

societies the same issue often emerges over rights to the carcass of a successfully hunted game animal. In very many of these societies the carcass is recognized as being individually owned and yet at the same time the various members of the camp in which the owner lives have socially recognized rights to a share in the meat which cannot be refused by the owner. In looking at the political relevance of property rights, the important question for us is not so much whether these rights are held by individuals or by groups, although this is a matter to which we will return, but the more fundamental question of the scale of equality and inequality in access by men, women and children to the range of material things that are desired and valued in hunting and gathering societies. We are concerned with the basis for the various equalities and inequalities that exist and with some of their possible historical trajectories. In our search for answers we must start with some comments about the organization of production in these societies.

Low production targets

In a famous paper at the 'Man the hunter' conference in 1966 Sahlins argued that hunter-gatherers, far from having difficulty in obtaining their material requirements and desires, obtained them rather easily and allowed themselves much leisure by setting their targets low and by limiting their material wants to those that are well within their capacity to achieve (Sahlins 1968: 85-9; 1974: 1-39). Much work has been stimulated by the theory over the years and many comments have been made, some favourable and some not. Certainly not all hunter-gatherers are willing to set their targets so low that in consequence they find tolerable the degree of hardship suggested in one of his examples (1968: 89). And again much more effort is, at some times and in some societies, made to obtain people's requirements than this theory predicts.

But, if two provisos are made, the crux of the theory has, we believe, stood up well to twenty years of additional research. The first proviso is that it applies very much better to hunter-gatherer societies with immediate-return systems — that is, in brief, with economies in which people usually obtain an immediate yield for their labour, use this yield with minimal delay and place minimal emphasis on property rights — than it does to hunter-gatherer societies with delayed-return systems — in which people place more emphasis on property rights, rights which are usually but not always linked with delayed yields on labour (for a more detailed characterization of these types of economy, see Woodburn 1980; 1982a; 1982b). Contemporary hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems include, in Africa, the Mbuti, the !Kung, the Nharo and the Hadza; in South Asia, the Paliyan, the Hill Pandaram and the Naiken; in South-east Asia, the Batek. Most north-

at do konce rickano

EKONOMIE

ern hunter-gatherers have delayed-return systems and so, too, do Australian Aborigines. All societies with pastoral or agricultural modes of subsistence have delayed-return systems. The second proviso is that difficulties must be recognized in the definition of material wants — those wants that according to the theory are set at a low level that is well within people's capacity to achieve. The difficulty arises because of the undoubted fact that people in these societies almost never obtain nearly as much of the more desirable foods — especially meat and honey — as they would like. And there is a clearly articulated desire for more arrows, more axes, more beads, more clothing, more tobacco, and so on. As many anthropologists who have worked in societies with immediate-return systems will testify, people's demand for food and other goods from anthropologists, as well as from members of their own society, is very great, indeed at times almost insatiable (Woodburn 1982a: 449, n.11). The point is not that wants are set low, but rather that production targets are. Demand is not focused on greater production. It does not, for example, lead to pressure to persuade those who hunt little to spend more time and effort on hunting. It is instead strongly focused on the requirement that people who at some particular moment happen to have more of something than they immediately need should carry out their moral obligation to share it out. The emphasis is on what was, at the conference from which the chapters in this volume are drawn, called demand-sharing. People do not wait meekly for their share, but make what are at times loud and explicit claims. Hunters, in some at least of these societies, are expected to deprecate their own success and may even choose to give up hunting for a while lest they be suspected of attempting to build up their status (see, for example, Lee 1984: 48-50, 151-7).

In all known hunter-gatherer societies with immediate-return systems, and in many, but not all, hunter-gatherer societies with delayed-return systems, people are almost always able to meet their nutritional needs very adequately without working long hours. In setting their production targets low, people are not normally running significant risks of endangering their health and welfare, not even, because of the emphasis on sharing, the health and welfare of the weak and potentially vulnerable.

The combination of low production targets, little difficulty for individuals in meeting their nutritional needs and strong pressures for immediate use of food and of artefacts means that, in comparison with other types of society, not many material things are held and even fewer are accumulated over time.

Definition of property rights

How, then, are property rights organized? We must first define what

Sahlins - Bird David / Ingold debate on Sahlins, 17

NOTES ON THE ORIGINAL AFFLUENT SOCIETY - M. SAHLINS / 1968

Richard A. Lee and Irven DeVore (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1968), 85-99. Copyright © 1968 by Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc.

If economics is the dismal science, the study of hunting-gathering economies must be its most advanced branch. Almost totally committed to the argument that life was hard in the Paleolithic, our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving the student to wonder not only how hunters managed to make a living, but whether, after all, this was living? The specter of starvation stalks the stalker in these pages. His technical incompetence is said to enjoin continuous work just to survive, leaving him without respite from the food quest and without the leisure to "build culture." Even so, for his efforts he pulls the "lowest grades in thermodynamics—less energy harnessed per capita per year than any other mode of production. And in treatises on economic development, he is condemned to play the role of bad example, the so-called "subsistence economy."

It will be extremely difficult to correct this traditional wisdom. Perhaps then we should phrase the necessary revisions in the most shocking terms possible: that this was, when you come to think of it, the original affluent society. By common understanding an affluent society is one in which all the people's wants are easily satisfied; and though we are pleased to consider this happy condition the unique achievement of industrial civilization, a better case can be made for hunters and gatherers, even many of the marginal ones spared to ethnography. For wants are "easily satisfied," either by producing much or desiring little, and there are, accordingly, two possible roads to affluence. The Calbraithian course makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies, that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable. Thus the gap between means and ends can eventually be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the extent that "urgent" goods became abundant. But there is also a Zen solution to scarcity and affluence beginning from premises opposite from our own, that human material ends are few and finite and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty, though perhaps only a low standard of living. That I think describes the hunters.

The traditional dismal view of the hunter's fix is pre-anthropological. It goes back to the time Adam Smith was writing, and maybe to a time before anyone was writing. But anthropology, especially evolutionary anthropology, found it congenial, even necessary theoretically, to adopt the same tone of reproach. Archeologists and ethnologists had become Neolithic revolutionaries, and in their enthusiasm for the revolution found serious shortcomings in the Old (Stone Age) Regime. Scholars extolled a Neolithic Great Leap Forward. Some spoke of a changeover from human effort to domesticated energy sources, as if people had been liberated by a new labor-saving device, although in fact the basic power resources remained exactly the same, plants and animals, the development occurring rather in techniques of appropriation (i.e., domestication). Moreover, archeological research was beginning to suggest that the decisive gains came in stability of settlement and gross economic product, rather than productivity of labor).

But evolutionary theory is not entirely to blame. The larger economic context in which it operates, "as if by an invisible hand," promotes the same dim conclusions about the hunting life. Scarcity is the peculiar obsession of a business economy, the calculable condition of all who participate in it. The market makes freely available a dazzling array of products all these "good things" within a man's reach—but never his grasp, for one never has enough to buy everything. To exist in a market economy is to live out a double tragedy, beginning in inadequacy and ending in deprivation. All economic activity starts from a position of shortage: whether as producer, consumer, or seller of labor, one's resources are insufficient to the possible

uses and satisfactions. So one comes to a conclusion—"you pay your money and you take your choice." But then, every acquisition is simultaneously a deprivation, for every purchase of something is a denial of something else that could have been had instead. (The point is that if you buy one kind of automobile, say a Plymouth fastback, you cannot also have a Ford Mustang—and I judge from the TV commercials that the deprivation involved is more than material.) Inadequacy is the judgment decreed by our economy, and thus the axiom of our economics: the application of scarce means against alternate ends. We stand sentenced to life at hard labor. It is from this anxious vantage that we look back on the hunter. But if modern man, with all his technical advantages, still hasn't got the wherewithal, what chance has this naked savage with his puny bow and arrow? Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and Paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance.

Scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We might entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and bow and arrow are adequate to that end. A fair case can be made that hunters often work much less than we do, and rather than a grind the food quest is intermittent, leisure is abundant, and there is more sleep in the daytime per capita than in any other conditions of society. (Perhaps certain traditional formulae are better inverted: the amount of work per capita increases with the evolution of culture and the amount of leisure per capita decreases.) Moreover, hunters seem neither harassed nor anxious. A certain confidence, at least in many cases, attends their economic attitudes and decisions. The way they dispose of food on hand, for example—as if they had it made.

This is the case even among many present marginal hunters—who hardly constitute a fair test of Paleolithic economy but something of a supreme test. Considering the poverty in which hunter and gatherers live in theory, it comes as a surprise that Bushmen who live in the Kalahari enjoy "a kind of material plenty" (Marshall, 1961, p. 243). Marshall is speaking of non-subsistence production; in this context her explication seems applicable beyond the Bushmen. She draws attention to the technical simplicity of the non-subsistence sector: the simple and readily available raw materials, skills, and tools. But most important, wants are restricted: a few people are happy to consider few things their good fortune. The restraint is imposed by nomadism. Of the hunter, it is truly said that this wealth is a burden (at least for his wife). Goods and mobility are therefore soon brought into contradiction, and to take liberties with a line of Lattimore's, the pure nomad remains a poor nomad. It is only consistent with their mobility, as many accounts directly say, that among hunters needs are limited, avarice inhibited, and—Warner (1937 [1958], p. 137) makes this very clear for the Murngin—portability is a main value in the economic scheme of things.

- 1) In Lee's paper he reported that productive members of !Kung Bushman camps spend two to three days per week in subsistence. We have heard similar comments in other papers at the symposium. Hadza women were said to work two hours per day on the average in gathering food, and one concludes from James Woodburn's excellent film that Hadza men are much more preoccupied with games of chance than with chances of game.

In addition, evidence on hunter-gatherers' economic attitudes and decisions should be brought to bear. Harassment is not implied in the descriptions of their nonchalant movements from camp to camp, nor indeed is the familiar condemnations of their laziness. A certain issue is posed by exasperated comments on the prodigality of hunters, their inclination to make a feast of everything on hand; as if, one Jesuit said of the Montagnais, "the game they were to hunt was shut up in a stable" (Le Jeune's Relation of 1634, in Kenton, 1927, 1, p. 182). "Not the slightest thought of, or care for, what the morrow may bring forth," wrote Spencer and Gillen (1899, p. 53).

SAHLINS

29.1.98

What's work -> what's not? included child-care? criticism by Bird-Daoud

Two interpretations of this supposed lack of foresight are possible: either they are fools, or they are not worried—that is, as far as they are concerned, the morrow will bring more of the same. Rather than anxiety, it would seem the hunters have a confidence born of affluence, of a condition in which all the people's wants (such as they are) are generally easily satisfied. This confidence does not desert them during hardship. It can carry them laughingly through periods that would try even a Jesuit's soul, and worry him so that—as the Indians warn—he could become sick. EWA.

confidence in the capacity of the environment to support them, and in their own ability to extract their livelihood from it

(19) from it

BIRD-DAVID

Sahlins offered two promising cultural propositions. The first was that affluence is a culture-specific relation between material wants and means and that hunter-gatherers achieve it by reducing their material wants through cultural processes: ("Want not, lack not.") This would have been a good starting point from which to explore the ideas of hunter-gatherers in relation to their economic conduct

Sahlins's second cultural proposition was, essentially, that hunter-gatherers have confidence in their environment and that their economic conduct makes sense in relation to that confidence. In "Notes on the Original Affluent Society" he put this boldly, arguing that "a certain confidence, at least in many cases, attends their economic attitudes and decisions. The way they dispose of food on hand, for example—as if they had it made"

Sahlins did not, I think, go back on the explanatory importance of hunter-gatherers' confidence in their environment. He simply laid his bet on another proposition which he had come to believe would make his case more strongly. Reputed to be central and crucial to "The Original Affluent Society," this proposition was that hunter-gatherers work an average of three to five hours per adult per day. In retrospect, and taking into account the recent work discussed briefly above, it is clear that he bet on the weaker horse.

[SAHLINS' ARGUMENT THAT] if hunter-gatherers could gain an adequate livelihood by working so little, it was obvious that they could easily get what they wanted and did not want more than they could easily get, and, furthermore, it was obvious ("reasonable") that they had confidence in their environment. Thus, Sahlins centered his concluding theory on the ecological proposition, which should not have been offered (since there was neither sufficient evidence nor any theoretical need for it), and abandoned the cultural propositions.

It is as a result of this that he provided a theory of abundance with cost (owing to ecological dictates) when he had set out to offer the opposite, a theory of affluence without abundance (owing to cultural influences).

I would argue, however, that in drawing attention to the explanatory power of hunter-gatherers' trust in their environment, Sahlins did point the way towards a culturally oriented theory of hunter-gatherers' economic behaviour. He was on the threshold of what can now be pursued by using the culturalist method of economic analysis.

The Cosmic Economy of Sharing

Here I discuss a closely related metaphorical model—the cosmic economy of sharing—in relation to subsistence activities in the context of a comparison between the Nayaka and two other groups with immediate-return systems, the Mbuti of Zaire and the Batek of Malaysia. Each group has animistic notions which attribute life and consciousness to natural phenomena, including the forest itself and parts of it such as hilltops, tall trees, and river sources. I shall examine the way in which they construct their relationship with these agents—at once natural and human-like—by looking eclectically at their ritual and myth and their everyday discourse and conduct and by paying special attention to the metaphors which they use. Four features in particular are prominent:

First, the natural (human-like) agencies socialize with the hunter-gatherers. The Mbuti *molimo* festival, for example, is, in fact, precisely about this: the Forest visits the Mbuti camp, plays music, and sings with the people (Turnbull 1961). The Batek similarly say that the supernatural spirits, called *hala'*, "come to earth merely for the pleasure of sharing a good singing session with the Batek." During the fruit season, Batek frequently sing for—and with—the natural spirits (Endicott 1979:219).

The Nayaka confine the merriment of a communal get-together with the natural agencies to a festival normally held once a year. However, throughout this festival, which lasts 24 hours, they converse, dance, sing, eat, and even share cigarettes with natural-cum-ancestral spirits, which they invoke by shamanistic performances.

Second, the natural agencies give food and gifts to everyone, regardless of specific kinship ties or prior reciprocal obligations. The Mbuti, for example, explicitly say that "the forest gives them . . . food and shelter, warmth and clothing" (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:253; 1978:165). They view game, honey, and other natural foods as "gifts" (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:161, 180, 277; 1961:61).

Third, the people regard themselves as "children of" the forest, the term connoting generic ties rather than simply bonds of emotion and care. For example, not only do Mbuti often refer to the forest as "father" and "mother" (Turnbull 1965:252; cf. Mosko 1987) and say that it "gives them . . . affection" (1965:253) but also they describe it as the source of all spiritual matter and power, including the vital essence of people's lives

Finally, these groups not only depict their ties with the natural agencies as ties of sharing between relatives but also explain experiences which could be seen to be at odds with this cultural representation in its own terms, as temporary, accidental, and remediable exceptions. The Mbuti, for example, say that mishaps occur when the forest is asleep. Then they have to awaken it by singing and "draw the forest's attention to the immediate needs of its children" (Turnbull 1961:87; 1976

we do with our "nature-culture" diholomy. They view their world as an integrated entity. While many other non-Western peoples view the world in this fashion, it seems that hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems distinctively view their ties with the natural agencies in terms of visiting and sharing relationships. We can say that their world—according to the metaphorical template carried by the image of sharing—is a cosmic system of sharing which embraces both human-to-human and nature-to-human sharing. The two kinds of sharing are constituents of a cosmic economy of sharing.

First, as in the case of human-to-human sharing, they care about going on forays just as they do about the value of their products. For example, on some days they collect items of no immediate use and of no great value, and, having collected something, return to the camp, even in the middle of the day. A concern with the activity itself—as much as, and sometimes more than, with its yield—is even more conspicuous when people engage temporarily in other subsistence activities. They continue to go on expeditions in the forest every now and then, even though they often collect little or nothing at all and could do without it.

Second, like sharing, hunting and gathering are social events and contexts for socializing. The Batek, for example, do not "view work as a burden. . . . Most men and women approach their economic activities enthusiastically" (K. L. Endicott 1980:650). "W-

Third, as in human-to-human sharing, seeing constitutes a crucial moment in hunting and gathering activities.⁵ These hunter-gatherers tend to appropriate what they see rather than to search for something they want.

In the case of these hunter-gatherers, the assumption of abundance has the same function. It is consistent with their view of the natural environment as a sharing partner, which implies that as human agents appropriate their shares they secure further sharing. The assumption of scarcity is consistent with Westerners' mechanistic view of the natural environment, which implies that in the course of time, as human agents use up resources, the total stock is depleted.

INGOLD

p. 41-42

TIM INGOLD

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, Roscoe Building, Brunswick St., Manchester M13 9PL, England. 21 VIII 91

This excellent article should be prescribed as an antidote for all anthropology courses for which "The Original Affluent Society" is required reading. I am so much in agreement with Bird-David's arguments that I shall limit my comments to one suggestion and one reservation, which is that her commitment to a "culturalist" account prevents her from bringing out the more radical implications of her own argument.

My suggestion concerns two terms which recur throughout Bird-David's presentation, as indeed they do in Sahlins's text, and which are surely as crucial to the whole argument as is the concept of sharing. These terms are "trust" and "confidence" and they are used to characterize the attitude that hunter-gatherers are said to have towards the environment and its present and future capacity to provide them with their means of subsistence. Sahlins uses the terms freely, as virtual synonyms (e.g., 1972:29, where they appear in consecutive sentences), and so does Bird-David. I suggest that they be distinguished, at least for purposes of analysis, and that the distinction will help us to put our finger on the most important respect in which Bird-David's portrayal of hunter-gatherer orientations towards the environment differs from that of Sahlins.

In making the distinction between confidence and trust, I follow the lead of (Luhmann) (1988). (Confidence) he suggests, is what enables us to get by in a world full of unforeseen and unconsidered dangers. It presupposes no engagement, no active involvement on our part, with these potential sources of danger, so that when trouble does strike it is attributed to forces external to the field of our own relationships, forces which just happen to set the "outside world," under its own momentum, on a collision course with our expectations. This, I think, is a fair representation of the way in which Sahlins depicts the hunter-gatherer attitude to nature, conceived as a world "out there," external to the world of human relationships (society) and subject to ups and downs regardless of human actions and dispositions towards it. Nature goes its own way, and if it yields or fails to yield it is not because it has the hunter-gatherer in mind. And the hunter-gatherer has to assume that it will yield, for the alternative—in Luhmann's (1988:97) words—"is to withdraw expectations without having anything with which to replace them."

Trust, by contrast, presupposes an active, prior engagement with the agencies and entities of the environment on which we depend; it is an inherent quality of our relationships with them. To trust others is to act with them in mind, on the expectation that they will do likewise—responding in ways favourable to us—so long as we do nothing to curb their autonomy to act otherwise. This peculiar combination of dependency and autonomy is, I believe, the essence of hunter-gatherer sharing, and by Bird-David's account—which could readily be corroborated with data from societies other than the ones she describes—it equally characterizes people's relationships with nonhuman constituents of the environment. These constituents, imbued with personal powers, are indeed supposed to act with the people in mind. So long as they are treated with respect and consideration, they may be expected to act benevolently. But by the same token, they have the power to withhold if any attempt is made to coerce more than they are prepared to provide. Coercion, the attempt to extract by force, represents a betrayal of the trust that underwrites the willingness to give.

The contrast I have drawn may be summarized as follows: Sahlins uncritically accepts the "Western" view of the environment as a world of nature outside of, and opposed to, the human world of society and its interests; moreover, he allows this view to inform his own characterization of hunter-gatherer attitudes towards the environment, epitomized in the notion of confidence. Bird-David correctly recognizes that for hunter-gatherers themselves the environment is not "nature" in this Western sense but rather the world as it is gathered within the ambit of an all-embracing nexus of personalized relationships whose quality is aptly conveyed by the notion of trust. This contrast, however, brings me to my reservation about Bird-David's argument. Despite her welcome suggestion that a proper recognition of the hunter-gatherer view "can help us loosen slightly the bonds of our own Western ways of viewing the world," the kind of "culture-sensitive" analysis that she offers—set up as it is in opposition to naturalistic, "ecological" models of hunter-gatherer life—actually has the opposite effect.

Hunter-gatherers do not, as Westerners are inclined to do, draw a Rubicon separating human beings from all non-human agencies, ascribing personhood exclusively to the former whilst relegating the latter to an inclusive category of things. For them there are not two worlds, of persons (society) and things (nature), but just one world—one environment—saturated with personal powers and embracing both human beings, the animals and plants on which they depend, and the landscape in which they live and move. In the culture-sensitive, anthropological account, however, what is taken to be literally true of relationships among humans is assumed to be only metaphorically true of dealings with the non-human environment. Thus it is said that sharing, an accurate description of what goes on between human members of a hunter-gatherer band, provides the people with a metaphor for expressing their relations with "nature." In the one case it belongs to the language of the objective account (of a social reality), in the other it becomes incorporated into the language of subjective representation, superimposed upon the objective reality of nature. The Western dichotomy between society and nature is thereby reproduced despite the hunter-gatherer's insistence on its dissolution. Nature, we say, does not really share with people (as people really share with one another in society). We know, from scientific ecology, what nature is really like. Hunter-gatherers' representations may be appealing and congenial, but they have got it wrong.

I suggest that we start again from the opposite premise, that (they have got it right)—in other words, that the notion of trust correctly captures the quality of relations that hunter-gatherers have with constituents of their environment and that it is manifested just as well in transactions with other humans that we might describe as sharing as in transactions with non-human constituents that we might describe as hunting and gathering. What we need, then, is not a culture-sensitive account to replace a naturalistic ecology, for, as we have seen, the former—ostensibly couched in the language of metaphorical representations—actually presupposes the possibility of an alternative, literal account of the natural world that the latter purports to deliver. Rather, we need a new kind of ecological anthropology that would take as its starting point the active, perceptual engagement of human beings with the constituents of their world. And the first step in its establishment must be to dissolve the facile identification of "the environment" with "nature" as a world out there, given independently of human involvement. For hunter-gatherers as for the rest of us, life is given in engagement, not in disengagement, and it is in that very engagement that the real world at once ceases to be "nature" and becomes an environment for people.