

4.

INSTITUTIONAL ALTERNATIVES

In the last chapter, we examined how human societies can be analyzed in terms of their basic components: matter, energy, and information. This examination helped reveal both the distinctive characteristics which make our species unique, and how, in spite of this uniqueness, we are still part of the total system of nature. This was, in a sense, a view of our species from the outside in. In this chapter, we will attempt to view societies from the inside out, and examine how people meet their needs through society.

Our approach will parallel that of the functionalists when they discuss the "functional prerequisites of society." However, whereas the superorganic mystics see these as needs of society, we will deal with them as human needs—for food, shelter, sex, affection, enjoyment, and a sense of meaning—which people meet through definite social relationships. The various complexes of social relationships through which people meet their needs as social beings are known as institutions. The dominant institutions of modern bourgeois society are the market, the state, the family, and the church.

The market is the key economic institution which regulates production, exchange, and distribution. The state is the political institution concerned with the exercise of power. The family is the kinship institution concerned with reproduction. The church is the religious institution concerned with our relation to the sacred and supernatural.

It must be noted here that although economic, political, kinship, and religious institutions are relatively discrete in our own society, in other societies they are not. The uji, or clans, of protohistoric Japan, like many other unilineal descent groups around the world, controlled land and labor, maintained law and order, regulated marriage and reproduction, and were united by common worship. They were thus simultaneously economic, political, and religious. Thus, the division between economics, political science, and sociology, which makes some sense in our own society, is not necessarily useful in the study of other societies.

Nonetheless, for purposes of exposition, we will examine how the needs met by these key institutions in bourgeois society are met by quite different institutional complexes in other cultures. Before looking at these institutions and their alternatives, however, we may briefly examine the concept of anthropological relativism and the different sorts of subsistence technology which people use to produce the goods and services essential to human life. As we shall see, subsistence technology exerts a powerful influence on the rest of social life.

4.I. ANTHROPOLOGICAL RELATIVISM

A century of further anthropological research has caused a re-evaluation of the work of Morgan and the other nineteenth century anthropologists regarded so highly by Marx and Engels. The past century has seen spectacular discoveries in archaeology and human paleontology, more intensive collection and analysis of ethnographic data, and several interrelated areas of advance in anthropological theory which must be incorporated into a materialist understanding of the development of our species.

A full assessment of the anthropological views of Marx and Engels is out of the question here (for critical evaluations of Engels' work, see Aaby 1977, Gough 1977, Harris 1968, Lane 1976, Leacock 1972, Ruyle 1986, Sacks 1976, Schein and Lopate 1972). Good summaries of modern views on prehistory are widely available in both introductory Anthropology textbooks (particularly recommended are Harris 1985, Keesing 1981, Kottak 1982) and in texts on Prehistory (Fagan 1983, Wenke 1985). Also useful is the introductory Sociology text by Lenski and Lenski (1978) which uses anthropological data extensively. For a review of prehistory by a Marxist, see Smith (1976). For Marxists, the best history of Anthropology is that of Harris (1968), but also see Brew (1968) and Honigmann (1976). For further discussion of the contribution of anthropology to historical materialism, see Ruyle (1988a).

The establishment of a professional anthropology in the twentieth century was accompanied by the rejection of the earlier evolutionary perspective in favor of a relativist one. No longer were "primitive" cultures seen as stages through which Europeans had already passed, but rather, each culture was

seen as a separate and unique experiment in human possibility—as if each were a differently colored, separate piece in a mosaic of human diversity, to be studied, and valued, in its own right. (Keesing 1981: 111-112)

There are three aspects to modern anthropological relativism: 1. the separation of race and culture and the non-importance of race; 2. linguistic relativism; and 3. cultural relativism.

The separation of race and culture is fundamental to the relativist position, as it is to all modern social science. In the modern view, the behavioral repertoire of any society is determined by what they learn, not any innate "racial" features. This does not deny, of course, that humans have biological needs and drives, nor that, within any human population, there are individual differences in physical and mental abilities. The modern formulation does deny that there are any significant differences between human groups (or "races") in terms of their physical, mental, or moral needs, abilities and capabilities.

The belief in racial equality was widespread among Enlightenment philosophers, and is also a key feature of the Marxian tradition. But prior to modern anthropology, this was merely a philosophical belief, not a scientifically established principle. This permitted the rise of racist ideology in the 19th century when most social thought assumed the superiority of the white race and the inferiority of colored races (Drake 1980, Harris 1968). Under the leadership of Franz Boas, modern anthropology discredited this assumption and provided firm scientific evidence for the modern view that all human populations are equivalent in key human abilities to acquire, utilize, and develop cultural information. There are thus neither "primitive races" nor superior or inferior "races." In fact, many modern anthropologists have abandoned the race concept itself as not useful for understanding human physical variation (see Brace and Metress 1973, Littlefield 1982, Livingston 1962).

Another important principle of modern anthropology is linguistic relativism. The intensive analysis of the languages of American Indians and other "primitive" peoples led to the recognition that all living languages are comparable in their phonetic and grammatical structure and in their ability to express whatever ideas are important to the people using the language (Lounsbury 1968). In the words of Sapir,

Both simple and complex types of language of an indefinite number of varieties may be spoken at any desired level of cultural advance. When it comes to linguistic form, Plato walks with the Macedonian swineherd, Confucius with the headhunting savage of Assam. (Sapir 1923:219)

There are, in other words, no "primitive" languages. Languages without writing are not inferior to written languages, they merely lack this essentially derivative linguistic form.

The third element of the relativist position is cultural relativism itself. Cultures must be understood and valued in their own terms and not as steps on some evolutionary "ladder." The family system and religion of a hunting and gathering people, for example, must be understood in terms of the values and life-style of that people, and not simply as stages in the development of the family system and religion of the West. The religious ideology of Australian aborigines, for example, is just as subtle and complex as that of Christianity or Zen Buddhism:

Australian Aborigines have incredibly subtle, philosophically challenging mystical cosmologies that posit a spiritual plane of existence that was prior to the world of sensory experience (in the "dreamtime") but now lies behind or parallel to it. Mervyn Meggitt (personal communication) describes how the old Walbiri man who was his spiritual guide eventually told him that he, Meggitt, had reached his philosophical depth and could follow no further into the mysteries of the cosmos. Perhaps no Westerner has ever fully penetrated these Aboriginal philosophical realms. (Keesing 1981:333)

The essence of anthropological relativism is a rejection of the naive evolutionism which sees non-Western peoples as inferior to, and simply representing stages in the development of, modern Western civilization. Each culture has its own methods of dealing with the environment, social relationships, and the supernatural, its own thought patterns and its own belief and values systems. These are different than, but not inferior to, those of the West. For the cultural relativist, if West has a more elaborate technological system than India or the Arunta of the Australian outback, this is simply because the West values technology. The religious systems of India are far more elaborate than the pale monotheism of Christianity, and the Arunta have elaborated a marriage and kinship system which is truly mind-boggling in its complexity. To say that the West is more advanced than India or the Arunta is simply to impose our Western values on these other cultures. For the cultural relativist, all cultures are equally advanced and equally human.

It is unfortunate that the positive insights of cultural relativism were accompanied by anti-evolutionism, anti-materialism, and anti-socialism (Harris 1968, White 1949, White 1959). Cultural relativists tended to reject and even ridicule the idea that cultures had evolved. They did not attempt to understand why particular cultures were patterned in different ways, why kinship was valued by the Arunta, religion by the Hindu, and technology by the West. The humanistic concern with cultural differences was never applied to the Soviet Union.

In spite of these shortcomings, anthropological relativism is an important perspective, the essence of which is not only fully compatible with the thought of Marx but also can enrich the science of historical materialism.

4.II. SUBSISTENCE TECHNOLOGY AND FUNCTIONAL UNITY

Subsistence technology, or the way that a given society produces the basic material necessities of life, exerts a powerful influence on the rest of social life. To paraphrase Marx and Engels remarks in the *Communist Manifesto*, it does not require deep intuition to comprehend that the ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word, the consciousness of men and women, change with every change in the conditions of their material existence, in their social relations, and in their social life (Marx and Engels 1848:489). The data of modern anthropology provide abundant confirmation of Marx's postulate of the functional unity of social systems based on the mode of production.

The relationship between a society's mode of producing basic necessities, or subsistence technology, and the rest of society is perhaps most clearly seen in the work of Gerhard Lenski (1966, Lenski 1970). Lenski has developed an evolutionary societal taxonomy based on subsistence technology (Figure 4.1):

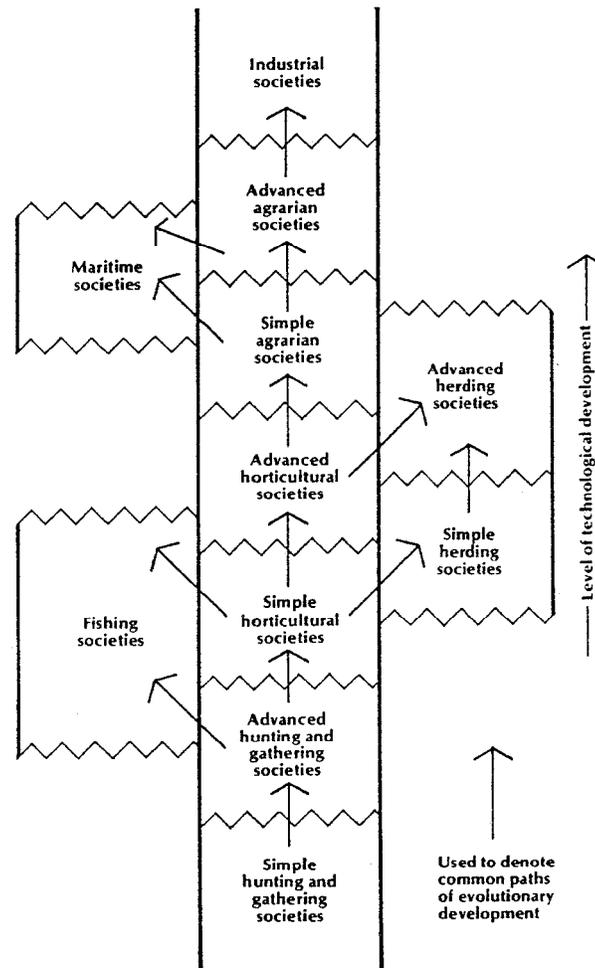


Figure 4.1. Lenski's Societal Typology.

Lenski sees a main line of cultural development as well as environmentally specialized types. Source: (Lenski 1970:124).

Simple Hunting and Gathering Societies lack the bow and arrow and spear-thrower. There are no living examples of this stage of technological development. **Advanced Hunting and Gathering Societies**, with the bow and arrow and/or spear-thrower, appear after 35,000 B.C.

Simple Horticultural Societies practice plant cultivation without the plow or metal tools. Such societies appear around 7000 B.C. in the Near East.

Advanced Horticultural Societies practice plant cultivation with metal tools but without the plow. Metal tools become common in the Near East after 4000 B.C.

Simple Agrarian Societies practice plant cultivation with the plow but without iron tools. The plow comes into common use in the Near East after 3000 B.C.

Advanced Agrarian Societies have both the plow and iron tools. Advanced Agrarian Societies appear in the Near East about 1000 B.C.

Industrial Societies utilize fossil fuels as an energy source. Such societies first appear in Europe about 1800 A.D.

In addition to this main line of technological development, Lenski also sees the following environmentally specialized types:

Fishing Societies rely heavily on fishing due to their proximity to water.

Maritime Societies have developed a water-based technology for trade and commerce. The Minoans on the island of Crete appear to have been the first maritime society about 2000 B.C.

Herding Societies develop in open grassland. **Advanced Herding Societies** use the horse or camel for work or warfare; **Simple Herding Societies** do not.

Lenski also recognizes **Hybrid Societies** which combine two or more modes of subsistence, such as **Industrializing Agrarian Societies**, and **Industrializing Horticultural Societies**.

Lenski uses his societal taxonomy to examine the relationship between subsistence technology and other aspects of culture. To do this, he uses the Ethnographic Atlas, a compilation of systematically coded data on 915 societies, which enabled him to examine the relationship between subsistence technology and such variables as population size, settlement type, division of labor, organizational complexity, government and religion. Lenski's findings include:

1. Expectably, subsistence technology is directly related to population size, with increasing technological efficiency being related to increasing population. Thus, the median size of Hunting and Gathering Societies is 40; for Simple Horticultural Societies it is 95; for Advanced Horticultural Societies it is 5,800; and for Agrarian Societies it is over 100,000.

2. Further, subsistence technology is related to permanence of settlement, as 90% of Hunting and Gathering Societies are nomadic, while only 4% of Horticultural and Agrarian Societies are nomadic.

3. The division of labor, inequality, presence of slavery, power of the chief, degree of development of the legal system, are all directly related to increasing technological efficiency.

4. Even something as seemingly remote from technology as religion also reveals a relationship. Thus, hunting and gathering societies typically lack a belief in a supreme creator, especially one who is active in human affairs and supports human morality, while most agrarian and herding societies do have such beliefs, perhaps a reflection of the supreme power of the king or emperor. Further, hunters and gatherers lack games of strategy, while advanced horticultural and agrarian societies have them.

Thus, even a cursory summary of cross cultural variation as this is related to subsistence technology, provides clear statistical confirmation of Marx's basic postulate: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general" (Marx 1859:4).

4.III. MONEY AND THE MARKET

In modern bourgeois society, we gain access to the social product and to the labor power of other people through money. The central role of money and markets in modern life may be seen from the fact that Marx called the commodity (defined as anything which is produced in order to be sold on the market) as the "cell" of capitalist society. The market is thus the key organizing institution of modern bourgeois society, a "super-institution" which integrates a variety of other distinctive institutions: the individual firm, the corporation, labor unions, and well as state institutions, families, and even churches.

The market, however, is not an inevitable reflection of human nature. It is only one of a number of possible ways of organizing human affairs, and it is only within the last few hundred years that the market has come to be the dominant mode of economic life. Those features which characterize economic life under capitalism, such as self-regulating

markets, the profit motive, corporations, wage labor and labor unions, were absent or unimportant prior to the rise of capitalism. Instead, economic life was organized according to completely different principles. Karl Polanyi (1944) has pointed out that there are four ways of organizing economic life:

1. **market exchange**, with money, which is the method we use and which involves conscious calculation of costs and benefits,
2. **reciprocity**, or the sharing of goods among kinsmen, with no conscious calculation of benefits given and received,
3. **redistribution**, or the movement of goods to and from a common center, based upon status, and
4. **householding**, or production for use by the producers and their immediate family.

For the first few million years of human existence, people organized their economic lives through the principle of reciprocity. Men and women simply produced and shared the product of their gathering, hunting, fishing, collecting, and handicraft activities with their immediate kinsfolk. The social order of hunters and gatherers can correctly be described as both "familistic" and "communistic" (Fried 1967:27-107).

Even after the break up of the ancestral commune and the emergence of class rule, economics continued to be submerged in social relations. In the archaic and historic empires of Asia, Africa, and the New World, redistribution came to be the dominant pattern. The direct producers (farmers, fishers, herders and artisans) turned over the bulk of their product to a central authority who stored them and redistributed them according to status. This was a hierarchal social order, with the temple priest, feudal lord, or emperor at the apex, and goods were differentially redistributed according to social position.

Householding, a la Robinson Crusoe, has never been the dominant way of organizing economic life, and only appears as an adjunct to other principles.

From the very beginning of humanity, then, human beings have been economically interdependent. Individuals have always been dependent upon the social order that produced them.

Significantly, the dominant economic principle of capitalism, that of profit, was consciously excluded from these earlier social orders. Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle condemned profit and individual gain as "unnatural" and destructive of the social bonds linking humans together. This condemnation was continued by the Catholic Church throughout the feudal period.

Contrary to much opinion, however, these precapitalist social orders were viable and technologically progressive. Most of the technological and economic inventions upon which modern industrial civilization is based (agriculture, the plow, the wheel, harnessing of wind, water, and animal power, writing, Arabic numerals, paper, printing, and money) were achievements of precapitalist societies.

4.III.1. Critique of the Market

No one has seriously questioned the ability of the market to provide for the needs of those that have money. Nor has anyone really claimed that the market can provide for those that do not have money. The ability of the market to satisfy human needs, in other words, varies directly with the amount of money people have, with their ability to create what economists call "effective demand." The existence of what can only be termed obscene levels of affluence with equally obscene levels of poverty in U.S. society demonstrates this point. If the market gets high marks in terms of efficiency, it gets low marks in terms of economic justice. It is this inability of the market to deal with the needs of the poor and powerless that underlies both the liberal critique of market and the rejection of the market by many socialist societies. The alternatives, however, are less efficient although they may be more just. The question is, can the market be used within

the framework of a socialist society, can the efficiencies of the market be drawn upon while avoiding its negative features?

This question is currently posed in most urgent terms by the reforms of the Soviet economy. As Gorbachev recently noted,

The advantages of the market economy have been proven on a world scale and the question now is only whether high social protection—which is a characteristic of our socialist system, the system for the working people—can be ensured under market conditions.

The answer is this: it is not only possible but it is precisely a regulated market economy that will make it possible to augment social wealth and raise the living standards of everyone. (Gorbachev 1990:20)

The problem of creating a "mix" between market principles and other economic principles in order to achieve both efficiency and economic justice is the problem of perestroika. It should be noted that Gorbachev is talking about a regulated market, regulated in the interests of working people, not the unfettered market of bourgeois ideology. The world capitalist market is also regulated, but regulated in the interests of capital.

4.IV. THE STATE

The modern state is also of crucial importance in our daily lives. If the commodity is the "cell" of modern society, the state is frequently viewed as the organism itself. Thus, the world is frequently viewed as divided into states: the United States and the Soviet Union, Canada, Great Britain, France, Japan, Iran, and so on, and we have a very strong identification as citizens of a particular state.

It must be stressed, however, that the modern state, like the market, only developed within the past few hundred years. States, of course, are as old as civilization (that is, about five thousand years old), but premodern states differed from the modern variety in a variety of ways.

First of all, premodern states lacked the strong identification of citizens that characterizes the modern state. This identification, of course, is a product of the powerful instruments of propaganda that are available to the modern state: the mass media and mass educational systems which enables the modern state to reach much more directly into the minds of its citizens than was possible prior to the modern era. Associated with this is the development of mass involvement with the state, through democratic elections and political parties, and the idea that citizens of a state have definite rights which must be protected by the state, and definite responsibilities to the state. The police forces of the modern state are responsible for maintaining law and order within the boundaries of the state, and the armed forces for preserving the territorial integrity of the state.

By contrast premodern states tended to be aloof from the ordinary people and existed more explicitly to benefit the rich and powerful. The state was more typically an exploitative mechanism in its own right, and operated according to what has been called the proprietary theory of the state, "according to which the state is a piece of property that its owners may use, within rather broad and ill-defined limits, for their personal advantage" (Lenski 1970:258, citing Max Weber). The form of the state was almost invariably monarchical. Further, the state was closely linked into religious organizations, in what Leslie White has called the State-Church.

As striking as the differences between modern and premodern states may be, they pale into insignificance with the contrast between state societies and stateless societies. We are so accustomed to having that state as the enforcer of law and order that we find it difficult to imagine societies in which there is no such authority, in which, in the words of Engels, there are "no soldiers, no gendarmes, no nobles, kings, regents, or judges, no prisons, or lawsuits" (1884:159).

Yet such was the original condition of our species. The state has only existed for about five thousand years. Prior to this time, people were able to handle their affairs in an orderly manner without recourse to the special instrument of violence known as the state. Why was this?

The reasons lie in the small scale of the ancestral commune, its kinship organization, the absence of class antagonisms, and the community of interest within it. Civilized, state-level societies are class societies, in which a wealthy class lives by exploiting the poor. In such a situation, the rich need the state to protect their privileges and oppress the poor. In the ancestral commune, there were no such antagonisms and law and order was rooted in a communality of interest. All members of the group are interdependent and thus have an interest in preserving order within the group. In such a situation, informal pressure is usually sufficient to maintain order.

4.V. THE FAMILY

Family are people who have to take you in when you have no place else to go (Mark Twain).

The study of kinship has always been a major focus of anthropology, and with good reason. The central events of human life—birth, copulation, and death—tend to occur within kinship units in most societies, as do important biological processes such as eating, sleeping and growth. But although kinship plays a vital role in organizing our biological processes, it is fundamentally cultural in nature. Kinship systems are cultural constructs, not biological givens. Consequently, although there are some universal features of kinship systems, the expression of these features varies from culture to culture. Thus, all societies recognize ties of parentage and siblinghood and extend these ties outward in kinship systems of varying extent. The precise ensemble of such relationships, and the precise nature of rights and obligations they entail varies widely, however. All societies recognize marriage, but the precise nature of the marital bond, and who one may or must marry, also shows variation. Although it is reasonable enough, therefore, to see a biological base to kinship, the cultural construct built upon this base varies, not randomly, but in accordance with definite principles. This variation can best be explained in terms of the material conditions of life of the society in question, most importantly, the degree of development of the productive forces of society. As Engels noted,

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, 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 side and of the family on the other. The lower the development of labor and the more limited the amount of its products, and consequently, the more limited also the wealth of the society, the more the social order is found to be dominated by kinship groups. However, within this structure of society based on kinship groups 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 antagonism: new social elements, which in the course of generations strive to adapt the old social order to the new conditions, until at last their incompatibility brings about a complete upheaval. In the collision of the newly developed social classes, the old society founded on kinship groups is broken up. In its place appears a new society, with its control centered in the state, the subordinate units of which are no longer kinship associations but local associations: a society in which the system of the family is completely dominated by the system of

property, and in which there now freely develop those class antagonisms and class struggles that have hitherto formed the content of all *written* history. (Engels 1884:71)

Two observations must be made. First, although Engels, like most nineteenth century evolutionary thinkers, spoke of higher and lower stages in the development of the family, modern anthropologists see the different forms of the family as equally valid ways of organizing domestic life, none "higher" or "lower" than another.

Second, kinship continues to be important even after the rise of private property and the state. Just as European royal families regularly intermarried for political reasons, so the modern bourgeoisie intermarry for economic reasons. Noting that the commanding heights of the American economy are controlled by "intermarried families and social cliques who operate through holding companies, family trusts, and family foundations," Domhoff notes

As a final example of a tight-knit interest group, we would point to the intermarriage which cemented the interest group built around the First National City Bank of New York. The two largest stockholders in that bank were William Rockefeller and James Stillman. Two of William Rockefeller's sons married two of Stillman's daughters; today the head of the bank is James Stillman Rockefeller, whose son by Nancy Carnegie is Andrew Carnegie Rockefeller. (Domhoff 1967:49)

Similarly, in a study titled *Big Business in Japanese Politics*, Yanaga notes,

Although no longer recognized as a basic legal unit, the family is still the touchstone of social success. The importance of family background or connections in achieving success in almost any field has not diminished. On the contrary, it seems to have increased greatly. More than ever, family status (*iyegara*) and pedigree (*kenami*) are necessary qualifications for membership in high society and for achieving a position of prestige and influence in business and politics, even academic life.

Matrimonial alliances occur with great frequency among the 300 or more top business families. To a considerable extent such marriages are motivated by the desire to consolidate and strengthen positions in the business world and to avoid conflicts. In recent years virtually all of top management families have been intermarrying in a manner reminiscent of the managed political marriages of feudal Japan. (Yanaga 1968:15-16)

All of this notwithstanding, the vital distinction which Engels made between civil society based on property and classless societies based on kinship remains valid.

In bourgeois society, access to the social product is largely obtained through money. Workers must sell their labor power in order to obtain the money to buy the commodities they need: food, clothing, shelter, amusements, and so on. Prior to the emergence of capitalism, however, money was relatively unimportant, and people obtained the goods and services they needed through other means. As the economic historian Karl Polanyi (1944) has pointed out, the economic principles underlying a market system are specific to capitalism. Precapitalist economic systems are organized according to different principles: householding, reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. Only in market exchange, which is so well known to us, is rational calculation of costs and benefits received with attempts to minimize the former and maximize the latter (Polanyi calls this economizing). Redistribution is found associated with the status and property systems of precapitalist civilizations. Householding refers to individual production by more or less isolated families, is only rarely a dominating feature of an economic system. Reciprocity, in which goods and services are shared within kinship groups without any systematic effort to calculate equivalences, is the form found typically among pre-state societies.

Thus, in pre-state societies, prior to the Urban Revolution of five thousand years ago, access to the social product was largely obtained through kinship. For this reason, the study of kinship is vital to an understanding of the classless societies that flourished for the millions of years before the emergence of class rule. Even after the rise of the state, however, kinship continued to play a vital role, and continues to be important today.

People everywhere organize their domestic lives (cooking, eating, sleeping, procreation, and child care) through the family. But both the forms and precise functions of the family vary widely from society to society. We shall examine some of the major variations.

4.V.1. The Nuclear Family Ideal

The ideal family pattern in the U.S. is the nuclear family. A man and woman meet, fall in love, get married, move in together, have children (preferably in that order), and live happily ever after, with the husband successful in his career and the wife contentedly caring for the home and children. This is the pattern firmly ingrained in our popular thinking and culture, in songs, novels, and T.V. sitcoms (from *Father Knows Best* to the *Cosby Show*). Although there may be stresses and strains involved in families, they can usually be worked out within a half-hour program.

Now, as we know from our own lives, things don't always work out this way. According to our ideology, this is due to our own failings, not to the system itself. We shall address this question shortly. First, we must examine the ideology that has developed around the nuclear family.

Many sociologists and anthropologists see the nuclear family as a universal unit, the basic building block of all societies. According to Murdock (1949), for example, the nuclear family is a cultural universal that fulfills basic functions essential for social life. These functions are:

1. **sex**, the husband-wife relationship permits satisfaction of sexual needs in a legitimate manner that diminishes sexual competition;
2. **reproduction**, necessary if society is to continue;
3. **socialization** (or enculturation), newborn infants receive their basic socialization within the family unit; and
4. **economic**, the family is a unit of consumption built upon a sexual division of labor in which the man provides protection and sustenance to permit the woman to provide reproductive functions (cooking, child care, etc.).

According to some theorists, the nuclear family goes back to the origins of our species, when men began to hunt and leave the women behind to care for children. It continues to provide the most efficient way of organizing our domestic lives. Both sociobiologists and creationists, for example, are united in their defense of the nuclear family as a "natural" unit for human beings. According to Linton, "the last man will spend his last hours searching for his wife and children."

It should be clear from the above that nuclear family theory is a way of legitimizing the existing system of gender relationships in our society. Despite its appeal, nuclear family theory must be rejected for a variety of reasons. We shall consider, first, the cross cultural evidence and then the evidence from our own society.

4.V.2. Cross Cultural Variation in Family Form and Functions

Anthropologists have discovered a wide variety of different ways of organizing domestic life in different societies. Although one may identify units that look like nuclear families in many if not most societies, the structural characteristics and inner dynamics of family form are quite different than those of the American nuclear family. We shall examine several different family forms.

In traditional Japan, the basic domestic unit is the stem family. The oldest son continues to reside at home with his parents who find him a suitable bride. The bride moves in with her husband's family (a pattern known as patrilocality) and is expected to obey her husband and his parents. She isn't really considered a full member of the family until she has children, preferably a son who can inherit the family farm and home and continue the family line. Younger sons are expected to move out, and daughters are married out. The oldest son is expected to inherit the family farm, support his parents in

their old age, and perform ancestral rites for them when they die. Each stem family has an ancestral shrine in the home where religious rites for the veneration of the ancestors of the husband's family.

Although one may analyze the stem family as a succession of nuclear families, such a procedure ignores the actual structure and dynamics of the Japanese family. Unlike the American nuclear family, in which the dominant dyad is the husband-wife relationship, the Japanese stem family is formed from the father-son relationship and a man's relationship to his wife is secondary to his tie to his parents. Family functions are also different. Sex between husband and wife is for purposes of procreation. The Japanese wife is not supposed to be sexy, and if a husband wants to enjoy sex he may do so outside the family, with a prostitute or geisha. The Japanese family fills the same reproductive, socialization functions as the American nuclear family, and is also a unit of consumption. But, in addition, the Japanese family is a unit of production, unlike the American nuclear family, and also has a religious function in ancestral veneration.

In many societies, for example the Iroquois, families are organized around groups of related women: mothers, sisters, and daughters. When a woman marries, she will bring her husband to live with her and her sisters, mother, and aunts (a pattern known as matrilocality). Houses and garden plots are owned by the women; men own and herd sheep, which keep them away from the home for much of the day. The children will be members of their mother's family and the father will have few rights over them. In such a matrilineal (descent calculated through women) society, the marital tie is fragile, and when a woman tires of her husband, she simply puts his belongings outside the door and when he comes home he picks them up and returns to his mother and sisters. A man is thus never fully integrated into his wife's family, but remains a member of his mother's and sisters' family, where he has authority over his sister's children and participates in various family ceremonies and rituals.

Again, although one may view this as a nuclear family in formal terms, the actual dynamics are quite different than those of the American nuclear family. The dominant relationships are between women (and men related through women), and marriage does not establish a new domestic unit, as it does in the American case.

Among the Nayar, a warrior caste on the Malabar coast of India, the matrilineal principle is carried to the extreme that there is nothing even resembling a nuclear family. When a woman reaches puberty, she marries but divorces within a few days. She has her own room within her mother's house and will take one or more lovers who may spend the night with her (leaving their spears outside the door to prevent embarrassing situations). When a child is born, the mother must have a man in an appropriate caste acknowledge paternity, but this "father" has no rights in, or responsibilities toward, the child, who is a member of the mother's family. Men reside with and eat with their mothers and sisters, and are responsible for their sister's children.

Another variation on the matrilineal pattern is found among the Trobriand Islanders off the coast of New Guinea. A newly married couple resides with the husband's family, but he is living with his mother's brother, not his parents. When the couple has children, they reside with their parents until puberty, then a son will move in with his mother's brother and inherit from his mother's brother, not his father or mother. This is a matrilineal system in which men are dominant and own property, but it is men who are related through women.

Among the Nyakusa and some other East African societies, adolescent boys will leave their families as they approach puberty and build their own villages. Their mothers will continue to cook for them until they take wives and begin their own families, at which time the founding of a new village is complete. Parents of American teenagers will no doubt view such a departure from the basic nuclear family pattern with envy.

Another widespread family form is polygamy, or plural marriage. The most common pattern is polygyny, in which one man has more than one wife. Polyandry, in which one woman has more than one husband, is rare. Although polygamy may logically be

considered to involve a series of nuclear families, the actual psychological and behavioral dynamics of polygamous families are quite different than those of monogamous families.

4.V.3. Larger Kinship Structures

The form of the family, then, varies widely from society to society. Further, the family is embedded in larger social structures that largely determine its form. The American nuclear family, for example, is embedded in a politico-economic structure dominated by the state, private property, money, and labor markets. Australian conjugal families are embedded in a fluid band organization. In many societies, especially horticultural societies, families are embedded in unilineal descent groups.

Unilineal descent groups are formed through the principle of unilineal descent, or descent calculated through one sex, either males (patrilineal descent) or females (matrilineal descent). Patrilineal descent groups include patrilineages and patrilineages. Patrilineages are composed of men and women who can demonstrate descent from a common ancestor through males. Thus, the sons and daughters of the common ancestor, the sons' sons and daughters, the sons' sons' sons and daughters, and so on, are all members of the patrilineage. Children are members of their father's patrilineage. A woman's children are members of her husband's patrilineage, not her own. A patrilineage is similar to a patrilineage but differs in that members of a patrilineage claim descent from a common ancestor but are not necessarily able to demonstrate such descent.

Matrilineages and matrilineages are formed by the same unilineal principle, but descent is calculated through females only, so that children are members of their mother's matrilineage or matrilineage. A matrilineage is thus made up of the sons and daughters of the common ancestor, her daughters' sons and daughters, her daughter's daughters' sons and daughters, and so on.

Unilineal descent groups are corporate groups that usually hold land in common. Although families may plant gardens on an individual basis, unused land refers to the group as a whole.

Unilineal descent groups are also exogamous (exogamy means marrying outside the group), so that wives and husbands must be found in other groups. Frequently there will be well-established relations between groups that exchange wives, or one group will regularly receive wives from one group and give them to another. Marriage is thus typically a group affair and is not simply left to the young man and woman.

4.V.4. The American Family: Myth vs. Reality

The American nuclear family is thus only one of a number of different ways of organizing domestic life. It is not universal. Many societies fill the functions of the nuclear family in quite different ways. Even in our own society, moreover, the nuclear family is not universal, but only one way of organizing our domestic lives.

It is useful to distinguish between the family as a set of ideas about how we should organize our domestic lives and the household as the way in which people actually organize their domestic lives. In actual fact, only a small proportion of American households are organized as nuclear family theory says they should be: a husband with a job outside the home, a wife who stays home and cares for the house and children. Other frequent patterns include: single parent households; married or unmarried couples without children; married couples with children of previous marriages; homosexual couples; unrelated individuals living together; and single-person households.

There are clear class differences in family structure and dynamics. The middle class family corresponds most closely to the nuclear family ideal, in that each family is a more or less self-sufficient unit dependent primarily on the husband's job, business, or profession for an income. Although middle class families may entertain other couples, each family is expected to be self-sufficient and to reciprocate dinner invitations. Lower

class families, by contrast, lack a stable source of income and tend to depend upon relatives, neighbors, and friends during times of trouble. Lower class families thus tend to be more interdependent than the self sufficient middle class family. A frequent pattern of families living at the poverty level is the matrifocal family, composed of a woman and her children, with men as only transitory members. This pattern develops in response to a situation in which women have a more stable source of income, either as domestic workers or from welfare, while the lower class men lack a steady job. Ruling class families (the DuPonts, Morgans, Rockefellers, Fords, etc.) tend to maintain close ties built upon family fortunes.

It is useful to consider the family in thermodynamic terms, for considerable energy input is required to maintain the family. As indicated in Chapter 1, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately \$28,547 is required to maintain an urban family of four at a modest but adequate standard. Studies have also shown that the average housewife with children works somewhere between 50 and 90 hours per week at domestic chores. However, since the average wage of production workers in the U.S. is only about \$17,400, it requires two incomes to maintain the family at anything approaching an acceptable level. Usually this means the wife must work full time, and in addition continue to perform the household labor.

Thermodynamic analysis thus reveals a major source of tension in the family. The average family simply lacks the energy resources to maintain the nuclear family in its ideal form, and this failure leads to tensions that are expressed in wife-beating, child abuse, alcoholism, and divorce. It has been said that the family is one of the most violent institutions in American society, surpassed only by the police and military.

The nuclear family, then, is only one of a number of different ways of organizing our domestic lives, and not necessarily the best way. The problems associated with the nuclear family in our society are intimately related to other aspects of our society, especially the job market and unemployment.

4.VI. THE CHURCH

All peoples have beliefs about the sacred and supernatural world and their relationship to it. The way different peoples conceive this world, however, varies as widely as the way they conceive their world of kinship. Confronted with the variety of religious beliefs and practices, our initial reaction, of course, is to ask which is true. Anthropologists, however, tend to regard all religions as equally true (or equally false) and instead ask: What functions does religion play in human society? How did it originate and through what stages did it evolve? How is it related to other aspects of human social life? A scientific theory of religion, in short, must not only recognize the variety of religious beliefs and practices, but must also relate this variety to the rest of the Human Adventure on earth.

4.VI.1. Marx on Religion

The basis for a scientific, materialist theory of religion was laid by Karl Marx in his famous passage on the "opium of the people":

The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, a reversed world-consciousness, because they are a reversed world. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritualistic point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn completion, its universal ground for consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence because the human essence has no true

reality. The struggle against religion is therefore mediately the fight against the other world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma.

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.

Criticism has plucked the imaginary flowers from the chain not so that man will wear the chain without any fantasy or consolation but so that he will shake off the chain and cull the living flower. The criticism of religion disillusioned man to make him think and act and shape his reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve around himself and therefore round his true sun. Religion is only the illusory sun which revolves round man so long as he does not revolve round himself

The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the saintly form of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to unmask self-alienation in its unholy forms. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of right and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics. (Marx 1844:226-27)

In this passage, Marx makes the essential point that religion is a product of human beings, and therefore related to the material conditions of life of those humans. It plays an essential function in dulling the pain of existence and enabling people to function in an oppressive situation. In ancestral society, people are oppressed by Nature, because they do not understand the forces of Nature; in civilized society, people are oppressed by other people, the ruling class. For Marx, the struggle against religion (as "the illusory happiness of the people") was essential so that people could seek happiness in a non-oppressive society.

Marx's attitude toward religion, then, was marked less by hostility than by a desire to replace religion by something better. By understanding the nature of oppression in class society, people can eliminate that oppression and shape their own destiny.

Under the influence of Lenin, however, most Marxists adopted a more militant attitude toward religion. The use of the term "opium" changed from an escape the oppressed feel they need (in Marx) to a drug foisted on them by their exploiters (in Lenin). According to Lenin,

Marxism has always regarded all modern religions and churches and all religious organizations as instruments of bourgeois reaction that serve to defend exploitation and drug the working class. (as quoted by McGovern 1980:264)

Every religious idea, every idea of god, even every flirtation with the idea of god is an unutterable vileness; . . . it is vileness of the most dangerous kind, 'contagion' of the most abominable kind (as quoted by McGovern 1980:265)

However, many contemporary Marxists are adopting less hostile and more understanding attitudes toward religion. In part, this is due to the influence of such theoreticians as Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist who examined much more closely the role of Catholicism in Latin countries. More importantly, it comes from an appreciation of the role that priests and lay religious personnel have played in the Central American revolution and from the influence of Liberation Theology. It is becoming increasingly clear that, although the oppressors have used religion to justify their oppression, oppressed people have also used religion, not only for survival, but also to struggle against oppression.

With this background, we may look at the anthropological study of the variety of religious beliefs and practices.

4.VI.2. Anthropological Views of Religion

Perhaps the earliest and most influential anthropological theory of religion was proposed by the English anthropologist, E.B. Tylor, in his classic study, *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1871). For Tylor, the universal and elemental form of religion was animism, or "the belief in spiritual beings." The belief in a human spirit separable from the body, according to Tylor, developed from early human efforts to explain such phenomena as dreaming and death, when the spirit seems to leave the body, and as possession, when the body seems to be possessed by an alien spirit. But if humans have spirits, so must animals, trees, rivers, and other natural phenomena. Thus nature worship, fetishism (worship of objects believed to be inhabited by spirits), and ancestor worship developed as logical extensions of the belief in human spirits. As Geertz notes,

Tylor believed that the idea of a soul was used to explain more and more remote and hitherto inexplicable natural occurrences, until virtually every tree and rock was haunted by some sort of gossamer presence. The higher, more developed forms of "belief in spiritual beings," first polytheism, ultimately monotheism, were founded upon this animistic basis, the urphilosophy of all mankind, and were refined through a process of critical questioning by more advanced thinkers. For this earnest Quaker the religious history of the world was a history of progressive, even inevitable, enlightenment. (Geertz 1972:7-8)

Tylor's intellectualistic theory of religion was paralleled by James George Frazer, whose monumental 12 volume work, *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890), remains a classic work in the anthropological study of religion. For Frazer, the primordial form of human thought was magic, the science of primitive peoples. Magic involves attempts to manipulate reality through two erroneous principles, the law of similarity (that like produces like, so that a magician can jab a doll with a needle and thereby wound an enemy) and the law of contact (that things which have once been in contact will remain so, so that a magician can work sorcery through an enemy's clothing, fingernail paring, or feces). Unlike magic which does not involve any high powers, religion is supplicative, and involves attempts to effect desired results through appeal to higher powers. Human mental progress, for Frazer, passed through the stages of magic and religion and finally, to science.

These intellectual theories of religion which stress the role of reason and conceptual thought were not without critics. R.R. Marett, in *The Threshold of Religion* (Marett 1914), argued that ". . . savage religion is something not so much thought out as danced out," and involves awe and other emotions as much as reason. For Marett, the primordial form of religion was **animism** — the belief in a supernatural power. The Polynesian concept of **mana** is a good example of animism. Mana is a supernatural power that pervades the universe and is stored up in some objects and persons more than others. Thus chiefs, priests, and persons of high status, and certain stones, alters, and temples have unusual concentrations of mana and can become **taboo** and dangerous for commoners to touch.

In contrast to these theories which stress either the intellectual or emotional roots of religion, Emile Durkheim's theory stresses the social and collective nature of religion. In his classic work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim 1915), Durkheim distinguished between magic, which involved primarily individual attempts to manipulate reality and did not create lasting social bonds, and religion, which is a collective enterprise that involves a church, a community of believers, and which both expresses and enhances social solidarity. For Durkheim, the elementary form of religion was totemism - a set of beliefs concerning a mystical relationship between a social group and a totemic animal. When a group worships its totem, it is in fact worshipping itself:

In a general way, it is unquestionable that a society has all that is necessary to arouse the sensation of the divine in minds, merely by the power that it has over them; for to its members it is what a god is to his worshippers. In fact, a god is, first of all, a being whom men think of as superior to themselves, and upon whom they feel they can depend . . .

society also gives us the sensation of a perpetual dependence . . . religious force is nothing other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan. (Durkheim 1915:35)

Yet another view critical of the intellectualism of Tylor and Frazer is that of Andrew Lang, who suggested in his book, *The Making of Religion* (Lang 1909), that magico-religious beliefs may actually refer to an actual supernatural order of existence. Lang suggested that

it might seem to be the business of Anthropology, the Science of Man, to examine, among other things, the evidence for the actual existence of those alleged and supernatural phenomena. . . . About the psychical condition of the savages who worked out the theory of souls and founded religion we necessarily know nothing. If there be such experiences as clairvoyance, telepathy, and so on, those unknown ancestors of ours may (for all that we can tell) have been peculiarly open to them, and therefore peculiarly apt to believe in separable souls. (as quoted by Barnouw 1982:217)

Lang's suggestions have not been systematically pursued by anthropologists, but the few cross cultural studies done do not confirm any particular extranormal abilities of tribal peoples in this regard (Barnouw 1982:217). There is, however, a fairly extensive literature in parapsychology examining the possible reality of extra-sensory perception (ESP), telepathy, and telekinesis. Anthropologists have, however, made fairly extensive studies of the use of hallucinogenic drugs by tribal peoples in Siberia, New Guinea, and Native Americans in both North and South America.

Any discussion of general theories of religion must include the work of Sigmund Freud, who suggested in such works as *Totem and Taboo* (Freud 1918) that concepts about gods may be modeled after a child's relations to his parents:

Now when the child grows up and finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, and that he can never do without protection against unknown and mighty powers, he invests these with the traits of the father-figure; he creates for himself the gods, of whom he is afraid, whom he seeks to propitiate, and to whom he nevertheless entrusts the task of protecting him. (as quoted by Barnouw 1982:222)

Freud's work, however, has caused some difficulty for anthropologists. As Geertz notes,

The source of the difficulty has been an inability or an unwillingness to disentangle Freud's basic thesis - that religious rituals and beliefs are homologous with neurotic symptoms - from the chimerical ethnology and obsolete biology within which he insisted upon setting it. Thus, the easy demolition of what Kroeber called Freud's "just so story" concerning primal incest, parricide, and guilt within some protohuman horde ("in the beginning was the deed") was all too often mistaken for total rejection of the rather more penetrating proposition that the obsessions, dreams, and fantasies of collective life spring from the same intrapsychic sources as do those of the isolated individual. (Geertz 1972:9)

Although Freud's writings are generally discounted by anthropologists, a number of studies have used Freudian insights concerning individual psychopathology to examine the public ritual and group ritual, for example Kardiner's study viewing religious institutions as projections of a group's "basic personality structure" and Bettelheim's explanation of initiation practices in terms of mechanisms for establishing sexual identity, and certain other anthropologists explanation of the Australian practice of subincision in terms of "kangaroo penis envy."

Finally, to complete our inventory of anthropological ideas on the origin and nature of magic and religion, we must consider the work of Bronislaw Malinowski. On the basis of his fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski viewed magic and religion as intimately related to practical affairs. His remarks deserve to be quoted at some length:

however much knowledge and science can help man in allowing him to obtain what he wants, they are unable completely to control change, to eliminate accidents, to foresee the unexpected turn of natural events, or to make human handiwork reliable and adequate to all

practical requirements. In this field, much more practical, definite, and circumscribed than that of religion, there develops a special type of ritual activities which anthropology labels collectively as magic . . . Magic is used as something which over and above man's equipment and his force helps him to master accident and to ensnare luck.

The place of religion must be considered in the scheme of culture as a complex satisfaction of highly derived needs. The various theories of religion ascribe it to either a religious "instinct" or a specific religious sense (McDougall, Hauer) or else explain it as a primitive theory of animism (Tylor) or pre-animism (Maret) or ascribe it to the emotions of fear (Wundt) or to aesthetic raptures and lapses of speech (Max Muller) or the self-revelation of society (Durkheim). These theories make religion something superimposed on the whole structure of human culture, satisfying some needs perhaps, but needs which are entirely autonomous and have nothing to do with the hard-worked reality of human existence. Religion, however, can be shown to be intrinsically although indirectly connected with man's fundamental, that is, biological, needs. Like magic it comes from the curse of forethought and imagination, which fall on man once he rises above brute animal nature. Here there enter even wider issues of personal and social integration than those arising out of the practical necessity of hazardous action and dangerous enterprise. A whole range of anxieties, forebodings and problems concerning human destinies and man's place in the universe opens up once man begins to act in common not only with his fellow citizens but also with the past and future generations. Religion is not born out of speculation or reflection, still less out of illusion or misapprehension, but rather out of the real tragedies of human life, out the conflict between human plans and realities.

Culture entails deep changes in man's personality; among other things it makes man surrender some of his self-love and self-seeking. For human relations do not rest merely or even mainly on constraint coming from without. Men can only work with and for one another by the moral forces which grow out of personal attachments and loyalties. These are primarily formed in the processes of parenthood and kinship but become inevitably widened and enriched. The love of parents for children and of children for their parents, that between husband and wife and between brothers and sisters, serve as prototypes and also as a nucleus for the loyalties of clanship, of neighborly feeling and of tribal citizenship. Co-operation and mutual assistance are based, in savage and civilized nations, on permanent sentiments. (Malinowski 1931:64, 71)

4.VI.3. Varieties of Religious Organizations

Wallace has proposed a useful typology of cult institutions which focuses on the social context of religious belief and ritual (Wallace 1966). Wallace sees four types of cult institutions:

Individualistic cults involve practices, such as various kinds of hunting magic, visions quests, or private prayer, performed in private by persons who are not specialists.

Shamanistic cults involve a magico-religious specialist, the shaman, who has special access to the sacred and supernatural and who can use this access to work good or harm. Shamans are part time specialists who are also the medical practitioners of tribal societies.

Communal cults involve rites and ceremonies performed by groups of laymen, such as rites of passage, calendrical ceremonies, and ancestor cults.

Ecclesiastical cult institutions are those that are staffed by full time religious practitioners, or priests, whose access to the sacred and supernatural is a result of their position in the cult organization, rather than their own abilities. Wallace distinguishes between Olympian cults, that recognize a pantheon of gods, and monotheistic cults (such as Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam), which worship one supreme being.

While individualistic, shamanistic, and communal cult institutions are widespread if not universal in human societies, ecclesiastical cults are found only in advanced agricultural societies and are equivalent to what White called the Church. Wallace's typology, therefore, has clear evolutionary implications.

Robert Bellah has also proposed a model for the evolution of religious belief (Bellah 1964). Bellah's stages are as follows:

Primitive Religion. In primitive religions there is little separation between the "real" and supernatural worlds; the two are coterminous and interpenetrating and neither is superior to the other.

Archaic Religion. In archaic religions the characteristic feature is "the emergence of true cult with the complex of gods, priests, worship, sacrifice, and in some cases divine or priestly kingship" (Bellah 1964:42).

Historic Religion. The characteristic feature of historic religion is what Bellah calls world denial: the sensible world is an illusion and the true reality is the spiritual world. The idea of salvation appears.

Early Modern Religion. Early modern religion appears with the Protestant Reformation and retains the dualism of the historic religions, but salvation comes, not from withdrawing from the world but from changing it to conform to the image of the cosmic world.

Modern Religion. This phase is unclear in Bellah's formulation, but appears to involve a greater acceptance of this world. But, as Bellah remarks, "This is not to be interpreted as a return to primitive monism: it is not that a single world has replaced a double one but that an infinitely multiplex one has replaced the simple duplex structure" (Bellah 1964:47).

The evolutionary typologies of Wallace and Bellah do not contradict each other, since Bellah's framework focuses on religious belief while Wallace's framework deals with social context and social organization of religion. Bellah's phase of primitive religion includes individualistic, shamanistic, and communal cult organizations, while ecclesiastical cults begin to emerge in Bellah's archaic phase, with the development of class society.

There is, however, another form of religious activity which must be considered: messianic cults. As Harris observes:

Under severe ecological and politico-economic stress associated especially with colonial conquest and intense class or minority exploitation, beliefs and rituals tend to be concerned with achieving a drastic improvement in the immediate conditions of life and/or in the prospects for an afterlife. These beliefs and rituals are sometimes referred to as nativistic, revivalistic, millenarian, or messianic movements. (Harris 1975:554-555)

Harris proposes the term, revitalization, to embrace all such movements, but we shall continue to use the term messianic movements. Anthropologists have devoted considerable attention to two such movements, the Ghost Dance of Native Americans in the U.S., and the cargo cults of Melanesia.

For several centuries, Native Americans have used religion to organize their resistance to white domination. As early as 1680, the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, led by the prophet Pope (according to whose visions the Christian God had died), burned Catholic missionaries at their alters and destroyed European artifacts. Later, in the Great Lakes region, the Indian chief Pontiac led a movement to expel whites. The Shawnee leader Tecumseh formed a widespread military alliance against whites until it was defeated at Tippecanoe by white forces led by William Henry Harrison (who used his victory over the "savages" to become President of the U.S.).

Perhaps the most famous of the Native American messianic movements was the Ghost Dance. Inspired by the Indian prophet Wodziwob, who foretold the return of the Indian ancestors and the destruction of the whites, leaving the Indians ancestral lands and white machinery, buildings, and other wealth in the hands of the Indians. As the Ghost Dance spread to the Great Plains, it inspired hostile resistance to white rule and included elements such as the Ghost Dance shirts which were believed to make their wearers invulnerable to the white man's bullets. A number of Ghost Dance leaders, including the famous Chief Sitting Bull, were arrested and killed.

As Ghost Dance inspired resistance was crushed by the U.S. Army in such massacres as that at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890, American Indian revitalization movements took more realistic forms. One of these is the Peyote Cult which uses hallucinogenic drugs, singing, praying, and contemplation to seek self-knowledge, personal moral strength, and physical health. Another is the American Indian Movement, a more overtly political movement.

A series of messianic movements have developed in Melanesia and New Guinea from the late nineteenth century to the present. The common theme in these movements is the disappearance of whites and the return of the ancestors in ships, airplanes, or spaceships bringing Western wealth, or cargo. Recent cults frequently center on building airports for the cargo planes which are sent by the ancestors for the natives, but which have been diverted by the whites to the white's airports. Such movements frequently involve violence against whites and military reprisals and suppression by colonial authorities. An interesting example of a cargo cult is the Lyndon Johnson cult, which developed on the island of New Hanover in 1964, and which offered to buy Lyndon Johnson for \$82,000!

Harris has suggested that the origin of Christianity is best understood by comparison with cargo cults and ghost dances (Harris 1974). Clearly, Christianity developed in the context of resistance against Roman imperialism in the Near East and thus exhibits many similarities to these messianic movements. We shall return to this topic at the end of the book, in our concluding remarks.

4.VI.4. Religion in Ancestral Communism and Class Rule

Before the rise of the state, in tribal societies of foragers and simple horticulturalists, religion served the people in a variety of ways. Tribal religions provided satisfactory explanations for how the universe came to be and how it worked.

Before the rise of the state, foragers and simple horticulturalists used their tribal religions in a variety of ways. They found satisfactory explanations of how the universe came to be, how it worked, and how all living creatures were related to one another. From their magical rites they drew strength to embark on hazardous undertakings. Their shamans used both their spiritual powers and their extensive knowledge of herbs and potions to cure and comfort the sick. Their collective ceremonies enabled them to both mourn the dead and celebrate the passages of the living through birth, adolescence, and marriage. There were no priests to threaten them with fire and brimstone or to promise them pie in the sky when they died, for the spiritual world was not seen as superior or even separate from the natural world. There was thus no need of salvation.

With the rise of the state, however, ruling classes began to use religion to legitimate their rule. Their priests began to teach that the spiritual world, to which they alone had access, was superior to this world, and that to disobey the priests was to invite punishment, if not in this world, certainly in the next. As ruling classes established their power, and as the material conditions of the masses worsened, this world came to be seen as simply a preparation for the next, and there came to be a need for salvation from the real sufferings of class oppression.

But although the ruling classes attempted to monopolize religion for their own purposes, they were unable to do so completely. Religious leaders rose from the masses who saw the injustice of class rule and who used religion to legitimize their struggle against class rule. Jesus was one such leader; not the only one, and not even the earliest.