Leacock, 1954) among the same Indians with whom Speck had worked showed that the hunting-ground system had indeed developed as a result of the fur trade, and further, that it did not involve true land ownership. One could not trap near another’s line, but anyone could hunt game animals, could fish, or could gather wood, berries or birchbark on another’s grounds as long as these products of the land were for use, and not for sale. A man in need of food when in another’s trapping area could even kill beaver, a most important fur-bearing animal, but he could not kill one in order to sell the fur. An account by Father Le Jeune, a Jesuit missionary who wintered with a group of Montagnais during the year 1632-33, reveals the aboriginal practices of the Indians with regard to land. In the summer relatively large groups would come together at lake shores and river mouths, and each fall they would break up into small family bands which would ascend the rivers into the interior and scatter widely over the countryside so as not to starve each other by overcrowding any one area. However, they would remain sufficiently in touch to be able to turn to one another for help should it be necessary (Leacock, 1954: 14-15).⁷

Another argument against the existence of a primitive communal stage in human history arose from the fact that various rank and status differentiations are found in societies

7 The full argument and related issues are summarized by Julia Averkieva in “Problems of Property in Contemporary American Ethnography,” 1962; and by Harold Hicker-son in “Some Implications of the Theory of Particularity, or ‘Atomism,’ of Northern Algon-
kians,” 1967

loosely designated as “primitive.” In some cases there are divisions into social groupings the names of which were translated by early observers as “nobles,” “commoners,” and “slaves.” Two points need clarification here. First, a distinction must be made between social ranking of various sorts and a system of classes based on differential relations to the basic sources of subsistence and production; rank per se does not indicate the existence of classes. As Fried puts it, in “rank societies” marks of prestige are not “used to acquire food or productive resources.” They do not “convey any privileged claim to the strategic resources on which a society is based. Ranking can and does exist in the absence of stratification” (1967:110).⁸

Second, the term “primitive” has been applied very loosely. Many societies in West Africa, Mexico and the Andean area, and Polynesia that are often designated as “primitive” are far away indeed from hunting-gathering peoples and horticulturalists. Although it is difficult to define with certainty the precise extent to which there had emerged in these areas a sizeable class that was “non-free” in the sense of being alienated from traditional rights to land and to the products of their labor, yet it is clear that in many cases peoples were close to or beyond the threshold of class organization and political statehood. In pointing out the fact that Montezuma was not the emperor he had been called by the Spanish, Morgan overstated the case for Aztec egalitarianism (1876). He also grossly underestimated the complexity of Hawaiian society. Since the Hawaiians lacked pottery, they fell into his stage of “savagery” although wooden bowls and coconut shells served very well in this highly productive agricultural economy. Finally, Morgan dismissed African society as “in an ethnical chaos of savagery and barbarism” in an inexcusably offhand manner, and accorded Africa no further attention. Engels drew on original sources in his chapters on the German state, and was familiar with material on classical Mediterranean and Asian societies, but with few exceptions (Australia was one) he was not familiar with primary sources on non-Eurasian peoples and did not question Morgan’s evaluation of them. Thus any implication that Engels’ characterization of primitive communism should apply to all non-Eurasian peoples is erroneous; it simply does not. In fact, the attempt to reconstruct the complex socio-economic and political forms that obtained in parts of West Africa, Polynesia, Mexico, and the Andes prior to European expansion has absorbed the attention of quite a few scholars who have been influenced by Marxist theory.⁹

8 This point is elaborated upon and documented in detail by Fried, 1967. See also: Service, 1962, although I differ with Service on the relative roles of men and women in hunting society (Leacock, 1969); Sahlins, “Political Power and the Economy in Primitive Society,” in Dole and Carneiro, 1960; and Leacock, 1958a.

9 For recent books synthesizing some of the materials on the areas, see: Adams, 1966; Davidson, 1959; Sahlins, 1958; Service, 1963; and Wolf, 1959. For articles, see Klein, 1969 and Murra, 1967. Murra’s unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1956, was on The Economic Organization of the Inca State. In another unpublished doctoral dissertation, Armstrong, 1950, examines the relations between the economy and political organization in five African societies.

A third challenge to the understanding that a pre-class stage in human history was characterized by an unquestioned cooperativeness was posed by the “culture and personality” school of anthropology associated with the names of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. (A third pioneer in this area, Edward Sapir, was less prolific a writer and not popularly known). The establishment, during the 1920s and 1930s, of a subfield within anthropology devoted to interpreting the relation between the individual and his culture was in keeping with general intellectual developments. Emile Durkheim had emphasized the influence of the group on the shaping of individual goals; and the founders of social psychology, Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead, had pinpointed as an important area for study the socialization process whereby growing infants develop a sense of identity and purpose in interaction with their social milieu. Soon Sigmund Freud’s insight into the role of symbolism in human action and into the sources of irrationality in man’s interpretation of reality afforded a clue to processes whereby people, in trying to “make sense” out of their experiences, project rationales or explanations that may become incorporated into institutionalized ideologies. However, these various endeavors developed implicitly, if not explicitly, not as extensions of Marxist materialism, but as alternatives. Therefore, the direction of their elaboration was toward a psychobiological determination of social forms, or a closed-circle functionalist type of description that stressed the intermeshing of individual behavior and social forms and avoided problems having to do with fundamental determinates and sources of change.

Ruth Benedict was interested in the way institutional forms and individually held goals mesh in different configurations or “patterns” from one culture to another. In her influential book, *Patterns of Culture*, she stressed the variability of man’s cultures and the fact that each unique way of life had to be understood in its own terms, free from the biases of a Western viewpoint. However, she emphasized the psychological patterning of motivations to the exclusion of the socio-economic structure of interaction, and she stressed and exaggerated the unique and often the bizarre, thereby underplaying cross-cultural commonalities and overriding the theory that the relations obtaining among a people as they produced and distributed the means of their livelihood would ramify through all other aspects of their life. The assumption that the forces and relations of production would be of no greater relevance to culture patterns than other social dimensions was shared to a greater or lesser extent by other students of the “ethos” or “value-attitude system” of various cultures, and of the “basic or social personality” or “national character” supposedly common to all members of a culture.¹⁰

10 For a full discussion of Benedict, and the “culture and personality” school generally, from a materialistic (albeit anti-dialectical) viewpoint, see Harris, 1968a: Chapters 15-17. Kardiner (1939, 1945), a Freudian analyst who worked with Linton and other anthropologists, sought commonalities in relations between “primary institutions” or “maintenance systems” and aspects of personality and ideology. The implications of this work have been carried further and subjected to statistical analysis by

The extreme relativism which characterized the culture and personality school is exemplified by the book, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*, a collection of papers on different peoples edited by Margaret Mead (1937). One might expect from the title an exploration of ways in which cooperative and competitive themes can be interwoven in hunting-gathering and horticultural societies where the underlying structure necessitates a fundamental cooperation, and how these begin to change when improvements in agricultural techniques lay the basis for economic inequalities. Instead, as the organizer of the book, Mead assumed a random distribution of cooperation or competition throughout early society, which is precisely what most (not all) of the authors found, working as they did with limited materials, limited theoretical orientations, and societies long adapted to the effects of European expansion.

One chapter in particular, that by Jeanette Mirsky on the Eskimo of Greenland, ties in with a line of argument parallel to that of Frank Speck on individually owned land among the Northeast Algonkians. The Eskimo come through as a highly competitive people, a picture thoroughly demolished in a critical response by Hughes (1958). Another chapter in Mead's book, "The Ojibwa" by Ruth Landes presents a similarly competitive picture of these Algonkian peoples who live in the area north of the Great Lakes. The influence of fur-trapping and trading upon life in the north woods has already been mentioned, but there are additional issues involved in the interpretations of Mirsky, Landes, and others who share the same views. Too often, the physical separation of hunting people who may scatter widely over an area in certain seasons is equated with "separatism" or "social atomism," without recognition of the mutual interdependence that is nonetheless maintained. Furthermore, and particularly in the case of the Eskimo, there is an implied equation of "individualism" with "competition" and little awareness of the way in which a fully cooperative society can enable the expression of individuality. Something of a Freudian assumption is commonly made, that man innately possesses some essential measure of aggression that must be expressed through competition, and that cooperativeness demands a bland, muted type of personality (as is often the case, apparently, in religious communities that adhere to a communal ethic in conflict with the competitive mores of the surrounding society). However, from my own field work experience among the Naskapi hunters of Labrador, it was beautiful to see the latitude allowed for personal idiosyncracies.¹¹

Whiting, 1953, and his co-workers. However, these scholars make no clear distinction between the more determinate aspects of socio-economic structure and its other dimensions; essentially they do not break out of a "psychological reductionist" framework whereby child-training practices to do with weaning, toilet training and the like become the major determinants of institutional forms through their effects on adult personality. For further discussion of limitations in "culture and personality" theory see Leacock, 1971: Introduction.

11 More than I myself expected, I realized, when distributing the molasses I had been asked to buy for everyone in camp to make some beer. It was illegal to sell it to an Indian, but one of the men in the band was mildly alcoholic and often managed to get

The fact that communism preceded the emergence of classes in human history should not be taken to mean, in some Rousseauesque fashion, that man has lost a utopia. The limited technology available to hunter-gatherers of “upper savagery” (the category which would include all mankind after *Homo sapiens* emerged in the late Pleistocene), and to the horticulturalists of “lower barbarism” meant that life was rigorous and relatively restricted. Yet the glimpses into the quality of interpersonal relations that we are afforded from accounts of North American Indians and peoples in the rest of the world before they had experienced the alienation from the produce of their labor, and the divisiveness of being placed in fundamental competition with their fellow men (whether as exploiters, exploited, or “hangers-on,”) do indeed make us somewhat envious. Behind the enormous variety of environmental adaptations and cultural embroideries which can be observed among these peoples, there did seem to be an underlying sense of self-respect and an ability to draw great satisfaction from work and personal relations. Perhaps most bitter to industrial man is the divisiveness which permeates relationships with those most dear, and the enmity between husbands and wives, parents and children. It is to the subject of the family in the primitive collective by comparison with that of class-based industrial society that we turn next.

KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE IN PRIMITIVE SOCIETY

THE GROUPING of fellow tribesmen into kin of various categories, some of whom one can marry and some of whom one cannot, is central to the social organization of most

some and have his private drunk on home brew. At these times he would immobilize the camp, for he had to be watched constantly to keep him from hurting himself, or from such things as bumping into a tent and accidentally setting it afire against the stove. He was such a nuisance when drunk that I assumed there would be tacit agreement that he should not have any of the molasses. But no, “Where’s Charlie’s?” was asked although he was not there at the time. Charlie was not even an old-timer in the band, but had come from western Labrador. For further discussion of these points in relation to Labrador hunters, see Leacock, 1958 and 1964. For an excellent autobiographical account of an Eskimo woman who left her traditional Eskimo culture to become involved in our own, see Washburne, 1959. For full accounts of life among hunting peoples of Africa, see Thomas, 1959, and Turnbull, 1968. For a further illustration of the “atomistic” view of Canadian hunters, see Barnouw, 1961. The alternative view is presented by Hickerson, 1962, as well as in review articles by Averkieva, 1962, and Hickerson, 1967. The assumption that cooperativeness automatically entails a muting of individuality is seemingly illustrated by the much studied Pueblo Indians of the American Southwest, where someone who is too ambitious or becomes too successful is liable to be accused of witchcraft. Assumptions such as this I know history. The Pueblo Indians have fought for over four centuries to maintain their autonomy and their cooperative society; this has not been without its toll. Moreover, in the 16th century, the Spanish introduced the practice of killing rebellious Indians as witches. For an overview of changing Indian society, see Leacock and Lurie, 1971: Introduction.

primitive peoples. Morgan assumed that the terms used for designating these different categories of kin represented possible biological relationships that derived from different forms of marriage. For instance, he argued that the not uncommon use of one term for one's father, his brothers and certain male cousins stemmed from a time when any of the men called father could have cohabited with one's mother (or any of her sisters and certain female cousins designated by a "mother" term). On the basis of such reasoning, and after examining some 80 systems of kin terminology from around the world, Morgan inferred that four successive forms of the family had followed an original promiscuity.

The first form of the family postulated by Morgan was the "consanguine family," or the marriage of brothers, sisters and cousins that resulted from the prohibition of intercourse between fathers and daughters, and between mothers and sons. As evidence of this form, Morgan cited the Hawaiian system of kin nomenclature, whereby all the children of brothers and sisters call one another brother and sister. The second form, the "punaluan family," followed from the prohibition of intercourse between siblings. The third, the "pairing family," resulted from the extension of the incest group to include collateral brothers and sisters, and finally, with civilization, monogamy arose.

The problem with Morgan's formulation is not so much his sequence of progressive limitations in marriageable partners (although generational difference is seldom an issue among contemporary hunter-gatherers), as the assumptions he makes about both the function of kinship terminologies and the nature of incest taboos. Discussions about primeval forms of society will doubtless remain in large part conjectural, although the study of primatology is suggestive in revealing a wide variety of mating patterns among those closest relatives of man who were in the line that did not become human; and archaeology is beginning to yield clues to the nature of man's early societies, albeit highly scattered and indirect. It is quite another question, however, to assume that kinship terminologies of contemporary peoples afford direct evidence of formerly existing biological relations. To take Morgan's case of Hawaii, his reference to occasional brother-sister marriage, in conjunction with the grouping of siblings with cousins of several degrees, reveals nothing about early institutions. Polynesia, as has been pointed out, does not represent a "savage" level, but is comprised of complex "barbarian" societies. Brother-sister marriages occur only among the highest ranks in Hawaii, and their purpose is to preserve the purity of the royal line as did brother-sister marriages among the Pharaohs of Egypt. In the rest of Polynesia such marriages were prohibited, although Linton cites cousin marriage to be "favored as a means of keeping property in the family"-an indication of the advanced state of Polynesian economy (1926: 152).

Morgan attributed the limitation of the marriage group to the more or less instinctive restriction of inbreeding, which he saw as operating, according to the principle of natural selection, to the advantage of the tribes practicing it. Engels realized that incest was an "invention," and that primitive conceptions of incest are "totally different from ours and frequently in direct contradiction to them." However, he did not follow through on the implications of this point and explore possible factors which might explain such dif-

ferences, but referred instead to an “obscure impulse” or “urge” against inbreeding that “asserts” itself “instinctively” (108, 109, 111). The fact is that the widespread custom of “exogamy,” or marrying out of one’s kin group, often resulted in a specialized form of inbreeding. When kin is counted on one side only, certain cousins are outside one’s kin group and are not only eligible as marriage partners, but are often preferred. To marry one’s “crosscousin,” the child of one’s father’s sister or of one’s mother’s brother, both cements already close ties and binds a person to another kin group. The cementing of such ties may be perceived as more important than avoidance of incest per se. When Margaret Mead asked her Arapesh informants why they disapproved of wsexual relations with a sister, she received the reply: “What is the matter with you? Sleep with your sister? But don’t you want a brother-in-law? With whom will you garden, with whom will you hunt, with whom will you visit” (1937:34)?

Rather than categorizing people one formerly might have marfled, kinship systems reveal presently or but recently past social and Konomic relationships. Engels recognized this to some extent when he stated that “The names of father, child, brother, sister are no mere complimentary forms of address; they involve quite definite anti very serious mutual obligations which make up an essential Part of the social constitution of the peoples in question” (95). However, his acceptance of Morgan’s hypothesis on the limitation of inbreeding as the dynamic factor behind successive family forms led him to make some important mis-statements. “Natural selection,” he wrote, “with its progressive exclusions from the marriage community, had accomplished its task; ... Unless new, social forces came into play, there was no reason why a new form of family should arise from the single pair” (117; italics are his). In the Preface to the First Edition of *Origin*, he explicitly assumes an independent development of the family:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence ... on the other side, the propagation of the species. The social organization under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production; by the stage of development of labor on the one hand and of the family on the other (71).

The fact is, of course, that social forces were never new to mankind, as Engels points out in “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition From Ape to Man” when he develops the theme “that labor created man himself” (251). Moreover, the discovery of the enormously long period during which man was evolving, which the Australopithecine discoveries in South Africa have now stretched from a million years to twice that long (some estimates run even longer), has radically shifted perspectives on the relevance of nearcontemporary peoples living at a simple technological level to an understanding of primeval man. The some two million years during which a lively, curious, sociable, chattering primate, endowed with an opposable thumb and stereoscopic vision, slowly learned to

manipulate his environment and himself, and developed languages and cultural traditions as his own body developed, raise questions about social and sexual relationships that cannot be answered by simple reference to near-contemporary kinship terminologies. On the basis of hunting-gathering societies, we can draw conclusions about the character of fundamental relationships at a technological level which has its historical roots in the cultures of the Upper Paleolithic a few tens of thousands of years ago when *Homo sapiens* emerged. However, our evidence from physical anthropology, archaeology and primatology about the earlier societies of pre-*Homo sapiens* man is slim and indirect. We can be certain that he must have lived in relatively small communal groups, but around what specific nexus of relations these groups were organized, how they articulated with other groups or what the range of variability was both over time and in different areas remain questions for further debate.¹²

THE EMERGENCE OF MONOGAMY AND THE SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN

THE PAGES in which Engels discusses early marriage forms are the most difficult in Origin, partly because kinship terminologies and practices are complicated and unfamiliar to the Western reader, and partly because confusions about biological and social forces obscure the significant parts of his discussion. However, Engels' fundamental theme is clear. He writes: "We ... have three principal forms of marriage which correspond broadly to the three principal stages of human development: for the period of savagery, group marriage; for barbarism, pairing marriage; for civilization, monogamy. . . . " Monogamy arises from a transitional stage of polygyny, "when men have female slaves at their command;" coupled with male supremacy, it is "supplemented by adultery and prostitution," and is from the beginning monogamy for the women only (138). Marriage was frankly polygynous throughout classical times, and covertly so thereafter.

The significant characteristic of monogamous marriage was its transformation of the nuclear family into the basic economic unit of society, within which a woman and her children became dependent upon an individual man. Arising in conjunction with exploitative class relations, this transformation resulted in the oppression of women that has persisted to the present day. As corollary to, or symptomatic of this transformation, the reckoning of descent was changed from "mother right" (matrilineality) to "father right."

In the field of anthropology, it is the last proposition, that matrilineality was prior to patrilineality in the history of mankind, which has received most attention. The rest of Engels' discussion has been virtually ignored, and it is unfortunate testimony to the status of women both within and without the field that detailed studies of women's status and role in primitive societies are so rare. Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence at hand to

12 However, Soviet anthropologists take a more optimistic view of how justifiably one can come to conclusions about the transition from the society of early hominids to that of *Homo sapiens* on the basis of survivals into recent times of presumably ancient customs (see Semenov, 1964, and Averkieva, 1964).

support in its broad outlines Engels' argument that the position of women relative to men deteriorated with the advent of class society, as well as data to fill in many particulars of his thesis. Above all, however, there is crying need for further analysis of existing materials and for the collection of new data.

Let us first examine the point that marriage is essentially different in hunting-gathering ("savage") and horticultural ("barbarian") societies on the one hand, and class society ("civilization") on the other, and that there is a further distinction between the freer "group marriage" of hunter-gatherers and its successor, "pairing marriage." The term "group marriage" unfortunately conjures up an unrealistic image of mass weddings that are nowhere to be found. In fact, however, Engels' actual analysis of "group marriage" as it obtained in Australia concurs with what has come to be called "loose monogamy" in anthropological writings. "All that the superficial observer sees in group marriage," Engels pointed out, "is a loose form of monogamous marriage, here and there polygyny, and occasional infidelities." Through the "mass marriage of an entire section of men ... with an equally widely distributed section of women ... the Australian aborigine, wandering hundreds of miles from his home ... often finds in every camp and every tribe women who give themselves to him without resistance and without resentment" (109). On a day-to-day basis, marriage takes the form of a "a loose pairing" among partners whose marriageability is defined at birth by their membership in one or another so-called "marriage class."

The Australian "marriage classes" are today conceived to be part of a system whereby various categories of kin are named so that a person can readily define his relationships within any group with whom he comes into contact.¹³ The system is far more elaborate than anything found among other hunter-gatherers, but nonetheless, all of them share common features of family life. Divorce is typically easy and at the desire of either partner, although it is not particularly common. Death more frequently seems to break up the marriage relationship; close and warm pairing relationships are the rule. These are not based, however, on any assumption of sexual exclusiveness for either partner among most hunter-gatherers about whom we have information. Perhaps it is because they were first contacted by whalers instead of missionaries that we have so much data on this point for the Eskimo. According to custom, it is hospitable for an unattached Eskimo woman, or else the host's wife, to sleep with a visitor. The practice has at times been referred to as evidence of the low status of women where it obtains an ethnocentric reading which presumes that a woman does not (since she should not) enjoy sex play with any but her "real" husband and which refuses to recognize that variety in sex relations is entertaining to women (where not circumscribed by all manner of taboos) as well as to men (a moralistic assumption from which Engels himself was not wholly free).

"Pairing marriage" is more hedged around with restrictions. Engels wrote: "the deci-

13 A description of kinship among the Arunta of Australia can be found in Service, 1963. These systems become unusually elaborate in parts of Australia, although somewhat comparable elaborations are to be found in nearby Melanesian tribes.

sive considerations are the new ties of kinship which are to give the young pair a stronger position in the gens and tribe” (142). Parents take a hand in the choice of marriage partners, and marriages are cemented through an exchange of goods-cattle, foods, or luxury items-between the relatives of the bride and those of the groom. The kin of the young partners now have a vested interest in the permanence of the marriage. Engels wrote, that although “still terminable at the desire of either partner ... among many tribes ... public opinion has gradually developed against such separations. When differences arise between husband and wife, the gens relatives of both partners act as mediators, and only if these efforts prove fruitless does a separation take place” (112).

There is no lack of data on what Morgan called the “pairing family.” It is intimately related to the clan organization of agricultural peoples, whereby communal relations in the production and distribution of goods are maintained in what have become relatively large and stable groups. Hunting-gathering bands of some 25 to 40 or so people can operate almost anarchistically, but with the development of agriculture more complex institutions are needed for ordering interpersonal relationships in villages of several hundred and more. Virtually everyone still stands in the same direct relation to production; at most a healer or priest-chief may receive gifts enough to release him or her from some agricultural and other labors. Therefore, economic, political, and social relations remain united; ties of kinship formalized as “gentes” or the term more commonly used today, “clans,” form the framework of community life. With clan organization, kin are counted on one side only—you belong either to your mother’s or your father’s clan, not to both, and you marry “out” (clans are normally “exogamous”). The two practices, unilineality and exogamy, enable discrete groups to last over generations (which is difficult with “bilineality” and overlapping lines of kinship), while at the same time the groups become linked through a network of marriage ties.¹⁴

The nuclear family of parents and children was embedded in the clan and village structures through a network of reciprocal relations.¹⁵ Parties of relatives worked together

14 . The social basis for incest taboos and exogamous marriage are discussed in White, 1949: Chapter 11; Slater, 1959; Aberle et al., 1963; and in Washburn and Lancaster, “The Evolution of Hunting,” in Lee and DeVore, 1968: especially 302. The ties of kinship and exogamous marriage were already practices in hunting-gathering societies, although they were more formally defined among the settled gatherers and fishermen than among nomadic hunters. This raises the question whether they were generally more well defined in early human society and lost under the harsh conditions endured by the Indians and Eskimo of the north and other hunters pushed into marginal areas. In any case, with agricultural society, they become highly defined and elaborated upon with “endless variations from group to group. The Soviet anthropologist, Julia Averkieva, has suggested to me that in her view clan organization was primeval, and that its elaborate definition occurred when it was already beginning to decay. For further discussion of hunting-band organization, see Leacock, 1969.

15 These have seldom been described better than by one of the founders of the “functionalist” school of anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, in his writings on the Tro-

in the fields and on the hunt, and exchanged foodstuffs and manufactured goods on the many occasions that called for festivity, such as at births, baptisms, puberty rites, marriages, deaths, and seasonal and religious ceremonies. The acceptance by the clan and village community, as formally represented by its respected elders, of the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of any member, was so totally taken for granted that it went unstated. On a day-to-day basis, however, it was the immediate lineage of grandparent, parent, and children, with spouses, that functioned as a working unit.

The significant point for women's status is that the household was communal and the division of labor between the sexes reciprocal; the economy did not involve the dependence of the wife and children on the husband. All major food supplies, large game and produce from the fields, were shared among a group of families. These families lived together in large dwellings among most village agriculturalists, and in hunting-gathering societies either shared large tepees or other such shelters in adverse climates, or might simply group together in separate wickiups or lean-tos in tropical, or desert areas. The children in a real sense belonged to the group 'as a whole; an orphaned child suffered a personal loss, but was never without a family. Women did not have to put up with personal injuries from men in outbursts of violent anger for fear of economic privation for themselves or their children. By comparison with more "advanced" societies where wife-beating became accepted, even to the point of death, a mistreated wife could call on her relatives for redress or leave if it was not forthcoming. Nor can "household management" be construed as it would be today. Whether a "public" industry or not, "managing the household" as the "task entrusted to the women" might be viewed dubiously as hardly very satisfactory. However, in primitive communal society, the distinction did not exist between a public world of men's work and a private world of women's household service. The large collective household was the community, and within it both sexes worked to produce the goods necessary for livelihood. Goods were as yet directly produced and consumed; they had not become transformed into "commodities" for exchange, the transformation upon which the exploitation of man by man, and the special oppression of women, was built.

In fact, women usually furnished a large share-often the major share-of the food. Many hunter-gatherers depended on the vegetable foods gathered by women as the staples to be augmented by meat (the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert are a case in point), and in horticultural societies women, as the former gatherers of vegetable foods and in all likelihood, therefore, responsible for the domestication of crops, generally did most of the farming. Since in primitive communal society decisions were made by those who would be carrying them out, the participation of women in a major share of socially necessary labor did not reduce them to virtual slavery, as is the case in class society, but accorded them decision-making powers commensurate with their contribution.

There has been little understanding of this point in anthropological literature. Instead, the fact that men typically made decisions about hunting and warfare in primitive soci- briand Islanders of Melanesia. Try, for example, his very readable *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*, 1926

ety is used to support the argument that they were the “rulers” in the Western sense. Men did indeed acquire power under the conditions of colonial rule within which the lifeways of hitherto primitive peoples have been recorded. Nonetheless, the literature again and again reveals the autonomy of women and their role in decision-making; albeit such data are as often as not sloughed off with supposedly humorous innuendos about “henpecked husbands” or the like, rather than treated seriously as illustrative of social structure and dynamics.

Unfortunately, the debate over women’s status in primitive society has largely ignored the actual role of women in primitive society in favor of an almost exclusive focus on descent systems. The growing body of literature on the world’s cultures in the latter 19th century showed the clans of horticultural peoples to be commonly matrilineal, and that women often participated formally in the making of “political” decisions. Morgan had described the power the elder women among the Iroquois held in the nomination and possible deposition of the sachems, and the importance of “queen mothers” in Africa had been described. There, a woman and her brother (or son or nephew) often shared chiefly or royal responsibilities somewhat analogous to those of a Department of the Interior and Department of State respectively. And the magnificent army of perhaps 5,000 volunteer women soldiers of Dahomey were the legendary Amazons incarnate. All of this caught the imagination of theoreticians in so male-dominated and property-conscious a culture as was Victorian society,¹⁶ and scholars spoke of patriarchal society as historically preceded by the “matriarchy,” where rule by women was based on the indisputability of legitimacy reckoned in the female line.

It soon became clear that matriarchy, in the sense of power held by women over men comparable to that later held by men over women, had never existed. However, questions about the significance that matrilineal descent held for the status of women in primitive society remained. It is impossible to review here the twists and turns of subsequent argument over the universal priority of matrilineal descent. Suffice it to say that it is clear that matrilineal systems give way to patrilineal systems with the development of exploitative class relations. In many cases a patrilineal (or patrilocal) system can be shown to have been matrilineal (or matrilocal), but in other cases ethnohistorical data sufficient for definitive proof are lacking. Hence statistical studies of descent and its correlates have yielded conflicting interpretations.¹⁷

16 Although one cannot help but note that the very age was named after a woman. This fact points to the priority of class considerations over sex in the socialization of women when it came to royalty. Princesses were, first of all, potential rulers. Thus we have the anomaly that in the history of Europe the only public area in which individual women were in every way the equal of men, both to the general view and in their own behavior and abilities, was that associated most deeply with stereotypes of masculinity—the area of leadership, power, and decision-making.

17 An early study by Hobhouse et al. (1965) found the matrilineal-matrilocal principle to be more common among “lower hunters” than the patrilineal-patrilocal principle. A later study of Murdock’s finds that “simpler cultures tend to be matrilineal, more advanced ones patrilineal,” although “the patrilineate coexists too frequently with the absence of traits ...(of more complex

A standard contemporary formulation, at least in the United States, is that horticultural societies were generally structured around matrilineally related groups since women were responsible for the major share of the farming, but that hunting societies were male-centered in their structure due to the importance of the men as hunters. The fact that the produce gathered by the women in many such societies was as important a source of food, or more so, than the produce of the hunt, led Service, in a recent formulation of this position (1966: 37-38) to point out that hunting required a close collaboration that is not important in most gathering activities. To Service, it was the need for the "delicate coordination of several people" that led to the practice whereby closely related men stayed together as the core of a hunting band while women married into other bands. The case is, however, that some hunter-gatherers are matrilineal, and others have been so in the recent past. My own field work among the Naskapi hunters of the Labrador Peninsula showed that patrilineal-patrilocal ties were strengthened at the expense of matrilineal-matrilocal ties after European contact, under the influence of missionaries, government agents, and especially the fur trade (Leacock, 1955, 1969). Despite the arduousness of hunting in the northern woods and tundra, there was no suggestion whatever that men had to grow up together to work well as a unit. Instead it was the norm for men in the past to marry away from the band of their youth.

In a recent study Martin also questions the "patrilocal band" as the primordial type of social organization. On the basis of reviewing descent and residence patterns, interband relations, and the recent histories of 33 predominantly matrilocal South American hunting-gathering peoples, she points out that there is greater cohesiveness with matrilocal rather than patrilocal organization. With matrilocal residence the men, who are responsible for defense and hence offense, are dispersed among related bands rather than forming localized clusters (1969: 256-57).

Works that deal directly with the role of women in primitive society are few and far between, and much of what has been done pertains to personality rather than socio-culture) and the matrilineate with their presence, to be consistent with the theory of universal matrilineal priority" (1937: 467). In a later work, Murdock writes: "While matrilineal societies appear, on the average, to be somewhat more archaic in culture than patrilineal societies the difference is relatively slight, the overlap is very great, and the disparity may well reflect principally the preponderant influence exerted throughout the world in recent centuries by the bilateral and patrilineal peoples of the Eurasiatic continent," (1949: 186). Using Murdock's figures, but without reference to Murdock's early study that involved a relatively sophisticated statistical analysis, Aberle comments on the greater patrilineality among hunter-gatherers than matrilineality, although bilaterality far exceeds them both (Schneider and Gough, 1961). Two distinctions between Murdock's figures and those of Hobhouse et al. must be noted. First, one of Murdock's criteria for selection of his sample was that each major rule of descent should be represented for each culture area, a factor he took into account in his own analysis, but which does not seem to have been considered by Aberle. The second consideration involves the passage of time. For the people with whom I am most familiar, the Naskapi, Hobhouse et al. use a 17th century Jesuit account that showed them to be matrilineal-matrilocal in orientation; Murdock uses 20th century accounts that describe them as bilateral and bilocal with a paternal emphasis.

nomie structure. Margaret Mead's early exposition of contrasting sex-role definitions in three primitive societies is a case in point (1950). Interestingly enough, Mead contradicts her own argument for the cultural definition of sex role by her later position which, in conformity with widely accepted Freudian thought, argues for a universal active-passive dichotomy differentiating male from female roles (1955). By contrast there is an early book by Mason, *Women's Share in Primitive Culture*, and the book, *The Mothers*, by Briffault, a surgeon, novelist, and amateur anthropologist. These draw together scattered ethnographic references to (1) women's role in decisionmaking and the administration of tribal affairs; (2) their importance as inventors of techniques for food production and the manufacture of baskets, leather goods, woven materials, etc.; and (3) their part in ritual and religious life. Impressive though the record of women's part in society appears, however, the data are lifted out of context and seem to be contradicted by the vast majority of extant ethnographic materials, for these seldom assess the impact of colonialism on the peoples described and generally focus on the activities and affairs of men. (This latter is not solely a problem of masculine bias, but also due to the greater ease of communicating with men who are far more commonly thrown into contact with Europeans and speak a European language.)

An unusually detailed study of women among a hunting-gathering people is afforded by Kaberry's work on the original inhabitants of Northwest Australia (1939). It is commonly stated that women's status is low among these people, as evidenced by their exclusion from the important ceremonies of the men and from participation in political affairs. Kaberry points out that the men in turn are kept out of the secret rituals held by the women; and that while warfare and the holding of formal meetings are the sole responsibility of the men, intragroup problems are handled by older women along with older men. Women are restricted as to whom they may marry; but so are men, and young people are free to have premarital affairs which either sex may initiate. In daily life, these Australian women emerge as autonomous participants in the affairs of their people, acting with assurance upon their rights and responsibilities, a view reinforced by a newly published study of Tiwi women by Jane Goodale (1971).

Similarly, biographical materials on Eskimo women contradict common assumptions about their subservient role, even in spite of its deterioration in recent times. The biography of Anauta (Washburne and Anauta, 1940), an Eskimo woman of Baffin Land who migrated to the United States with her children after the death of her husband, reveals her independence of action and strong sense of personal autonomy. Short biographies of Nunivak Island Eskimo women, one of them a shaman (a person who can communicate with the supernatural powers, usually for healing and/or divination), likewise indicate considerable freedom of choice and leeway for women to take the initiative in the running of their own lives (Lantis, 1960).

The position of women among the Naskapi hunting people of the Labrador Peninsula was stronger in the past than it is today. Seventeenth century Jesuit missionaries writing of their experiences state that "the women have great power here" and that "the choice

of plans, of undertakings, of journeys, of winterings, lies in nearly every instance in the hands of the housewife" (Thwaites, 1906: Vol. V, 181; Vol. LXVIII, 93). A Jesuit scolds a man for not being "the master," telling him "in France women do not rule their husbands" (Vol. V, 181). To make the women obey their husbands became one of the concerns of the missionaries, particularly in relation to the sexual freedom that obtained: "I told him that it was not honorable for a woman to love anyone else except her husband, and that, this evil being among them (women's sexual freedom) he himself was not sure that his son, who was there present, was his son." The Naskapi's reply is telling: "Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we love all the children of our tribe" (Vol. VI, 255).

Women are no longer shamans, as they could be in the past, nor do they commonly hunt, nor join the men in the sweat bath, nor hold their own formal councils in case of emergency (Vol. II, 77; Vol. VI, 191; Vol. VII, 61, 175; Vol. XIV, 183). However, traditions of individual autonomy, mutual support, and collective responsibility for the children still leave their mark on Naskapi life despite great changes. One of many incidents I observed must suffice to indicate what can lie behind the stereotyped ascription in monographic accounts of such people: the men hunt; the women gather berries and care for the children. For the greater part of one day a man sat patiently, lovingly crooning over his sickly and fretful infant of but a few weeks old. His wife was busy. Though worried for the baby's health, he appeared in no way inept or harassed by his responsibility, nor did he call on another woman around the camp for help. His unself-conscious assurance and patience set him quite apart from latter-day readers of Dr. Spock. This was his task while his wife tanned a caribou skin, a skilled and arduous job that demanded her complete attention. The men knew how to cook and tend the babies when called upon to do so, but did not really know how to tan leather.

There is a real need for studies that reconstruct from extant materials on primitive communal and transitional societies something of women's functioning before the development of the male dominance that accompanied European economic and colonial exploitation. For example, how were goods distributed in horticultural societies where garden produce still lay in the women's domain? How did older women function in the settling of disputes, a role often referred to but little documented? What were the paths of influence women held in relation to the men's sphere of war and the hunt? Conversely, what was the role of men in socializing young children? A recent analysis by Mintz (1971) of the entrepreneurial role played by Yoruba women traders exemplifies how published data can be used to begin answering such questions.

An interesting subject for reassessment is the mystique that surrounds the hunt and, in comparison, that surrounding childbirth. A common formulation of status among hunter-gatherers overlooks the latter and stresses the importance and excitement of the hunt. Albeit the primary staple foods may be the vegetable products supplied by the women, they afford no prestige, it is pointed out, so that while not precisely subservient women are still of lower status than men. However, women's power of child-bearing has been a

focus for awe and even fear as long ago as the Upper Paleolithic, judging from the fertility figurines that date from that period. This point is easy to overlook, for the ability to bear children has led in our society not to respect but to women's oppressed status. Similarly, the mystique surrounding menstruation is underestimated. Attitudes of mystery and danger for men are interpreted in terms of our cultural judgment as "uncleanliness." Indeed, the semantic twists on this subject would be amusing to analyze. Women are spoken of as "isolated" in "menstrual huts" so that the men will not be contaminated. Where men's houses exist, however, they are written about respectfully; here the exclusion of women betokens men's high status. Doubtless this congeries of attitudes was first held by missionaries and traders, and from them subject peoples learned appropriate attitudes to express to whites.

However, a recent study by Hogbin (1970) on the religion of a New Guinea people reveals another side to the picture. Intriguingly titled "The Island of Menstruating Men," the study describes a practice also found among other peoples in this part of the world whereby the men simulate the phenomenon of menstruation. Blood is drawn from the penis (or some other part of the body among other groups) and men go through the ritual cycle of menstruation, retreating from the ordinary round of daily affairs, observing various taboos, then reentering, cleansed and renewed.

In some ways it is the ultimate alienation in our society that the ability to give birth has been transformed into a liability. The reason is not simply that, since women bear children, they are more limited in their movements and activities. As the foregoing discussion indicates, this was not a handicap even under the limited technology of hunting-gathering life; it certainly has no relevance today. Nor did women's low status simply follow their declining importance in food production when men moved into agriculture; nor automatically follow the growth in importance of domestic animals, the province of the men, although herding did relate to lowered status for women. However, what was basic was that these transitions occurred in the context of developing exploitative relations whereby communal ownership was being undermined, the communal kin group broken up, and the individual family separated out as an isolated and vulnerable unit, economically responsible for the maintenance of its members and for the rearing of the new generation. The subjugation of the female sex was based on the transformation of their socially necessary labor into a private service through the separation of the family from the clan. It was in this context that women's domestic and other work came to be performed under conditions of virtual slavery.

The separation of the family from the clan and the institution of monogamous marriage were the social expressions of developing private property; so-called monogamy afforded the means through which property could be individually inherited. And private property for some meant no property for others, or the emerging of differing relations to production on the part of different social groups. The core of Engels' formulation lies in the intimate connection between the emergence of the family as an economic unit dominated by the male and this development of classes.

The distinction of rich and poor appears beside that of freemen and slaves-with the new division of labor, a new cleavage of society into classes. . . . The transition to full private property is gradually accomplished, parallel with the transition of the pairing marriage into monogamy. The single family is becoming the economic unit of society (223).

Engels outlines for early Greece the way in which the division of labor and development of commodity production enabled new wealth in the form of slaves and herds to be accumulated by single individuals, thereby leading to a conflict between the family and the gens. Since men owned the “instruments of labor” (having largely displaced women in the fields, it is important to note, following the decline of hunting as an important activity), conflict between family and gens took the form of a conflict between the opposing principles of father right and mother right. “As wealth increased it made the man’s position in the family more important than the woman’s, and ... created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favor of his children, the traditional order of inheritance” (119). Therefore, the formation of the family as the economic unit of society was affirmed by the over-throw of mother right, the “world historical defeat of the female sex” (120; italics Engels’).

Far more empirical documentation than Engels offers is needed to clarify the process of women’s subjugation, both in relation to the initial rise of class societies in the Old and New Worlds, and to the secondary diffusion of commodity production and class divisions that accompanied European expansion and colonial domination. Essentially Engels offers a paradigm, posing a sharp contrast between women’s status in primitive communal society and in classical Greece and Rome. He then touches on Medieval Europe and jumps to industrialization. The many changes within the great span of history covered and the variations from place to place need analysis and, even more important, so do the variations in women’s position in different classes: slave, free worker, peasant, serf, burgher, aristocrat.

Engels focuses on the emergence of the upper-class family as an instrument for the concentration of individual wealth. He does not clearly define the lower-class family as affording an important buttress for class society by making the individual acutely vulnerable to exploitation and control. The separation of the ordinary laborer from the communal security of the gens meant the worker was responsible as an individual not only for his own maintenance but also that of his wife and children. This to a large measure insured not only his labor, but also his docility; it rendered him as he is to this day-fearful of fighting against the extremities of exploitation as endangering not only himself but also his wife and his dependent children. With wonderful wit and satire, and warm sympathy, Engels deals with the conjugal relations produced by monogamy, but largely in relation to the bourgeois family. He writes of the proletarian wife who moves into public industry under conditions of great difficulty for herself and her children, but does not elaborate on

the enormous ambivalence the individual family creates in the working-class man and his wife as a result of their isolation.

The dehumanization of conjugal relationships, caught as men and women are in a network of fear and confusion; the brutalization and petty dominance of the man; the anger and bitterness of the woman; the nature of marriage, all too often as a constant battle all this is only too well known. Despite the fact that the pre-class societies which have been studied have already been undercut by European and American colonization, a quality of respectful ease, warmth, and assurance in interpersonal relations, including those between husband and wife, often persists as evidence that the tensions associated with conjugal relations in our society are based ~ in our social structure, not in the natures of women and men,

POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF ENGELS' ARGUMENT ON WOMEN'S SUBJUGATION

ENGELS WRITES, "the peculiar character of the supremacy of the husband over the wife in the modern family ... will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights," although, in itself, legal equity affords no solution. Just as the legal equality of capitalist and proletarian makes visible "the specific character of the economic oppression burdening the proletariat," so also will legal equality reveal the fundamental change that is necessary for the liberation of women. Engels goes on to say: "Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished" (137-38).

Such a change is dependent on the abolition of private ownership. "With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike" (139). Only when this is accomplished will a new generation of women grow up, Engels writes, who have never known "what it is to give themselves to a man from any other considerations than real love or to refuse to give themselves to their lover from fear of the economic consequences." Then men and women "will care precious little what anybody today thinks they ought to do; they will make their own practice and their corresponding public opinion about the practice of each individual-and that will be the end of it" (145). To which must be added today that the destruction of the family as an economic unit does not automatically follow with the establishment of socialism, but rather is one of the goals to be fought for as central to the transition to communism.

There has recently been much discussion about the extent to which women can achieve a measure of personal "liberation" by rejecting the sex-role definitions of the contemporary "monogamous" family, and about the relevance such rejection can have to

the furthering of revolutionary aims and consciousness. There has also been considerable argument about the basis for women's inferior position, ranging from the extreme psychobiological view that it results from an innate masculine drive for domination and can be changed only through a single-minded "battle of the sexes," to the extreme economic determinist and generally masculine view that since all basic changes ultimately depend on the revolutionary restructuring of society, it is both illusory and diversionary to focus on ameliorating the special problems of women.

While there is still a great deal of abstract argument about the correct position on women's liberation, there is also a growing recognition that it is fruitless to debate the extent to which various parts of the women's movement can or cannot be linked with revolutionary goals, and there is a growing commitment to developing concrete tactics of program and organization around situations where women are in motion on basic issues. It might seem that Engels' discussion of family arrangements that have long ceased to exist in their pristine forms is somewhat esoteric and of little relevance today. However, it is crucial to the organization of women for their liberation to understand that it is the monogamous family as an economic unit, at the heart of class society, that is basic to their subjugation. Such understanding makes clear that child-bearing itself is not responsible for the low status of women, as has been the contention of some radical women's groups. And more important, it indicates the way in which working-class women, not only in their obviously basic fight on the job but also in their seemingly more conservative battles for their families around schools, housing and welfare, are actually posing a more basic challenge than that of the radicals. By demanding that society assume responsibility for their children, they are attacking the nature of the family as an economic unit, the basis of their own oppression and a central buttress of class exploitation. Therefore, while some of the activities of middle-class radical women's groups can be linked with the struggles of working-class women, such as the fight for free legalized abortion, others are so psychologically oriented as to be confusing and diversionary.

The self-declared women's movement in this country has historically been middle class and largely oriented toward a fight for the same options as middle-class men within the system, while the struggles of working-class women have not been conceived as fights for women's liberation as such. This has been true since the close of the Civil War, when the women's movement that had been closely concerned with the fight against slavery and for the rights of women factory workers broke away on its "feminist" course. Today there is more widespread awareness that all oppressive relations are interconnected and embedded in our system as a whole, and that only united effort can effect fundamental change. However, there has been little clear and consistent effort made to achieve such unity. For example, the committees formed by professional women to fight job discrimination are generally prepared to admit forthrightly that their battle is ultimately inseparable from that of working-class and especially Black working-class women, but they have done virtually nothing to find ways of linking the two. And it is commonplace to point out that, despite basic differences between the oppression of women and the oppres-

sion of Blacks, there are marked parallels of both an economic and a social-psychological nature-not to mention the fact that half of Black people are women. But again, there has been no solid commitment to building organizational ties between the two movements around specific issues. The theoretical differentiation between the symptoms and the causes of women's oppression can help clarify the issues around which united organization must be built, and can help remove the blocks hampering the enormous potential a women's movement could have for unifying sections of the middle and working classes and bridging some of the disastrous gap between white workers and Black, Puerto Rican, and Mexican American workers. However, in this effort it is important to be wary of a certain suspect quality of many white middle-class women (akin to that of their male counterparts) to be attracted and exhilarated by the assertiveness of the struggle for Black liberation, and to neglect their responsibility to find ways of also building an alliance with white working-class women and men.

Theoretical understanding is sorely needed to help combat the difficulties that will continue to beset the women's movement. Male supremacy, the enormous difficulty men have in facing up to their pathetic feelings of superiority and display of petty power over women, even when theoretically dedicated to revolutionary change, will continue to feed what is often a narrowly anti-men orientation among "movement women;" and the media will continue to exploit this as a gimmick that serves at the same time to sell cigarettes and shampoo, dissipate energies, and divide women from each other and from what should be allied struggles. As with the black-power movement, the sheer possibility of open confrontation will for some serve the need to express a great pent-up anger, and token victories will temporarily serve to give the illusion of some success. The overwhelming need is to keep this powerful anger from being dissipated-to find ways of building upon it through taking organizationally meaningful steps.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE STATE

MORGAN'S DOCUMENTATION of the transition from kin-organized to politically organized society in ancient Greece and Rome emphasized the growth of private property as such, rather than the development of classes based on differential relations to major means and sources of subsistence. In fact, Morgan virtually ignored the fact that Greece was a slave society. Engels, therefore, added to Morgan's data on the Athenian state "their economic content and cause" (171), especially the division of labor and its implications. Within the "structure of society based on kinship groups," Engels writes, "the productivity of labor increasingly develops, and with it private property and exchange, differences of wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labor power of others, and hence the basis of class antagonisms" (72). The incompatibility of these "new social elements" with "the old social order" brings about a complete upheaval. "The gentile constitution ...[was] shattered by the division of labor and its result, the cleavage of society into classes. It was replaced by the state" (228).

The Iroquois confederacy represents the highest stage of political organization possible under the gentile system, Engels continues. Within the limits imposed upon them by the level of their technology, the Iroquois control their own production. In early Greece advancing technology and the creation of a surplus lead to the division of labor between herdsmen and agriculturalists, and between agriculturalists and craftsmen, which “slowly insinuates itself into ... [the] process of production” (233). Goods are transformed into commodities for exchange: the producers lose control of their products; the accumulation of individual wealth and the separation of society into privileged and non-privileged classes becomes possible. Slavery, made profitable by improved productive techniques, is first limited to prisoners of war, but is then extended to fellow tribesmen. Private estates are built up through the transmission of property within family lines, rather than within the larger kin group, and the family becomes a power against the gens. The gentile constitution had grown out of a society with no internal contradictions and it depended for its effectiveness on the coercive force of public opinion. However, the new developments produced “a society which by all its economic conditions of life had been forced to split itself into freemen and slaves, into the exploiting rich and the exploited poor; a society which not only could never again reconcile these contradictions, but was compelled always to intensify them” (228). The state was the new institution which, as the instrument of the exploiting class, appeared to stand “above the warring classes, suppressed their open conflict and allowed the class struggle to be fought out at most in the economic field, in so-called legal form” (228).

Typically, Engels’ argument was nowhere dealt with directly by the Boasian school of American anthropology. However, a leading member and major antagonist of Morgan’s, Robert H. Lowie, wrote *The Origin of the State*, in which he took the position that the state was universal, be it in however rudimentary a form, due to the fact that “illiterate peoples, too, maintain political order within fixed territorial limits” (1929:2). If the “principle of continuity and psychic unity” is correct, he wrote, then we can “discover the processes that could convert a community of the Andamanese model into the elaborate structure of modern times” (1929:6). To Lowie, the evolution of the state involved a purely quantitative change—the strengthening of the feeling for the home territory. In answer to the question of what caused the territorial tie to be strengthened, he wrote: “though permanent concentration of power in a single person’s hands is ... the simplest way to impose the territorial bond, it is not the only one” (1929:116). As another way, he suggested that the “coercive force” might also be vested in a group. Thus he ended where Engels began, with the problem of how power over the rest of society became centralized in the hands of a few, or, in effect, the question of how the state arose at a particular historical juncture.

Although anthropologists in the United States have seldom criticized Lowie’s theory of the state directly, it is no longer of much influence. In keeping with a revived evolutionary perspective, there is widespread recognition among contemporary anthropologists that the state emerged as a qualitatively new institution associated with marked economic

inequalities, a well developed division of labor, and sizable urban centers. Furthermore, the use of coercive force to control a territorially based citizenry is generally accepted by anthropologists as a central feature of state organization.¹⁸

Nonetheless, Engels' work is rarely mentioned in the West in scholarly inquiries into the emergence of the state. This is of course typical of the skittishness with which Marxist theory is treated. However, there is another consideration in this case, for Greece and Rome are unfortunately too late to be good models for state development when applied too narrowly. *Origin* is a relatively brief and pointed book in which a forceful comparison is presented between the communal relations of primitive society and the exploitative relations that arose within it. It throws into sharp relief the nature of the family as an economic unit and the state as the arm of an exploiting class, both institutions that must be abolished if freer relations among people are to be achieved. Unfortunately, however, when Athenian Greece as described by Engels became the model for the transition from classless to class-based society, the concept of a slaveholding "stage" became rigidified in a form that simply could not be applied to the over 2,000 years of prior history during which state-organized and class-based society had existed. To insist on too literal an interpretation of an Athenian model leads to a hopelessly "Eurocentric" position that elevates Greece and Rome to overly important positions, distorts the ancient civilizations of Asia and Northwest Africa, and virtually ignores the states of West Africa and of Central and South America. (Similarly, the implicit acceptance of a specifically European model of feudalism has confused the interpretation by Western scholars of the Orient.)

It has been puzzling to scholars that Engels made no mention of the "Asian" or "Oriental" mode of production Marx spoke of as characterizing some of these societies, and which he illustrated in *Capital* in terms of village India (1965; 1967). In the ancient Indian communities, lands remain held in common by extended family or village groups, and the major part of production is for direct use. Craftsmen and other specialists residing in the community produce goods and services directly for it, and are in return maintained by it. Goods do not become commodities, except for that surplus portion which is taken by the state in the form of goods in kind (1967:334). Marx wrote:

18 For instance, Krader (1968: viii) writes: "This book, then, has a thesis: there is such a thing as the political state, which is found only in certain societies. It has a role in these societies that is uniform throughout, controlling and directing the life of the people under it by centralized social power in the hands of a few." Fried writes, "the emergent state, then ... is the organization of the power of the society on a supra-kin basis" (1960: 728), and, elsewhere, that "the power (of an emerging state) itself represents a quantum leap over anything previously wielded" (1967: 231). Bohannan (1963: 274) writes: "The state is a special social group charged with allocating authority to use physical force in order to achieve peace and conformance with law and custom on the one hand, and to maintain territorial and cultural integrity against external threats on the other." Bohannan discusses "stateless" society at length (1963, 1964). "Chiefdoms," transitional to the state, are discussed by Sahlins, 1968.

In the ancient Asiatic and other ancient modes of production, we find that the conversion of products into commodities and therefore the conversion of men into producers of commodities, holds a subordinate place, which, however, increases in importance as the primitive communities approach nearer and nearer to their dissolution. Trading nations, properly so called, exist in the ancient world only in its interstices (1967: 79).

Engels refers to this form of relations in *Anti-Dühring* (1939: 165, 337ff), though unfortunately not in *Origin*. He does, however, add to his analysis of Morgan's material on Greece and Rome the case of Germany, where the state "springs directly out of the conquest of large territories which the gentile constitution provides no means of governing." In the German conquest of Rome, "the economic basis of society remains . . . as before ...[and] the gentile constitution is able to survive for many centuries" (228). However, this is a secondary, not primary mechanism of state formation. By contrast to other "conquest theories" of state origin,¹⁹ Engels emphasized that in its "purest" form the state arises "directly and mainly out of the class oppositions which develop within gentile society itself" (228), and he used the Athenian experience to exemplify the process whereby it did so.

Engels wrote in summary:

The stage of commodity production with which civilization begins is distinguished economically by the introduction of (1) metal money and with it money capital, interest and usury, (2) merchants as the class of intermediaries between the producers, (3) private ownership of land and the mortgage system, (4) slave labor as the dominant form of production (234-35).

Associated also were the male-dominated monogamous family as the economic unit of society, the "establishment of a permanent opposition between town and country as basis of the whole social division of labor," and "the introduction of wills, whereby the owner of property is still able to dispose over it even when he is dead" (235). Further: "The central link in civilized society is the state, which in all typical periods is without exception the state of the ruling class and in all cases continues to be essentially a machine for holding down the oppressed, exploited class" (235).

The fact that in seventh century Athens the associated processes outlined by Engels that had been unfolding for thousands of years came to their full fruition makes it both useful and misleading as a paradigm for the emergence of the state. While useful as an analysis of the interconnections among economy, society and polity associated with what has been called civilization, the case of Athens is misleading when these processes are

19 Fried (1967) discusses the ongoing process of warfare as important in state formation, by comparison with "conquests" in a literal sense. Similarly, in a recent paper, Carneiro suggests that the concentration of resources in a limited area leads to "warfare over land, and thus to political integration beyond the village level" (1970: 737).

seen as unfolding in the same sequences in other cases. This is generally true of secondary developments of class and political organization, such as those set off by European conquest, which collapse certain processes into a very short period, thereby sharpening them at the same time as distorting them relative to primary or autonomous developments.

In the Ionian peninsula, the institutions associated with clan society had already been undermined by precisely the type of “Oriental mode” Marx described, and during the classical period, slave-labor and commodity production grew rapidly to predominance. In fact, it was upon the growth of commodity production that the efflorescence of Athens was based. As a small, seafaring, cosmopolitan, trading nation, Athens was one of those “interstices” where trade was carried on by a merchant class, interested in profit, whereas most trade in the ancient Middle East was carried on by a state apparatus associated with a priesthood or aristocracy, for the purpose of acquiring building materials, luxury articles, and slaves. Various forms of money had long been employed in the ancient world, but coinage became necessary when commodity production and trade reached sufficient proportions to warrant it. Its use became widespread rather late, when Athens borrowed it either from Lydia or another of the contemporaneous, trading citystates²⁰

The pristine developments of the state had taken place in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt over two millennia earlier, and although there is still disagreement about how important slaveholding was before the first millennium BC in Mesopotamia, there is greater agreement that it was not dominant as a form of labor in Egypt until that time. Nor was it dominant, apparently, in the early Chinese states. In both the medieval states of West Africa and the independently evolved states of the Maya, Aztec, Inca and their predecessors in the New World, production was still based on the peasant-farmer. The farming population supported often despotic aristocracies through feudal-like arrangements whereby they donated goods and services, but retained their inalienable right to land through their connection with a kin or transitional type of kincommunity group.

Slavery existed in all of these societies, for it is of course undeniable that slavery of some sort represented the first form of unfree labor. Prisoners of war in primitive societies were often enslaved, and as outsiders with no kinship status within the society, they were consigned to the most onerous tasks; in some societies, they could be killed in ritual sacrifice. Their condition could be dismal enough from a personal point of view; however, they did not, as yet, constitute a significant factor in production. Engels made the point that slavery could not become economically relevant until labor was sufficiently productive to enable slave-labor to produce enough above and beyond the cost of its own maintenance to release a sizable group for exploitative roles in society. Thus, the descendants of slaves in early societies did not necessarily remain slaves, and in many cases, slaves

20 Levy (1964: 16fj) points out that close approximations to true coins had been used for a long time previously, but had not become standardized by established practice. For a richly documented, if theoretically somewhat confusing, account of early trade, see Polanyi et al., 1957.

themselves might be adopted into the group and become loved and respected kinsmen.

Slaves in numbers were first attached to temples or palaces where they were often trained as specialists or craftsmen. Although “unfree,” their standard of living was well above that of peasant farmers, and their situation was quite different from that of gang-slaves who worked in the fields or mines, or alongside of the corvee labor donated by free men on public works such as irrigation systems, roads, and monumental structures. Thus the term “slavery” covers different kinds of groupings.²¹ In comparing central Mexico and ancient Mesopotamia, Adams writes that in both “corporate kin groups, originally preponderating in the control of land, were gradually supplanted by the growth of private estates in the hands of urban elites.” In both “there were various social impediments and conditions of servitude, of which slavery was merely the most extreme, and the role of an inferior and in some respects unfree agricultural class was surely far more important than the numbers of narrowly defined ‘slaves’ alone would suggest” (1966: 119, 103-04). However, Adams points out that slaves in Mesopotamia, large numbers of whom were women, were important in the production of wool or thread. He writes:

... the sale or exchange of this commodity not only played an important part in the local redistributive economy but presumably also served as the basis for long-distance trade in luxuries and vital raw materials like metal. In a sense then, there was a strategic concentration of slaves in precisely those institutions which characterized Mesopotamian urban society as distinguished from preurban society, so to characterize the institution as insignificant, accordingly would misrepresent its importance as a factor in development (1966: 103).

Slavery grew slowly and unevenly in the history of mankind and its significance did not lie in its literal dominance over “free” labor. Greece and Rome were not typical, and although slavery was the first form in which labor was exploited, primitive communal relations were often transformed into feudal relations without slavery becoming predominant. Engels implies this to be the case in Germany; it seems evident for China and the New World; the French Marxist Maurice Godelier has pointed it out for West African society; and many Soviet scholars seem to be in agreement.²²

21 For a fuller discussion of this point, see Finley, 1964.

22 The universality of a Mediterranean type of slaveholding “stage” in the history of human society has occasionally been questioned by Soviet scholars (see Danilova, 1966, and Lentsman, 1966). However, the question has been most sharply and conclusively raised in recent times by the French socialist Godelier and his colleagues, in relation to African society. Godelier argues that the communal ownership of land with a surplus appropriated by a chief or king, as found in Africa, corresponds to Marx’s concept in which “exploitation of man by man exists without property in land,” thereby accelerating “the process of establishment of a class of exploiters.” Godelier and his co-workers see this to be a universal form, for which the term “Asian mode” is too narrow.

The major question that awaits fuller documentation in the light of these considerations is not simply how important slaves were numerically in any given society or period, but how slavery functioned in the transformation from communal to class society. Despite the many local variations, and the expansion and decline of

individual peoples or specific areas the long-term growth of private property and state organization unfolded in a remarkably similar manner in both the Old and the New World. Wherever there is data on the rise of complex societies, one finds that as increasing productivity made exploitation more profitable, the techniques that maintained communal relations and kept goods equitably distributed were eventually undermined by conflicting tendencies. Everywhere the function of priesthoods and chiefly families to maintain tribal reciprocity and integrity conflicted with the institutionalization of the power implicit in the goods and services they had at their disposal. "Civilization" arose as the reciprocal exchanges of goods and services became transmuted into exploitative consumption by a budding upper class and state apparatus.²³

Priesthoods were often of great importance in the process of state formation, for it was in their interest to establish their position through the building of temple complexes; warfare was usually important, for it necessitated periodic centralization of controls and materials; and in some areas, the reclamation and maintenance of agricultural lands through the building, and servicing of irrigation systems contributed to the usurpation of power by an upper class.²⁴ The enslavement of war prisoners, the temporary and permanent enslavement of kinsmen for debt or other causes, and the slavelabor used to produce agricultural and luxury goods for consumption by an aristocracy or for other enterprises conducted by the state weakened the status of the peasant farmer and the craftsman. Specialization of labor became more prominent and trade more extensive, although for a long time it was controlled by the state apparatus and not allowed to fall completely into the hands of private merchants who were interested in making their own profit. And finally, the focus of these interlinked developmental processes was inevitably to be found in expanding urban centers.

Awaiting fuller synthesis is a wealth of scattered data on how the transformation of

Godelier poses as "two possible paths of development and decay of the Asian mode of production," the GrecoRoman route "to the slaveholding mode of production based upon private property and commodity production," and "the Chinese route" developing toward "a particular form of feudalism," without passing through a slaveholding stage "characterized by the development of private property without the appearance of commodity production" (1965: 39-40).

23 . The works of Childe (1939, 1965) and Adams (1966) on the rise of civilization have already been cited. For extensive documentation of Grecian society in terms of the outline offered by Engels, see the work of the British classicist, Thompson (1949, 1955).

24 Referring to Marx's mentioning of irrigation as influential, Wittfogel (1957) has argued that it was basically the social requirements for building large-scale irrigation networks that led to the origin of the ancient states. Adams (1960: 280ff) counters Wittfogel's narrow, technological interpretation.

some men into chattels, commodities, undercut the status of free men; on how free tribesmen became converted into an exploited class—converted from free farmers, with inalienable rights to land and obligations to the collective as represented by a priest or chief, into serfs, trapped on the land and indebted to a ruling aristocracy or priesthood;²⁵ and on how these processes were underpinned by the transmutation of goods into commodities—the loss by people of control over their own production. In an analysis of the Inca state, John Murra discusses the function of cloth as a highly valued commodity in a society without money and with relatively small markets. Supposedly generous “gifts” of cloth were made by the Inca to vanquished peoples from the huge supplies kept in state warehouses, but these were, in effect, “the initial pump-priming step in a dependent relationship, since the ‘generosity’ of the conqueror obligates one to reciprocate, to deliver on a regular, periodic basis, the results of one’s workmanship to the Cuzco warehouses.” Thenceforth the peasant owes a steady supply of cloth to the state. Murra writes:

The state was doubly served: the supply of cloth was insured and the onerous nature of the weaving *mitta* could be phrased in terms of culturally sanctioned reciprocity. But one can also see in this textile “gift” the issuing of Inca citizenship papers, a coercive and yet symbolic reiteration of the peasant’s obligations to the state, of his conquered status (1962: 721-22).

It is doubtless through the analysis of commodity production in its early stages that questions about slavery, the “Oriental” mode and other modes mentioned by Marx can be most fully resolved. Despite Marx’s important discussion of commodity production in the first section of *Capital*, there has been little follow-through by Marxist scholars on how the acquisition and exchange of a surplus by early states entrapped urban populations as a lower class, while allowing perpetuation of reciprocal relations on a village level—nor of related questions, both empirical and theoretical. When do traders, at first functionaries for the state, perhaps even slaves of a sort, become transformed into or rivaled by independent merchants? What is the relation between state trade and direct exchange of goods in the market place, old and widespread in much of the world? When does the latter become converted to a significant extent into exchange in the profit-making sense?

The use of the Athenian city-state as a model obscures how slowly state trade of a surplus acquired through tribute, compulsory dues, and sheer loot gave way to a city-based merchant class that was interested in production for the purpose of profit-making.²⁶ The early trading ports, where merchants held sway, seldom achieved ascendancy in the

25 . Relevant material is reviewed by Mandel (1968: Chaps. 1-4),

26 See the work of Polanyi and his colleagues (1957) cited above. The book suffers from a confusion between marketplaces and the market in the profit-making sense, as well as from a meticulous avoidance of anything sounding like a serious discussion of commodity production or classes. However, there are good chapters, such as that on Mexican trade by Chapman and that by Neale documenting the Indian village economy to which Marx had referred. A chapter by Pearson arguing the meaninglessness of a surplus in production is rebutted by Mandel (1962: 68ff) and by Harris (1959).

ancient world. Their rise in Greece, though prophetic, was temporary, and their battle for autonomy forms an important component in the history of medieval Europe.²⁷

The rise of full commodity production to dominance essentially lies in the history of urbanization and the rise of the contradiction between urban and rural life. It was in the urban centers that commodity production first transformed relations within the group from direct, personal, and basically cooperative to impersonal and highly competitive, ruled by “mysterious forces” that eluded understanding and control. The full victory of commodity production conducted for profit awaited the development of northwest Europe. A backward area for almost five millennia, here the combination of harbors and waterways, and relatively available coal and iron deposits awaited the historical events that enabled a newly victorious urban merchant class that was expanding northward to realize all the explosive potential of industrial capitalism. Then came the worldwide metamorphosis of human relations into commodity relations, relations among things to be used; a metamorphosis that spread its effects into the remotest hinterlands, with its incredible potential for both enormous creation and for insanepershaps ultimate-destruction: the heritage of the 20th century.

PROBLEMS OF THEORY AND METHOD

SIXTH CENTURY Greece, aboriginal Australia, pre-Columbian America-such subjects seem remote. However, the theoretical questions posed by studying the transition to class society are crucial to humanity’s future. What are the implications of the fact that women’s special oppression is ultimately based on the family as an economic unit? What does it mean to eliminate commodity production and the estrangement of interpersonal relations that follow from it at an advanced technological level where elaborate systems of production and exchange are necessary? Is it possible to erase the contradiction between city and country without transforming the world into one vast suburb? What are the steps by which the state can be eliminated?

In his brief discussion of social laws in *Origin*, Engels makes the point that unless they are “laboriously investigated and established,” the world seems governed by chance, by “alien, at first often unrecognized powers,” and “society is regulated, not by a jointly devised plan, but by blind laws which manifest themselves with elemental violence” (234). However,

... chance is only the one pole of a relation whose other pole is named “necessity.” In a world of nature where chance also seems to rule, we have long since demonstrated in each separate field the inner necessity and law asserting itself in this chance. But what is true of the natural world is true also of society. The more a social activity, a series of social processes, becomes too powerful for men’s conscious control and grows above their heads, and the more it appears a matter of pure chance, then all the more surely within this chance the laws peculiar to it and inherent in it assert

27 On the rise of towns to ascendancy in medieval Europe, see Rörig, 1967

themselves as if by natural necessity (233-34).

If humanity is to survive, it will only be through the mastery of social laws, not only by revolutionaries in the capitalist and neocolonial countries where an economy of waste and destruction now threatens the entire world, but in the socialist countries as well, where any illusion that communism at an advanced level follows smoothly from the initial establishment of socialist power has surely been abandoned.

To reconstruct the social laws, the processes, the mechanisms, whereby class society in all its variations emerged, and the nature of the social forms that preceded it, involves a delicate interweaving of theoretical and empirical considerations. Archaeological and ethnographic data on pre-class societies and on societies where class relations were developing independently of colonial relations established by the powers of Europe and Asia are spotty and ambiguous. Archaeological data on all but the broad outlines of socio-economic organization are generally suggestive, not conclusive, and to find records of a non-literate society means, of course, that it has already come into contact with, and hence been in some way affected by, the relations of commodity production. A basic dilemma, therefore, confronts the attempt to reconstruct the early stages of human history from the evidence at hand. Reconstructing fully communal societies as they functioned before becoming involved in trade and warfare with Europeans or with the state-societies that existed elsewhere in the world necessitates making certain assumptions about the social and political forms that are concomitant with living at simpler technological levels. Yet the reconstructions themselves are needed to demonstrate the correctness of the theoretical assumptions.

Instances where data on pre-class social relations are clear are, therefore, of great importance. Such, for example, is the case of the northeastern Algonkians where unusually detailed records by Jesuit missionaries and others demonstrated the lack of private landownership that had been ascribed to them. Where materials are available for ethno-historical research into a given primitive culture, they reveal fundamental changes of the type that have been taking place independently in various parts of the world or have been developing rapidly during the recent centuries of colonial rule: the breaking down of the corporate kin group into individual families and the individualization of property rights, the downgrading of women's status, the strengthening of rank, and the usurpation of powers by chiefs—in short, the basis for class society. Nonetheless, areas where warfare and trade, often in slaves as well as goods, have been causing vast upheavals for up to four and five centuries of European influence and domination are still commonly treated as if reconstructed 19th century social forms represent “untouched” institutions.

To add to the resulting theoretical confusion, it is increasingly common for anthropologists to analyze the forms and processes of primitive institutions through quantification of what are largely 20th century materials.²⁸ Furthermore, in the pragmatic atmosphere

28 For a recent review of cross-cultural surveys, see Naroll, 1970. An early and influential venture in the quantification of ethnographic data was initiated at Yale University by George Peter Murdock in a project later known as the Human Relations Area Files. Data on some 250

of United States science, the tendency is to accept quantified analysis, not as suggesting clues about significant relationships to be analyzed, but as of itself indicating cause and effect relationships. The fact that quantified comparative analysis separates traits from their social context is not seen as a serious problem. The sociologist Talcott Parsons makes this explicit in a statement of Marx's limitations, a statement worth quoting in full since it describes so succinctly the limitations of contemporary Western sociology.

Marx ... tended to treat the socioeconomic structure of capitalist enterprise as a single indivisible entity rather than breaking it down analytically into a set of the distinct variables involved in it. It is this analytical breakdown which is for present purposes the most distinctive feature of modern sociological analysis, and which must be done to take advantage of advances that have taken place. It results both in a modification of the Marxian view of the system itself and enables the establishment of relations to other aspects of the total social system, aspects of which Marx was unaware. This change results in an important modification of Marx's empirical perspective in relation to the class problem as in other contexts. The primary structural emphasis no longer falls on the orientation of capitalistic enterprise to profit and the theory of exploitation but rather the structure of occupational roles within the system of industrial society (1954: 324).

Parson's statement illustrates the type of conclusions that can be reached when social phenomena are naively lifted out of context for statistical study. Counting the occurrence of a phenomenon as part of its description and correlating its frequency with that of other phenomena are essential procedures. Problems enter when it is assumed or implied that to codify, quantify, and correlate one aspect of reality with another ipso facto reveals causal networks; when, after stating the limitations of statistical analysis for complex social phenomena, the analysis is carried out as if these limitations did not exist. Class status is defined through scaling of occupation and/or income and education, and endlessly correlated with other variables; mental illness is reduced to a scale and measured in different sections of a population; learning ability is tested along some single dimension and individual children are trapped in the confines of some arbitrary number. The net effect—indirectly also the cause—is a mechanical or static view of reality. That which numerically predominates at a given moment, as defined, rated, and counted according to some unstated value scheme of the researcher, is considered “proven” to characterize a situation.

societies were coded and punched on IBM cards for the running of cross-tabulations. Murdock is now continuing his research at the University of Pittsburgh. His *Social Structure* (1949) was based on the assumption that correlations among various social features in a world ethnographic sample would yield valid generalizations about primitive social organization, in spite of the fact that most of the societies in the sample had been changed by the impact of conquest and/or colonialization. For a more productive use of statistical analysis, tied in with a clearer theoretical perspective, see Carneiro's application of scale analysis to the study of evolutionary change (1962, 1968, 1970).

Thus measurements ad infinitum crowd the social science journals only to obscure rather than reveal, and much less prove, anything fundamental about social process. The upshot is to perpetuate the world of social myth in which we perforce live, to measure it, test it, analyze it, “discover” it-without ever lifting the veil and looking at it!

The contemporary Western social psychological view of experimentation is but an amplification of the same limitations. To put people in a room and manipulate them in various ways will show certain things about behavior, in some cases widely applicable, in most cases probably not, but seldom will it predict how people will act under basically changed circumstances. For this, the laboratory of ongoing history is necessary. The study of voting statistics over the years has indicated with surprising accuracy how people are likely to vote-given the existing framework. However, the question of greater interest, certainly to revolutionaries, remains un touched: what changes are needed in this framework to shift the pattern?

Here there is no substitute for Marx’s method of detailed analysis in specific cases, based on a dialectical and materialist theory of relationships that must constantly be tested, elaborated upon, and refined, both through theory and action. Rather than seeking comparabilities in statistical terms among what are all too often superficial features of different situations, comparabilities must be sought at the level of determinate mechanisms, at the level of processes that are generally hidden from easy view. Statistical methods can not be allowed to influence theoretical considerations. And hypotheses about social laws or processes are ultimately to be tested in the laboratory of historical experience.

A consideration of the challenge to dialectical materialism put forth in Harris’ recent *Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968) helps clarify the Marxist method of analysis. Harris credits Marx as the pioneer in the “materialist strategy” of research to which he himself subscribes (655, 674), and he writes that, other historians of anthropology notwithstanding, Marx is clearly not irrelevant to anthropology. Instead, Harris points out, it would be closer to the truth to state “that cultural anthropology developed entirely in reaction to Marxism” (249, italics his); and he devotes a considerable part of his book to cogent analyses of the “culturalidealism” or “mentalism” that characterizes the various schools of anthropology. On the other hand, dialectics is, to Harris, “ponderous double-talk” (219), and the Marxist commitment to the inseparability of theory and political action is pernicious to the search for scientific truth (220-22).

However, Harris is guilty of considerable “double-talk” in his efforts to disassociate the concept of social evolution from dialectics. Although he accepts change as “ubiquitous and incessant” (1971: 7), he argues that evolution involves, not “negation” or “contradiction,” but “transformation.” People may think in terms of dichotomies, and intellectual advances may often follow from “resolving contradictions between the extremes,” but history does not proceed in this fashion (71). The description of evolutionary processes as negations of negations “is mere poetic analogy.”

If the evolutionary process exemplifies the dialectic of negation, it does so simply,

by virtue of the absence of workable rules for distinguishing between negative and positive changes. Since evolution means transformation, or difference, it is always possible, in the absence of definite criteria, to declare that each and every evolutionary product is the negation of some earlier condition. . . . What all evolutionary processes have in common is not the “negation” of earlier forms, but *simply their transformation* (68-69, italics added).

Apparently Harris is addressing himself to the casual or conversational usages of the terms contradiction and negation rather than their meaning in the context of how to deal with change as an inherent attribute to all matter. If change is “ubiquitous and incessant,” as Harris agrees, then being is becoming as Hegel argued, and reality is not comprised of things but of processes. Any phenomenon is not, as phrased in classical logic, either A or not-A; instead, it is both A and not-A, or in the process of always becoming something else—hence a “unity of opposites,” an expression of “struggle,” involving “contradiction” or “negation.” The use of ordinary terms in a specialized sense is always somewhat awkward, but some such terminology is essential to deal conceptually with the reality of constant change.

Without the concept of contradiction as internal to the processes that we call matter, change is by implication external to any given phenomenon, a result of the interaction between it and other phenomena that are conceived in somewhat static terms. Yet any thoughtful scientist today recognizes that it is not things or states that are interacting, but processes; as the physicist studies the organization of forces in what we call atoms, the chemist the interacting atoms that make up molecules, the biochemist the combinations of these that make up cells, and so on up to the anthropologist who confronts historically evolving societal structures, it is clear that matter, as process, is integrated in a marvelously complex series of successively more inclusive levels. Hence that which can be studied by the scientist as the external “interactions” between two phenomena at one level are in fact internal “contradictions” at the more inclusive level where the two interacting phenomena form a more complex system. This is the understanding of reality that Harris is brushing aside when he decries “Marx’s Hegelian infatuation with ‘contradictions’” (223).

Harris’s disavowal of dialectical concepts leads him to make such statements as that the class struggle, rather than exemplifying contradiction, “is simply an expression of irreconcilable competition between proletarians and bourgeoisie for control of the means of production” (223). Further, where he argues that the advantage of the Marxian model is not that it is dialectical, but that it is “diachronic and evolutionary,” he writes:

Any diachronic model is capable of accommodating the fact that strains may accumulate until consistency on the old basis is no longer feasible, and there is a violent collapse in the whole system. But there is another kind of accumulation of dysfunctional strains which defeats the Hegelian dialectic: evolution through the

slow accumulation of minor changes wrought by minor adjustments to minor stresses (236).

Two comments must be made. First, it is not just collapse of the old but *replacement* by the new that is essential to the process of evolution that has been called “negation.” Second, since Harris agrees that evolution is transformation, there is presumably a point at which the accumulation of minor strains results in transformation or *qualitative change* in accordance with the principles of MarxistHegelian dialectic. It is interesting that Harris, in questioning Hegelian dialectics and despite his own materialist convictions, cannot resist a subtle inference of Hegelian idealism: “To the pervasive evolutionism of his times, he added the peculiar notion that entities or events could be comprehended, *or to say the same thing*, exist, only by virtue of their opposite, contradiction or negation” (67, italics added).

Harris’s own strategy for analysis calls for the formulation of a materialistic or “etic” data language that will enable a community of scientific observers to treat their material objectively. He characterizes Marxist science as “explicitly bound to a political program,” and writes: “If the point is to change the world rather than to interpret it, the Marxist sociologist ought not to hesitate to falsify data in order to make it more useful” (221). However, the Marxist commitment is not to a program as such; instead, the principle underlying the necessary unity of theory and action is that active identification with the presently oppressed but emerging class involves a commitment to the future direction of social change that is basic for full understanding. Some Marxists have indeed crassly distorted and manipulated social data; but, the fact is that such opportunism has not worked in the interest of beneficial change. Furthermore, as the history and sociology of science so amply document, there is no such thing as a community of observers that can avoid acting and reacting in response to their social status as scientists, no matter how detached they may attempt to be. Harris convincingly, at times brilliantly, illustrates the extent to which idealism in anthropology is bound up with the failure to separate materialistically conceived structures and actions from the subjectively held conceptions of members of the societies being studied. His solution is to make clear a methodological distinction between “emic” and “etic” data (terms recently borrowed from linguistics by social anthropologists). Most ethnographic data are emic” in that they are organized in terms of informants’ views; they deal with distinctions that are “built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate, or in some other fashion regarded as appropriate by the actors themselves” 571). For a materialist strategy to be achieved, a new data language must be developed to replace “the predominantly emic corpus of extant ethnography” with etic descriptions (569). ctively~ctively derived, or “etic” data, depend “upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers” 575). The emic/etic dichotomy.

rests upon the epistemological significance of describing cultural things ,rough categories and relations which are necessarily isomorphic with those appropriate or

meaningful to the actors, as opposed to categories and relations which arise independently in the ethnographer's data language. Thus, actual behavior can be treated in both an emic and etic fashion. An informant's description of what is actually happening... need not correspond to what the ethnographer sees or would see in the same situation (580-81).

Harris' concern is to differentiate emic from etic data in order to focus sharply on the material "etic" conditions that determine people's actions (and at times he departs from his own stricture at the emic/etic dichotomy is purely epistemological and applies the term etic to the material conditions of society (1971: 503). As his recent textbook exemplifies, he is deeply committed to exploding myths about the backward or irrational behavior of peasants in the emerging nations or the poor in our own society that buttress neocolonialism and racist institutions. In an earlier work, he demolished the assumption that Indian peasants irrationally and needlessly go undernourished while protecting the sacred cows that uselessly wander the countryside (1965). He pointed out that in addition to milk the cows produce bullocks that are necessary for ploughing; that their dung is essential for cooking fuel and for manure; that their hides are a prime source of leather; that they are free to wander, the better to forage; and that when they die there are plenty of people with no caste to lose by eating them. Another nice example of Harris' work is his critique of assumptions that culturally patterned attitudinal differences between the early Anglo-Saxon and Latin settlers in the New World were responsible for the differing relations among the races to be found in North and Latin America (1964). Harris documents the fact that differing race relations are instead based on historically developed differences in patterns for the exploitation of labor.

An enormous amount of such reinterpretation needs doing in anthropology, as Harris makes clear. However, his anti-dialectical -and idealist placement of the observer outside the framework of goals and meanings and extreme separation of the material and ideological dimensions of society leave such reinterpretations incomplete. Harris' own views of the motive forces behind human history stress technological innovation in interaction with environmental influence. He is interested in the "precise demarcation of the sectors of sociocultural systems" and critical of concepts such as "mode of production" which leave so hazy, to him, "the boundary between economics and technology" (233). He quotes Marx's well-known premise from the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy that men's "social existence determines their consciousness" (229), and proceeds as if there were no further interaction between ideology and socio-economic structure, or for the role of consciousness in historical process. Instead he speaks of "emic ethnography" and "etic ethnography" as separate enterprises; indeed, a major point is "to insist upon the separateness of emic and etic phenomena and research strategies." He writes: "An etic approach, by definition, avoids the premises of the emic approach. From an etic point of view, the universe of meaning, purposes, goals, motivations, etc., is thus unapproachable" (579). *Yet until one has directly faced the problem of dealing with man's consciousness in*

material terms, as analyst as well as actor, one has not dealt with man, his history, his culture, or his science.

By hindsight, mechanical materialism seems to work. The objective conditions—technological, economic, environmental—that preceded—hence “caused”—later developments can necessarily and inevitably be located. The more remote the period studied, the more the role of internal stresses, alternative choices, and revolutionary versus conservative ideologies that defined precisely how, when, and where major changes were initiated are lost in the ambiguities and spottiness of archaeological and historical data. However, for understanding contemporary history, the nature of tensions internal to systems, and the role of understanding as well as misunderstanding are seen to be crucial.

The existence of human consciousness and purpose introduces a type of complexity into the operations of human society that is not found in the rest of nature. In the past it was common to assume although society still eluded our grasp, control of natural processes was a mere matter of time. The awesome feat of landing a man on the moon would seem to verify such an assumption had it not come at a time when we have been forced to recognize that the piecemeal approach to natural processes that has characterized Western science is powerless to stop the “blind laws” of nature from asserting themselves at a more complex level and rendering the earth unfit for human life. The world, like society, is a product of history, of meteorological and geological history. Comfortable regularities (in the time and space limits of our solar system) like the atomic progression of minerals and the law of gravity function within the context of interconnecting and changing relationships of unlimited complexity. Now the fact that man is but an aspect of this complex whole has unavoidably asserted itself. Humanity can not for much longer muddle through the mess it has gotten into. It will take understanding to save us, and at the present stage of history, at least, the kind of understanding called Marxist.

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