INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL LIFE

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QUESTIONS OF SOCIALITY

Wherever people live, as they generally do, in the company of others, and act with those others in mind, their mode of life may be called *social*. Questions about social life have therefore to do with elucidating the dynamic properties of human relationships, properties conveyed by such stock-in-trade anthropological notions as kinship, exchange, power and domination. We may ask how these features of human sociality are generated, maintained and managed; how they are implicated in the life-history of the individual from childhood to old age; how they are represented and communicated in discourse; how they structure – and are in turn structured by – the production and consumption of material goods, and how they underwrite (or subvert) diverse forms of moral or political order. These are the kinds of questions addressed in the chapters making up the third part of this volume. They can, of course, be posed on any number of different levels, from the minutiae of everyday life in familiar contexts of face-to-face interaction to the trials and endeavours of whole populations on a world-historical stage. Likewise the temporal scale on which social processes are viewed may range from within a lifetime to the entire span of human history. It is important to remember, however, that it is the perspective of the observer that 'selects' the scale of the social phenomena observed. When anthropologists claim that they generally study small-scale societies rather than large-scale ones, this is not because the world of humanity is objectively partitioned into social units of diverse size, of which the smaller lend themselves more readily to anthropological investigation, but because from a locally centred perspective, the horizons of the social field appear relatively circumscribed.

The concept of society, moreover, is by no means neutral, but trails in its wake a long history of controversy among Western philosophers, reformers and statesmen about the proper exercise of human rights and responsibilities. In this controversy, the meaning of 'society' has varied according to the

contexts of its opposition, alternately, to such notions as individual, community and state. Unlike the 'individual', society connotes a domain of external regulation – identified either with the state itself or, in polities lacking centralized administration, with comparable regulative institutions – serving to curb the spontaneous expression of individual interests on behalf of higher ideals of collective justice and harmony. In other contexts, however, society comes to represent the power of the people – as a real or imagined community bound by shared history, language and sentiment – *against* the impersonal and bureaucratic forces of the state. And in yet other contexts, society stands *opposed* to 'community', connoting the mode of association of rational beings bound by contracts of mutual self-interest, as epitomized by the market, rather than by particularistic ties of the kind epitomized by kinship relations. What is clear from this diversity of usage is that the term 'society', far from forming part of a value-free language of description, in fact belongs to a language of argument. To use it is, inevitably, to make a *claim* about the world.

One further opposition, which has proved especially troublesome for anthropology, is between society and 'culture'. So long as society could be regarded as an association of individuals, and culture as the sum of their knowledge, acquired by traditional transmission and imported into contexts of interaction, this distinction seemed straightforward enough. Indeed it served for much of the twentieth century as the rationale for a division between two largely autonomous branches of anthropological inquiry, 'social' and 'cultural', whose intellectual homes lay respectively in Britain and North America. In recent years, however, this division has come to be seen as increasingly artificial. The reasons are various, but at the most fundamental level, they are bound up with a general rejection of what is known as an essentialist viewpoint – that is, one that would treat societies and cultures as real entities 'out there', presenting themselves to anthropological observation as objects to be described, compared and classified. Contemporary anthropology veers more to a process-oriented view, according to which cultural form does not come ready-made, like a suit of clothing to cover the nakedness of the 'biological' individual, but is perpetually under construction within the contexts of people's practical engagements with one another. All culture, then, is social, in that its constituent meanings are drawn from the relational contexts of such mutual involvement; conversely all social life is cultural, since people's relationships with one another are informed by meaning. In short, culture and social life appear to be caught in an ongoing dialectic in which each, in a sense, 'constitutes' the other, through the mediation of human agency.

As the emphasis has shifted from the study of societies as things to the study of social life as process, anthropologists have begun to pose their questions in a rather different way. Instead of asking 'Why do different societies take the forms they do?', they are presently more inclined to ask 'What is it about a form of life that makes it social?'. They have moved, in other words, from questions about society to questions about sociality. What, they ask, is

necessary for there to be social life at all? Recent discussions have thrown up three kinds of answers. The first seeks the roots of sociality in some innate biological endowment, an evolved predisposition to associate that will naturally be expressed in varying manner and degree, depending upon the prevailing conditions of the environment. For proponents of this view, sociality is by no means confined to human beings, or even to the order of primates, but extends right across the animal kingdom. The second answer is to identify sociality with moral accountability; that is with the explicit recognition of rules and standards by which people judge their own and others' actions. Insofar as the articulation of these rules and standards depends upon a capacity for language, sociality in this sense is generally attributed uniquely to human beings. The third kind of answer locates the essence of sociality neither in individually held dispositions nor in collective rules, but in the *relationships* that bind people together as fellow participants in a life-process. To grasp the significance of this answer, however, it is necessary to examine the notion of 'relationship' a little more closely. In particular, we need to reconsider the dichotomy, which keeps cropping up especially in discussions of kinship and gender, between *social* and *biological* domains of relationship. This emerges as a central theme of Articles 27, 28 and 29.

SOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Dunbar, in Article 27, writes as a student of animal behaviour with an intimate knowledge of the elaborate social intrigues typical of everyday life in populations of non-human primates. He leaves us in no doubt that monkeys and apes, like human beings, are caught up in complex networks of relationship with others of their kind. Any one individual may indeed be simultaneously involved in several different networks. Yet such networks, for all their complexity, and for all the intensity of their constituent relationships, do not imply the existence of large or stable groupings. The company an animal keeps may be highly selective, and may vary from one moment to the next according to a host of situationally specific factors. Thus to be bound by relationships is not at all the same thing as to live in a group. In many animal species, including the so-called 'social' insects, birds and mammals, individuals cluster into aggregates of a size and permanence without parallel in the primate order, prior to a relatively late phase in the evolution of human society, yet within these aggregates there may be no relationships to speak of at all. Thus, explanations of why animals live in groups, for example in terms of the facilitation of co-operative foraging, defence of food resources or protection against predators, do not in themselves account for the presence and quality of relationships among their members. How then, are they to be explained? What is the source from which relationships spring?

To these questions, as Dunbar remarks, biological and social anthropologists are inclined to come up with rather different answers. One reason for

this lies in a certain disparity between their respective views of what a relationship *is*, and of how it is to be recognized. Social anthropologists discover relationships in the commitments and promises that people make towards one another, in their agreements and obligations, which they do not always live up to in actual practice. For biological anthropologists, on the other hand, the existence of a relationship is a matter of empirical observation, whenever it is found that the same individuals interact on numerous successive occasions, evidently with a knowledge, based on past experience, of each other's identity and character. Consequently, whereas the generative source of relationships lies, from a social anthropological point of view, in the dynamics of total social systems, from the viewpoint of biological anthropology it lies in the behavioural predispositions of individuals. Though these viewpoints need not be mutually exclusive, the former looks from the 'top down', the latter from the 'bottom up'. And this difference in perspective may be linked directly to the fact that each is situated within a different framework of interpretation. In the first, the challenge is to 'make sense' of people's behaviour by placing it in its social context of shared cultural understandings. The second, by contrast, seeks an underlying rationale for social behaviour in terms of its consequences for the survival and reproduction of the individuals concerned, regardless of what construction — if any — they may place on it.

This difference of approach is well illustrated by what Barnard, in Article 28, and Dunbar, in Article 27, have to say about the nature and significance of relations of kinship. Barnard's position is in close accord with that of mainstream social anthropology. Kinship, he argues, is not a fact of nature but is rather constituted within a specifically human discourse on social relationships. This discourse typically includes ideas about the sharing of bodily substance, as conceived within the indigenous theory of procreation. In Western societies, the substance of kinship has commonly been identified with blood (as in the notion of consanguinity), though nowadays this is giving way to a pseudo-scientific conception of genetic material. When people in these societies say that they are of one blood, or that they have inherited the same genes, their statements should be understood not literally, as having reference to a given, 'biological' reality, but rather metaphorically, as ways of talking about an experienced, social reality. In other words, kinship is 'biological' only insofar as 'biology' enters into the vernacular discourse on social relations. And it is in this light, too, that a social anthropologist would interpret the kinds of comments that people make, probably in all societies, about the appearance of children. A child may be said to resemble this parent or that, or to possess features that it has 'received' from certain more distant relatives. The purpose of such commentary, however, is not to discover evidence of actual genetic connection but to *place* the child, and confer upon it a specific identity, within a nexus of social relationships.

Yet Dunbar, resting his argument on the premises of evolutionary biology, reaches precisely the opposite conclusion! His objective is to show how

particular patterns and modes of relationship may have evolved through a process of variation under natural selection. To achieve this it is necessary to suppose, first, that manifest social behaviour is the output of a programme that every individual brings into its encounters with conspecifics, and second, that the constituent elements of this programme — commonly identified with genes — are replicable across generations. The mechanism of genetic replication is assumed to be sexual reproduction, though as Dunbar recognizes, the relation between 'genes', as units of heredity conceived in the abstract, and the actual genetic material in the chromosomes, is far from clear. According to the logic of natural selection, any behaviour that has the effect of increasing the representation, in future generations, of those genes of which it is the outward expression, will tend to become established. To demonstrate that a behaviour has this effect, by conferring a reproductive advantage on those who engage in it, is sufficient to account for its evolution. But granted that an animal may derive some benefit from its association with conspecifics, why should it choose to establish relationships only with *some* particular individuals, while others are avoided?

Sociobiological theory explains this selectivity, in part, on the grounds that, depending on their genealogical proximity, individuals will have a greater or lesser proportion of their genes in common. Hence the consequences of associating with a close relative, in terms of genetic replication, will differ from those of associating with a distant relative or a non-relative. However, if an individual is to associate preferentially with relatives, then it must have some mechanism for their identification. The perception of physical resemblances, according to Dunbar, furnishes just such a mechanism, and in the comments that people habitually make about children's likenesses to their elders ('Doesn't he have grandma's nose!'), we see it in operation. If this argument is correct, then comments of this kind, quite contrary to the social anthropological interpretation offered by Barnard, *do* have a forensic purpose: they are meant to draw attention to actual genetic connections. Such connections, virtually by definition, exist independently of, and prior to, any relationships at all. Thus whatever the people themselves may claim, they are predisposed to attend to physical resemblances not for what they reveal about the relationships within which children come into being as members of society, but for guidance on where to place their investments in succeeding generations. In other words, the configuration of social relations follows from — rather than provides a context for — the recognition of physical affinity.

What, then, makes a relationship a *kinship* relationship? Is it merely a matter of the choice of idiom in which people talk about it, or does kinship have an independent foundation in genetic relatedness? For the biological anthropologist, actual genetic connections are critical, since the evolutionary rationale for kin-based altruism rests on the presumption that individuals identified as potential beneficiaries do in fact share a substantial proportion of the altruist's genes. To the objection, commonly levelled by social anthropologists, that

cultural designations of kinship are arbitrarily superimposed upon genetic realities, the biologists' response is that their theory requires no more than a statistical correlation. So long as there is sufficient overlap between culturally perceived kinship and true genetic kinship, the theory should work. Social anthropologists, for their part, while not denying the facts of genetic connection, exclude them from their field of inquiry. Their concern, they say, is with the ways in which certain relationships come to be 'culturally constructed' as relations of kinship by virtue of their grounding in an indigenous biology of shared substance. If genetics figures at all in their discussions, it is as one particular instance of such a biology, namely that of the Western biomedical establishment. To what extent this biology is scientifically more 'correct' than others is not for them to judge.

Ask a social anthropologist to describe a relation of kinship, for some particular society, and the answer — as Barnard shows in Article 28 — is likely to come in two parts. Consider, for example, the relationship between a father and his son. First, there is a set of expectations surrounding the proper performance of fatherhood, as there is attached to being a good son; in this sense 'father' and 'son' are roles to be enacted, and the relationship between them is inscribed within the framework of normative orientations of the society in question. This relationship is said (by the anthropological analyst) to be one of 'social' kinship. Second, members of the society claim that father and son are linked by a bond of substance, by virtue of the father's material contribution to the formation of the body of his child. This sharing of substance is said (again by the analyst) to be constitutive of a relation of 'biological' kinship. Armed with this distinction between the social and biological components of paternity, social anthropologists have gone on to draw attention to cases where one component can occur without the other: where a man extends fatherhood towards children who are not thought to share in his bodily substance; or denies it to children who are. None of this, however, has anything to do with actual genetic connection. Whether the individual who is socially identified as the donor of paternal substance is or is not the same as the true genetic father is irrelevant for social anthropological analysis. For the aim of such analysis is to understand the concordance between social and biological kinship as *culturally perceived.*

There is a remarkable parallel between the history of the biological/social distinction in the study of kinship relations, and that of the sex/gender distinction in the study of relations between men and women. In both cases, the distinction was drawn initially in order to emphasize the independence of socially defined role relationships from underlying biogenetic constraint. Just as the roles of 'father' and 'son' were held to have nothing to do with the genetic connection — if any — between their incumbents, so the expectations defining what it is to be a 'man' or a 'woman' were shown to vary widely from one society to another, lending support to the view that they are independent of innate predisposition. For any society, the distinction of gender — between men and women — was said to belong to a normative order, superimposed upon a given

biological substrate of male/female sex differences. While sex as biological fact was thus eliminated from the field of gender relations, it reappeared as a focus of social anthropological attention in quite another guise, as part of a discourse for talking about them. The need therefore arose to introduce a further analytic distinction, between sex as a fact of nature — a prerequisite for physiological reproduction — and 'Sex' as constituted within the cultural discourse on gender relations. The result, as Moore shows in Article 29, is the separation of sex, 'Sex' and gender; a trichotomy that has its precise counterpart in the field of kinship studies in the separation of biology as actual genetic connection, 'biology' as indigenous cultural discourse, and the structure of role relations on which this discourse comments.

This solution, though neat, is not entirely satisfactory. The problem lies in the very notion that the orders of gender and kinship are socially or culturally constructed upon the foundation of biological reality. Critics have pointed out that the recognition of sex differences as pre-existing in nature, independently of the constructions placed on them, belongs to a specifically Western ontology. In other words the distinction between sex and gender, as constituted respectively within the domains of nature and society, is itself the product of a particular set of discursive practices. By incorporating the distinction into its own theoretical apparatus, social anthropology has taken for granted what it should be seeking to explain. By and large, people in non-Western societies do not make this kind of distinction. Far from regarding sexual identities as ready-made, as though every new-born child came into the world completely and unalterably male or female, they hold that these identities are fashioned within life-cycle processes through the exchange and ingestion of male and female substances. Likewise, they would not accept the distinction, built into the framework of the anthropological analysis of kinship, between its biological and social components. Contrary to Western genetics, they would argue that the contributions of paternal and maternal substance that go to make up the body of a child are themselves delivered within the context of an ongoing set of nurturing relationships. In short, as they proceed through life, human beings are thought to incorporate into their very biological constitution the matrix of relationships that, at the same time, furnishes their identities as social persons.

It is tempting, as many anthropologists have done, to accommodate these non-Western views by regarding them as so many cultural constructions of reality, alternative to the Western one. This, however, will not do, for the simple reason that the Western ontology — which yields the distinctions both between sex and gender and between biological and social kinship — also underwrites the logic of cultural construction itself. Applying this logic, what are constituted within social processes are 'meanings' and 'understandings', that are added on to bodies that have been biogenetically pre-programmed in advance of their entry into the social arena. Through the reduction of 'biology' to genetics, human relationships are withdrawn from the real world in which

people dwell, as a preliminary to their reinscription on the level of its cultural representation. Thus individuals are perceived to exist in hermetic isolation, while relationships exist in the discourse. In this division between the discursive worlds of culture and naturally given, biogenetic reality, no conceptual space remains for the domain in which human beings live their lives through an active engagement with those around them. The relationships constitutive of this domain are indeed social, but they are no less 'real' or 'biological' for that. For in truth, no more than other animals do human beings come biologically ready-made, to be 'topped up' by culture. They rather emerge with their peculiar capacities, dispositions and intentions in the course of a process which, in the literature of biology and psychology, goes by the name of *development*. In this process, the contributions of other persons in the social environment are critical. And as Poole shows in Article 30, the rather belated recognition that human development is invariably embedded in contexts of social relations requires us to take a fresh look at the time-worn concepts of socialization and enculturation.

BECOMING A PERSON

Traditionally, the project of social anthropology has been distinguished from that of psychology in terms of a distinction between the *individual* and the *person*. In this division of intellectual labour, the nature of individual self-awareness, posited as a human universal, was to be studied by psychologists, while anthropologists focused on the person as a social being, formed within the normative framework of society and its relationships. Having thereby excluded the self as an aspect of human nature from their field of inquiry, anthropologists were able to turn their attention instead to issues of indigenous psychology. In a move strikingly similar to the developments reviewed above in the study of kinship and gender, they could claim that their concern was with the diverse ways in which notions of the self can be brought to bear in the cultural construction of personhood, rather than with the 'actual' psychological foundations of the self as a centre of individual experience. This move, however, leads to precisely the same impasse, in that the opposition between the individual (the psychological self) and the person (the social being), on which the logic of cultural construction depends, is itself constituted within a specifically Western discourse on nature and society. And again, people in non-Western societies seem to be telling us something quite different: namely that as agentive centres of awareness and experience, selves *become*, and that they do so within a matrix of evolving relationships with others. Personhood, in other words, is seen not as the imprint of society upon the pre-social self, but as the emergent form of the self as it develops within a context of social relations.

In Article 30, Poole advocates an approach to understanding the development of personal identity that would take this view as its starting point. To

characterize it as 'non-Western' is perhaps misleading, since several prominent social theorists, writing in the Western tradition of scholarship, have gone out of their way to stress the relational aspects of selfhood. Nevertheless, they have written against the grain of the doctrine of individualism which, for many, is the hallmark of the political philosophy with which 'the West' is popularly identified. Conscious of the dangers of importing assumptions based in this doctrine into their studies of non-Western societies, anthropologists have been inclined to portray these societies as holistic or socio-centric in orientation, and to deny the applicability of such notions as 'the individual' and 'individuality' for fear that they may be tainted by their association with individualism. This fear, as Poole points out, is misplaced. It is indeed essential to distinguish between an analytic notion of *individuality* and the various and shifting ideologies of *individualism* to be found in the history of Western discourse. For the former has to do with the ways in which people, in all societies, build unique identities for themselves and for one another out of their own particular experiences and life histories, and the histories of their mutual relationships. The individual of real life, equipped with such an identity, bears only a distant and problematic relation to the abstract, atomic individual as posited within the doctrine of individualism.

The recognition that individual selves *are* social in their very constitution not only dissolves the conventional dichotomy between social anthropology and psychology, but also has radical implications for our understanding of the process of socialization. It has been usual, in the past, to regard this process as one in which the child, initially without a social identity or presence of any kind, is gradually provided with the lineaments of personhood, in the shape of schemata for categorizing and positioning others in the social environment, and guidelines for appropriate action towards them. The acquisition of these schemata and guidelines has been taken to be a precondition for meaningful engagement with other persons, and hence for full participation in social life. This implies, however, that the process of learning that prepares the child for personhood can form no part of that life, and that to study this process is to investigate not the dynamics of social life itself but rather the psychodynamics of acquisition, by the immature individual, of the schemata that enable him or her to enter into it. Herein lies the principal explanation for the unfortunate separation between the psychological study of child development and the anthropological study of culture and social life. The failure, until recently, of developmental psychology to take account of the social context of learning has been matched, by and large, by an equal failure on the part of social anthropology to pay any attention to children and how they learn. Indeed it would be fair to say that in the majority of anthropological accounts, children are conspicuous by their absence.

Poole offers an approach to the rectification of this deficiency, though given the dearth of anthropological studies of child development, it is necessarily somewhat programmatic. Children, he argues, are not to be regarded as

passive recipients of social knowledge which 'descends' upon them from an authoritative source in society. On the contrary, they participate actively and creatively in the learning process. They do so by playing their own part in shaping the contexts in which learning occurs and knowledge is generated. Such interaction begins in earliest infancy, growing in complexity and sensitivity as the child's communicative competence increases, above all with the mastery of language. Learning, then, is not preliminary to involvement in the social world, for it is above all through such involvement – in the 'hands-on' experience of engaging with others in practical situations of everyday life – that the child learns. Far from providing a prelude, in the career of each individual, for his or her entry upon the social stage, these situations of interactive learning are the very sites from which social life unfolds. In clear contrast to the scenario of classical socialization theory, according to which children start from a position outside or on the margins of society, whence they must progressively work their way in, the view advanced here holds that children are launched at birth into the very centre of a social world. They learn, not in order to gain entry to this world, but to be able to make their way in it.

Nor does learning end with childhood. To be sure, childhood experience may have a formative quality, underwriting all that occurs in later life. But adult experience too, especially the experience of tutoring children, can be transformative. Indeed as Poole stresses, socialization is a process that carries on over an individual's entire lifetime. There is no point in the life-cycle at which socialization could be said to be 'complete', marking off the period of preparation from the attainment of full personhood. In a sense, then, socialization and social life are two sides of the same coin: on the one side, the enfolding of social relations in the experience and sensibility of the self; on the other, the unfolding of the self in social action.

Perhaps no aspect of socialization is more crucial than the acquisition of language, and in Article 31 DeBernardi presents a comprehensive review of the large literature concerning the social dimensions of language acquisition and use. Here a rather similar shift in perspective is evident to that described above, from a view of language as an abstract structure or code that is 'taken on', more or less unconsciously, by each new generation, to a view that gives a much greater weight to the processual and performative aspects of language use. In this latter view, language is regarded not as a pre-formed totality but rather as perpetually under construction within the dialogic contexts of everyday interaction, including interactions involving infants and young children. Though the effectiveness of linguistic communication depends on the existence of community-wide verbal conventions, such conventions do not come ready made but have continually to be worked at. Current conventions are the sedimented outcomes of the struggles of past generations to make themselves understood: thus words, as DeBernardi observes, condense a community's recollections of its past. This kind of approach requires that much greater attention be paid to the diversity of individual voices. Variations in

usage which, from a structuralist perspective, would be dismissed as merely idiosyncratic or as defects of performance, reappear as instances of language in the making. It is the tension between individual circumstance and common code, DeBernardi argues, that provides language with its historical dynamic, keeping it forever 'in play'. For language changes, even as we speak.

POLITICAL ECONOMY

Besides learning to speak, people in all societies must also learn to work, and this generally entails the acquisition of a specific set of practical skills, along with an understanding of the appropriate contexts for their deployment. Learning to work is thus one aspect of socialization, which Ortiz describes in Article 32. Her principal thesis is summed up in the statement that work is as much a social as it is a technological process. This point needs to be argued only because people in Western industrial societies – including many economists and social theorists – are inclined to believe that work is somehow excluded from the domain of social life. The reasons for this, as Ortiz shows, lie partly in the experience of industrialization itself, and partly in the way in which the meaning of work has been framed within the modern science of economics, whose concern is exclusively with the dynamics of commodity production. We may note the following points: first, that under conditions of industrial capitalism, workers labour not for themselves or their families but for employers who command both their capacities to labour and the instruments and raw materials needed for these capacities to be realized; second, that with the automation of production, manual skills tend to be replaced (albeit never completely) by the operation of machines; third, that in the mass production of commodities, the objects produced cease to be identified in any way with their producers; and finally, that with the separation of the 'workplace' from the 'home', the latter comes to be seen as a place of consumption rather than production. This, in turn, leads to the perception of 'housework' as an anomalous category.

Clearly in non-industrial societies, where these conditions do not obtain, the significance of work will be very different. For one thing, people retain control over their own capacity to work and over other productive means, and their activities are carried on in the context of their relationships with kin and community. Indeed their work may have the strengthening or regeneration of these relationships as its principal objective. For another thing, work calls for the exercise of specific skills which identify their possessors as belonging to the communities in which they were acquired. But it is not only by their skills that persons in non-industrial societies are identified; they are also known for what they produce. Through making things, people define themselves. Moreover there is no obvious criterion for distinguishing work from non-work. Many non-industrial societies lack any general term whose meaning would overlap with that of 'work' in the Western industrial context (and even in that

context, the term has manifold, often contradictory meanings). Instead, a host of more specific terms are used to denote the various life-sustaining tasks that people are called upon to perform. Thus work, in these societies, is embedded in social life to the extent of being virtually indistinguishable from it. Our modern tendency to see work as opposed to life, or to regard it as technological *rather than* social, is the product of a particular history in the Western world.

This history has also given rise to the notion of the 'economy' as a domain of activity separate from that of 'society', and operating exclusively on the basis of market or market-like principles. The sub-discipline of economic anthropology has emerged largely out of the attempt to show that where these principles do *not* operate, the activities not only of production and consumption but also of exchange, far from being external to society, are embedded in a social relational matrix. However as Gregory shows in Article 33, neither of the two major paradigms of Western economic thought – the 'commodity' paradigm of nineteenth century political economy and the 'goods' paradigm of twentieth century marginalism – was capable of addressing the questions raised by anthropological work in societies where wealth is evaluated and transacted according to principles other than those of the market. Classical political economy distinguished between values in use and in exchange: the former consist in the capacities of objects to fulfil human needs, the latter in the amounts of labour that went into their production. But the distinction was made simply in order to clear the way for an exclusive concern with exchange value, as it is revealed in contexts wherein objects are exchanged as marketable commodities. The neoclassical economists, for their part, did away with both these notions of value, replacing them with a single notion of *utility*, based not in the objective properties of the wealth items themselves but in the subjective preferences of individuals. This approach, apparently applicable to virtually any kind of exchange, offered the prospects of building a deductive theory of great generality and predictive power. Given a knowledge of individual preferences, and of the means available for fulfilling them, one could predict rational courses of action and their aggregate effects.

This theory, however, is quite indifferent to the particulars of social and historical circumstance, and seemed to offer little to anthropologists more interested in developing generalizations by induction, from a comparative analysis of the ways in which wealth is evaluated and distributed in different societies and periods. For them the commodity paradigm has always been more attractive, and the gradual accumulation of ethnographic data from fieldwork-based studies put them in the position of being able to address the questions that it had left unanswered, particularly about the nature of *non-commodity* exchange – ironically at a time when mainstream economists were abandoning the commodity paradigm in favour of the abstract formalism of the theory of goods. What made this possible, Gregory argues, was the development of a positive theory of non-commoditized wealth as consisting in gifts. Gifts have two crucial properties by which they may be distinguished

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from commodities: first, they are evaluated in terms of a qualitative rather than a quantitative standard (in other words, the principle of their ranking is ordinal rather than cardinal); second, their exchange does not entail any severance of the bond of identification with the persons exchanging them. Thus whereas the exchange of commodities establishes a quantitative relation between the things exchanged, that of gifts establishes a qualitative relation between the exchange partners. Indeed, every exchange of this latter kind is a moment in the constitution of a social relationship. Equipped with a theory of the gift, anthropologists were able to show how the character and significance of transactions, and the evaluation of the materials transacted therein, depend upon the kinds of relationships in which they are embedded.

A further feature of the classical approach to political economy that commended it to anthropological attention lay in its recognition of the ways in which exchange is underwritten by relations of power. The imbalances in exchange set up by these relations enable dominant élites to cream off the surpluses needed to finance their activities and legitimating institutions. In Article 34, Earle reviews the different sources of political power – social, military, ideological and economic – and considers their respective strengths and weaknesses. Social power, based on the ability to draw support from close kin, is necessarily limited in scope, since the strength of support naturally wanes with increasing genealogical distance. Military power, based on threat and intimidation, or on the direct use of physical force, is perhaps more effective but also more difficult to control, since a military cadre can all too easily turn against a leader who has grown too dependent on it. Ideological power is established through the promulgation of belief in the natural right to rule of an élite, backed by religious sanction. But this, too, has its limitations, for power of this kind can be used as much to resist domination as to support it. The final source of power, namely economic, lies in controlling access to the means of production and distribution of necessary goods, whether staple foodstuffs or prestige-conferring valuables.

In different societies, or among competing factions within the same society, élites have based their dominance on different sources of power. However these sources, Earle argues, are neither independent of one another nor equivalent in the control they afford. Of all the four sources, the economic is most fundamental, since it alone can provide a stable basis for the construction and expansion of complex, politically centralized societies. This is not only because of the ease with which economic processes can be controlled (especially with the intensification of the regime of subsistence production), but also because the products of the economy can be reinvested in order to secure control over other sources of power. Social power can be extended by financing strategic marriages, military power by supporting and arming the cadre, and ideological power by financing religious institutions and ceremonies which uphold the legitimacy of élite authority. It is by examining the historical interconnections between the sources of power, Earle contends, that we can best

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understand the evolution of complexity in human society, from the small, intimate bands of hunter-gatherers, through tribal polities and chiefdoms, to large and highly stratified urban states.

DISPUTE, NEGOTIATION AND SOCIAL ORDER

Political anthropology has its roots in the problem of order. Western philosophers have looked to the institutions of the state as providing a regulative framework within which individuals could peaceably pursue their own legitimate interests. It was assumed that in the absence of such a framework, social life would dissolve into chaos, a war of all against all. Such, indeed, was supposed by many to have been the lot of humankind in its primordial condition of savagery. Anthropological studies among peoples without a state organization, or anything equivalent to it, revealed however that they did not lead disordered lives. Nor did they experience levels of conflict significantly greater than those encountered in state-organized societies. The problem was thus to explain how order in these societies is established and maintained. If behaviour is guided by rules or norms, in what authority are they vested and how are they enforced? And how are disputes handled when they do arise? In Western societies, the answers to these questions come under a single rubric, that of 'law'. The term is used to refer both to a set of codified rules and regulations — backed by the authority of the judiciary — for people to live by, to an institutional apparatus through which government can exercise its role in steering human affairs, and to a set of procedures for the adjudication of disputes. Is there, then, anything equivalent to 'law' in non-Western, and especially in stateless, societies? In Article 35, Roberts reviews the history of attempts by both anthropologists and legal specialists to address this question.

He divides this history into five phases. The first is characterized by the attempts of late nineteenth century scholars to discover the primitive antecedents of what they perceived as an evolved state of modernity. In the second phase, evolutionary questions were replaced by functional ones, as the first generation of anthropologists to have conducted intensive fieldwork asked how the institutions of the societies they studied worked to maintain order and stability. The third phase was marked by a shift of focus from the maintenance of order to processes of dispute, and led to a number of advances in the understanding, for example, of how settlements may be reached without involving third-party adjudication, of the role of litigation in struggles for political power, of the relations between rules and outcomes, and of the differences between legal disputation and physical fighting as mechanisms of conflict resolution. In the fourth phase, anthropologists and historians embarked on a highly critical reappraisal of earlier ethnographic depictions of the so-called 'customary law' of native peoples. This law, it was argued, bore only a tenuous relation to precolonial arrangements, and was largely invented by the colonial authorities, with some assistance from their anthropological advisers, as an

instrument of domination by indirect rule. In the fifth and final phase, this radical critique has given way to a more measured view which recognizes the co-existence of a plurality of loosely bounded normative orders, situated at a number of 'legal levels' from metropolitan centres to local communities. The problem, in this 'legal pluralist' approach, is to understand the linkages between what goes on at these different levels. Yet the applicability of the concept of 'law' to normative orders which lack the attributes of state law, that is where the order is not tied to a command structure, remains problematic. In the last analysis, Roberts suggests, what is 'legal' about the anthropology of law may have less to do with its subject matter than with the fact that the majority of its practitioners are now lawyers rather than anthropologists!

While people may sort out their individual differences by verbal contestation or by actually fighting, the same applies at the collective level as well. Collective violence — whatever its causes, which are clearly multiple — typically takes the form of warfare; and the threat or reality of war brings its own countermeasures by way of attempts to promote common security through negotiated settlement. In Article 36, Rubinstein considers the relevance of anthropological understanding in tackling the many large-scale conflicts, affecting the lives of millions of people, that are endemic in the contemporary world. This entails a significant change of perspective, in that diplomats, analysts and politicians who are professionally charged with negotiation at this level are not so much the subjects as the consumers of social scientific research. Rubinstein shows that the approach adopted by these professionals, above all in the Western defence establishment, rests on a set of highly artificial assumptions about how people behave. Ironically known as 'political realism', this approach envisages a world in which the actors are nation states, and in which actions follow the predictions of formal econometric or game-theoretic models, calculated on the basis of a knowledge of objective social scientific facts to maximize economic or military pay-offs. Thus no account is taken of local or indigenous interests below the level of the state, or of the influences of social and cultural experience on people's perceptions and actions, or of sources of power other than the military and economic (for example what Rubinstein calls 'normative power' — roughly equivalent to Earle's concept of 'ideological power' — which can furnish a significant means of resistance against economic and military might). Where political realism *does* take cultural considerations into account, these are typically based in crude stereotypes of how other people behave, insensitive to both history and context. In their application, such stereotypes generate chronic misunderstanding. Good negotiating practice, Rubinstein argues, should be informed by a proper appreciation of the cognitive and emotional force of symbolic forms. This is no minor plea: the future security of entire populations depends on it.

Béteille's discussion, in Article 37, of the premisses of inequality in human societies takes us back to the problem of order. A central question in the

anthropology of law, as we have seen, is whether any framework of norms and standards can be maintained without a system of imposed regulation: that is, whether there can be 'order' without 'command'. Another way of posing the same question is to ask whether there can be 'society' without 'inequality'. Is an egalitarian society possible, even in theory? The answer, of course, depends on what is meant by society, and by equality. On the face of it the trajectory of social evolution, as laid out by Earle in Article 34, from hunter-gatherer bands through agrarian civilizations to modern nation states, seems to involve a steady increase in inequality until a relatively recent point was reached, marked by the transition to modernity (politically speaking, from aristocracy to democracy), whereupon the trend went into reverse, and orders that were rigidly hierarchical in both ideal and fact gave way to societies premissed upon a formal commitment to equality. Yet it would be absurd to suggest that the equality of the hunter-gatherer band remotely resembles that of the modern industrial state.

Indeed these inequalities rest on entirely different principles: the first on the lack of enduring commitments and dependencies among persons who are nevertheless well-known to one another; the second on an individualistic conception of the person as the singular yet anonymous embodiment of a universal humanity. Those who hold that egalitarian society is an impossibility are inclined to dismiss the evidence from hunter-gatherer societies on the grounds that in the absence of any framework of normative obligation, or of anything that might be recognized as 'social structure', they can scarcely be recognized as societies at all. The very existence of society, they argue, depends on the presence of *rules*, and since it is in the nature of rules that they are sometimes violated, giving rise to disputes that require adjudication, situations are bound to arise which call for the exercise of power by some individuals over others. By this argument, inequality is a necessary condition for ordered social life. The argument, however, can also be turned on its head, such that systems of rules, far from calling for the exercise of power, function as part of an apparatus of domination through which power achieves its effects. The more, then, that power is concentrated in the hands of a dominant élite, the more elaborate the framework of rules and regulations imposed upon the subject population.

When it comes to modern nation states, it is invariably the case that ideological commitments to equality are combined with stark practical inequalities. Citizens may, according to the democratic ideal, be equal *before* the law, but they are very far from equal *after* it. However as Béteille shows, the manner of their inequality will depend upon whether the public commitment is to an ideal of *competitive* equality (judged by the balance of opportunity) or *distributive* equality (judged by the balance of income or result). In the first case, everyone is supposed to have the same chances to compete in the 'market place' of civil society, but due to inherent variations of individual ability, some are said to do better for themselves than others. The successful rise to the top,

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the unsuccessful sink to the bottom, whilst the majority settle somewhere in between, leading in aggregate to the observed pattern of social stratification. In the second case, the state intervenes to ensure equality of results through an enforced redistribution from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Yet it can do so only because of a concentration of power at the centre. Thus the very promotion of distributive equality sets up further inequalities, experienced as constraints on civil liberties.

Two further aspects of Béteille's argument warrant special emphasis. The first is that while people in society may differ in all kinds of ways – such as in gender, physical appearance, occupation and lifestyle – not all differences count as inequalities. What converts difference into inequality is a *scale of evaluation*, and such scales may vary within as well as between societies. In stressing the possible existence of multiple and partially contradictory scales within the same society, Béteille echoes a point also made by Moore (Article 29) with regard to the evaluation of gender differences, and by Roberts (Article 35) with regard to different fields of law. Second, whether or not a society appears egalitarian will depend to a certain extent on the scale at which it is defined. Large, highly stratified societies may encompass communities that are, internally, markedly egalitarian; conversely small-scale, egalitarian societies may be encompassed within wider social systems structured by relations of pronounced inequality.

This point applies with equal force at a global level. To the extent that Western societies have achieved a basic level of affluence for all, they have done so at the cost of the other societies around the world that they have subjugated and exploited. How they did so is the subject of Worsley's account, in Article 38, of the history of colonial expansion, an expansion that laid the foundations for the contemporary world order. This account effectively demolishes any naïve, evolutionist model of development that would portray the history of non-European peoples as one which began with first European contact, and which has gradually raised them from an original, primitive or traditional condition to a position where they can take their fair share of the benefits of modernity. For one thing, the societies first encountered by Europeans varied from small stateless polities to great empires of a scale, wealth and sophistication far exceeding anything that had been achieved in Europe itself. In many parts of the world, European supremacy was by no means a foregone conclusion, and was achieved only after long and bloody conflicts which often set native peoples at war with one another. For another thing, far from encouraging the development of local industries in the territories they controlled, the colonial powers blocked such development, in order to guarantee for Western industry its supply of raw materials and markets for its goods. Today, in a post-colonial world, key resources remain concentrated in the 'developed' nations of Europe, North America and of course the Far East, while war and starvation stalk the continent of Africa, and indigenous people are being wiped out in the name of progress in parts of South America and

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South-east Asia. At the same time, the West is becoming painfully aware of the disastrous environmental consequences of its own expansion. Notwithstanding rumours of a new world order, humankind has still a long way to go before it reaches the far side of history, if indeed it ever will.

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