

Human Societies

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INTRODUCTION

In this discussion I will attempt to introduce to you the extent of the role of humans in the determination of their lifeways (culture) and social institutions. I will also attempt to give you a cursory overview of the variety of human cultures and types of human societies. In order to put this discussion in a general context and in the context of the previous presentations, I will comment briefly on the relationship between biological and socio-cultural evolution. I shall also raise some questions about the relevance and validity of the results of experimental studies of human and non-human behaviour and ethology itself. I also intend to suggest the relevance which non-biological, non-instinctual components of human behaviour play in the creation, maintenance and solution or non-solution of the enormous problems that face human society and life today.

ETHOLOGY

Ethology, the scientific study of animal behavior especially in relationship to habitat, has had a long and significant history. Ethology in the sense of the study of animal social behavior and its implications for human social behavior, with the underlying assumption that at least in part, similarities between non-human species and human behavior

are based on biologically transmitted factors, has recently had a strong upsurge, for example in the writings of Desmond Morris (*The Naked Ape*, 1967; *The Human Zoo*, 1969), Robert Ardrey (*The Territorial Imperative*, 1966; *The Social Contract*, 1970), Lionel Tiger (*Men in Groups*, 1969) and Tiger and Robin Fox (*The Imperial Animal*, 1971).

I would suggest that you read these books with a very critical eye indeed and consider carefully the questionable validity of some of the basic assumptions and the curious logic involved in some of the explanations propounded. Many periodicals, both professional and popular, have carried serious critiques of these books. I would recommend that you read Alexander Alland's *The Human Imperative* (1972).

Among the critiques of Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape* I would recommend Lila Leibowitz's article in *Psychology Today* (1970) in which she demonstrates in a systematic and humorous way that Morris's hypothesis that human females' breasts, buttocks and body hair are the evolutionary products of male preferences eons ago, is not only highly questionable but makes assumptions about the process of selective mating that are untenable or unnecessary to explain the evolution of female anatomy and form.

Robert Ardrey is a writer by profession but not a scientist, and his central thesis in *The Territorial Imperative* is that human beings, like some species in the animal world, possess a territorial instinct. By this he means that human beings possess as part of their genetic makeup an instinct to defend a territorial space. This thesis has come under heavy attack (see Montagu, 1968). Psychologist Clara Mayo and colleague Franklin Becker (1971) argue, on the basis of research on human behavior, that what is often taken for territorial behavior is merely maintenance of personal space.

To seriously question many of the conclusions of both professionally trained and popularizing writers in the field of ethology today is not to deny that there may be significant and genuine parallels of behavior and its meaning between the human and non-human animal species. Animal studies such as Calhoun's work on rats and the 'behaviorial sink' which results from over-crowding (1962) may well be valid for humans also. I agree that there may well be important lessons about human behavior to be learned from such studies and that perhaps the behavior of the Ik (pronounced "Eek") studied by Colin Turnbull (1972) is such an example from a human society. *The Mountain People* (1972) is a description of a Ugandan tribal group who were pushed out of their traditional hunting territory of the Kidepo Valley when the government turned the Ik homeland into a national park. The Ik refused resettlement and were left to survive on a relatively small territory where game was scarce and adequate rainfall undependable. Perhaps the resultant overcrowding and stress may account for the behavior of the Ik, who in many ways exhibit aspects of

the 'behaviorial sink' phenomenon. To cite one example from Turnbull's book will suffice to give you an impression of the Hobbesian kind of social world of the war of all against all which seems to characterise the Ik today. Turnbull records the incident of a nursing mother who put her infant down beside a waterhole and a leopard made off with it. Turnbull states:

"...the mother was delighted. She was rid of the child and no longer had to carry it about and feed it, and still further it meant that a leopard was in the vicinity and would be sleeping off the child and thus an easy kill."

The mother was right; the men found the leopard, killed it, cooked it, ate it, child and all. Hunger may explain part of this behavior but perhaps the concept of 'behaviorial sink' is also relevant here too.

Lorenz's (1937) work on 'imprinting', that is that the social and sexual attachment of many animal and bird species depends upon exposure to their own species at a critical period early in life, was an important breakthrough. Lorenz's experiments showed that in species which possess this 'imprinting' characteristic, the process is confined to a critical period early in life which may be very brief; that once the process is complete it is totally irreversible and that imprinting is to a species. Lorenz's work showed that ducks were an imprinting species and that the 'critical period' was consistently between thirteen and sixteen hours after birth. If the newborn ducklings only saw humans during this 'critical period', they imprinted to the human species, forever thereafter relating socially and sexually to humans not ducks, which meant of course, among other things, that they would not mate with their own species and so not reproduce.

From several quarters, it has been suggested that the human species may possess something akin to the 'imprinting' characteristic. All this is very hypothetical and questionable. But even if there exists some sort of comparable process in the psychosocial development of the human being, what implications would this have for the rationality of the cultural practices of childbirth that have generally held sway in supposed 'modern' western societies in the past several decades and only recently have begun to change? Until recently, human babies born in western countries since the 1920's often spent the first few hours or days of life tightly swaddled, with little freedom of movement or auditory or tactile stimulation. Moreover, according to our still all-too-prevalent childbirth practices, a child is born and held in gloved hands by a blob-like white form who's only discernible human features are the eyes, and the newborn was often so treated for days on end, seeing its parents frequently only under

similar conditions and being fed by an inanimate phallic-shaped object. What do these kinds of cultural practices imply for the adequate opportunity for the newborn to identify with the human species for later adequate psycho-sexual development?

Recently, medicine has begun to recognize the importance of handling, fondling and speaking to the newborn and permitting the newborn to have these experiences from human beings who look like human beings. Studies have revealed that this kind of treatment is positively correlated with healthier post-natal development of the infant. In recent years too, the cultural definitions, practices and experiences of childbirth have altered also: women are becoming no longer passive or resistant, fear-filled pawns in the process of childbirth but prepared, educated and competent in managing their own children's births; husbands are sharing this culturally transformed rewarding experience with their wives and babies are often put to the breast to nurse immediately after birth. Instruction in this 'new childbirth' is now offered in most large urban centres across Canada, the United States and Europe. The most common education manual for this method, called the Psychoprophylactic Method, is Erna Wright's book *The New Childbirth*.

Finally, I wish to make some comments on the implications of the Harlows' (1962) research on the Rhesus monkeys and the question of "multiple mothering" and its possible effects, which were raised in a previous lecture by Prof. Platenius. First of all with regard to the merits or demerits of "multiple mothering" (or more accurately "multiple nurturing") in infancy and early childhood, I would like to point out that probably 99% of the human population since the evolution of homo sapiens has had "multiple mothering" in the form of aunts, uncles, fathers, grandparents, siblings and other kin or community members. I would submit to you that what the infant and young child needs is constant, loving, interested, nurturant persons consistently in his or her life, but that this does not need to be supplied by one person - the biological mother only, twenty-four hours a day, as our post-World War II attitudes and media conditioning had led us to believe was the only way for adequate socialization to occur.

If indeed, the infant really did need to have his/her biological female parent caring for it virtually exclusively of others, why have we adopted in our culture the practice of artificial feeding (which virtually anyone can do) and created a whole complex of cultural hangups against breastfeeding - the one thing that virtually only the child's biological mother can do for her child? Only a small percentage of Canadian children are breastfed (although breastfeeding seems to be coming back in popularity

somewhat) and then usually only briefly - a few weeks or a few months and weaning is often rather abrupt and severe. North American society is very atypical in this respect. The average length of breastfeeding in societies around the world is two to three years, with some South Indian groups nursing their children for six or seven years.

In spite of the Harlows' findings on their experiments with Rhesus monkeys that the nursing function did not direct the monkey's clinging and affection, this cannot be taken as evidence that breastfeeding is not healthier for the human child. (The wire surrogate mother monkey with a nipple and bottle of milk attached attracted the young monkey only when it was hungry but when it was frightened, anxious, or wanted cuddling it clung to the terrycloth-covered surrogate-mother which had no feeding apparatus attached.) Research on animals has demonstrated conclusively that the colostrum and the milk of many animals contains important antibodies which provide protection against disease. Repeated experiments on several animal species have demonstrated that the neo-natal mortality rate triples or even quadruples or goes up as much as ninety percent if the newborn animal is prevented from suckling from its mother in the first few hours of life.

What about the possibilities of such important immunities in human milk? Immunities in human milk have as yet not been directly proven; little in the way of research funds has been allocated to research on human milk itself. Yet in spite of this, over and over research has demonstrated that breastfed babies are much healthier, have a lower neo-natal death rate, get less digestive disorders (including colic) as well as less respiratory and other diseases than do bottlefed babies. A recent study of 'sudden unexpected infant deaths' (often referred to as 'crib deaths') in infants from one month to a year done at Queen's University by Steele, Kraus and Langworth (1967) demonstrated that sudden infant deaths (or 'crib deaths') are positively and significantly associated with bottle feeding. Yet in spite of this demonstrated relationship and the benefits of breastfeeding we are still culturally going our old or post World War I cultural way of generally artificial feeding. We have lots of cultural contradictions and irrational cultural patterns just as other societies do.

CULTURE, SOCIALIZATION AND SOCIETY

I have used the word 'culture' several times and it is this concept that I wish to enlarge on now because of its very profound influence on our behavior. There are several different definitions of culture at

We become adults largely through the socialization process, and generally respond in the culturally patterned ways. Indeed, so important is the socialization process that if socialization does not accompany maturation during the early years, even the unfolding of maturational processes like crawling, walking and speech may be permanently impaired. Two articles which deal with this topic which I recommend are the Ogburn (1959) and Bettelheim (1959) articles.

So pervasive is the socialization process for almost everyone in a society (the inculcation of our cultural ways as well as social class and other patterns of behavior) that we often tend to assume that our ways are always 'right' and 'superior' to those of other nations and cultures. Ethnocentrism is the concept that we use to describe the tendency to take our culture's ways and value judgments as always being right and judging other cultures by our own culture's standards.

Moreover, we often fail to appreciate the extent to which inter-societal contact and borrowing has occurred over time and often tend to assume that a lot of our own culture's content is not derived. Ralph Linton, an American cultural anthropologist, gave an amusing but very telling account of the extent to which one culture has borrowed items from other cultures. He wrote:

"Our solid American citizen awakens in a bed built on a pattern which originated in the Near East but which was modified in Northern Europe before it was transmitted to America. He throws back covers made from cotton, domesticated in India, or linen, domesticated in the Near East, or wool from sheep, also domesticated in the Near East, or silk, the use of which was discovered in China. All of these materials have been spun and woven by processes invented in the Near East. He slips into his moccasins, invented by the Indians of the Eastern woodlands, and goes to the bathroom, whose fixtures are a mixture of European and American inventions, both of recent date. He takes off his pajamas, a garment invented in India, and washes with soap invented by the ancient Gauls. He then shaves, a masochistic rite which seems to have been derived from either Sumer or ancient Egypt.

Returning to the bedroom, he removes his clothes from a chair of southern European type and proceeds to dress. He puts on garments whose form originally derived from the skin clothing of the nomads of the Asiatic steppes, puts on shoes made from skins tanned by a process invented in ancient Egypt and cut to a pattern derived from the classical civilizations of the Mediterranean, and ties around his neck a strip of bright-colored cloth which is a vestigial survival of the shoulder shawls worn by the seventeenth century Croatsians....

When our friend has finished eating he settles back to smoke, an American Indian habit, consuming a plant domesticated in Brazil in either a pipe, derived from the Indians of Virginia, or a cigarette, derived from Mexico. If he is hardy enough he may even attempt a cigar, transmitted to us from the Antilles by way of Spain. While smoking he

*reads the news of the day, imprinted in characters invented by the ancient Semites upon a material invented in China by a process invented in Germany. As he absorbs the accounts of foreign troubles he will, if he is a good conservative citizen, thank a Hebrew deity in an Indo-European language that he is 100 per cent American.*¹

So all-pervasive is our culture's influence on us that we assume that some of our behavior patterns are not only "right", but "natural", that is, biologically determined for our species. I want to cite one very dramatic example of this. Probably most people in our culture think that when urinating in the woods, it is anatomically and physiologically easier for a male to do so in a standing position, but for a female the squatting position is biologically natural. However, the Akwe Shavante of Brazil, studied by David Maybury-Lewis (1967) have the directly opposite pattern; the males always squat and the females always stand up while urinating - and they regard their practice as the 'natural' way. Clearly, even the postures the sexes use in this biological functioning (let alone others) are not biologically but culturally determined.

Indeed there are few universal behavior patterns in this sense in the human species. There are some cultural universals, e.g. all known societies have some sort of religious beliefs, an incest prohibition and marriage regulations, but the cultural variability is enormous. With regard to the incest taboo, for example, our society has a very narrowly defined one: no one may knowingly have sexual intercourse with their biological parent, sibling, grandparent or grandchild. In many societies the incest prohibition includes not only those persons but also one's parallel cousins, i.e. the offspring of your parents' same-sexed siblings. In China the taboo extended to anyone of the same surname - even if they were caucasian and their surname only sounded the same but was spelled differently.

The most common lay explanation in our society for the incest taboo is that close inbreeding produces biological degeneration in the offspring. Yet such an explanation fails to account for the fact that inbreeding *per se* does not necessarily produce biological degeneration in the offspring (we use inbreeding of animals to produce superior offspring). In human societies, although all known societies had or have an incest taboo, the taboo did not apply to members of certain royal families, e.g. Ancient Egypt, Inca, Hawaiian and some royal families of the Interlacustrine Bantu kingdoms of the past. Cleopatra, the beautiful, intelligent, healthy Queen of Egypt was the offspring of eleven generations of brother-sister marriage and mating of the Ptolemaic royalty. In the late 18th Dynasty (circa 1400-1300 B.C.) of Egypt, one Egyptian king, Achnaton, was married

1. From: *The Study of Man* by Ralph Linton, pp. 326-7. Copyright 1936 by D. Appleton - Century Company, Inc. Reproduced by permission of Appleton - Century - Crofts, Educational Division, Meredith Corporation.

to three women: his mother Tiy; Nefretete who was his mother's (Tiy) brother's daughter, and also to his daughter Meritaten by his wife Nefretete. This all sounds very confusing to us and this confusion of relationships has been cited as the reason for an incest taboo: to avoid such confusion which may hamper the socialization process. Indeed, the Chinese character for 'incest' has a second meaning: 'confusion of relationships'.

I cannot go into the theories and evidence pro and con regarding the 'biological degeneration theory of the incest taboo' but I would like to cite one other author. Frank Livingstone (1969) has pointed out that from the perspective of a population, inbreeding may produce a higher death rate but it may also lead to the gradual elimination of more of the deleterious recessive genes than would be the case if completely random mating prevailed. That is, if an inbreeding group is able to overcome the higher rate at which homozygotes initially appear, it will eventually reach a genetic equilibrium with a lowered percentage of lethal or other deleterious genes.

Now let us look at the notion of social organization. We need some form of social organization because of the long period of dependence of the human young and the fact that we have to learn (to be taught through the socialization process) the various adult roles. It has been suggested that there are nine functional prerequisites, that is things that must get done in any society if it is to continue. These functional imperatives have been discussed by several authors, especially Talcott Parsons (1951: 26-36), Bennett and Tumin (1948) and Aberle, Cohen, Davis, Levy and Sutton (1950) that latter authors' statements in abstract form are reprinted in Table 2.

The way in which societies and cultures meet these nine necessary factors for survival is virtually infinite, with vast numbers of permutations and combinations. But perhaps it is anachronistic to suggest that each society can continue to solve the problems of the functional prerequisites in their own cultural way and independent of each other. The ever-pressing exigencies of world-wide problems of pollution, overpopulation, decreasing non-renewable resources, etc. means that it is not just individual societies that must meet these prerequisites but that the whole human species, all its societies, must collectively meet these prerequisites. As Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos have said (1972) we really do all live on a small planet.

TABLE 2: THE FUNCTIONAL PREREQUISITES OF SOCIETY

1. provision for adequate relationship to the environment and for sexual recruitment - i.e. biogl. maintenance and reproduction.
2. role differentiation and assignment (i.e. a division of labour).
3. communication - no society can exist without shared, learned symbolic modes of communication, because without them it cannot maintain the common value structure or the protective sanctions which hold back the war of each against all. Communication is essential for socialization to take place.
4. shared cognitive orientations - there must be some degree of agreement of meanings to make stable, meaningful and to some extent, predictable, the social situations in which they are engaged.
5. a shared articulated set of goals - there may of course be some conflicting goals within the society and/or between various segments of it, but there must be at least a few common goals to hold the society together.
6. the normative regulation of means - i.e. definitions of the legitimate and non-legitimate ways the goals may be sought.
7. the regulation of affective expression - that is there must be some consensus on what types of affect or emotions are appropriate in certain situations (otherwise chaos would ensue).
8. socialization - i.e. the process by means of which a person acquires the culture of his society. Our culture and social organization are learned, not innate or instinctual behavior.
9. the effective control of disruptive forms of behavior - i.e. there must be some modes of social control.

VARIATIONS IN HUMAN SOCIETIES AND AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

Forms of marriage patterns vary greatly around the world. Of the two basic forms, 'monogamy' and 'polygamy' (or one person being simultaneously legally married to two or more persons, usually of the opposite sex), the majority of societies permit polygamy, although even in these societies most persons only have one spouse at a time. In the World Ethnographic Sample of G.P. Murdock (1949) of 250 societies, and since expanded to 915 societies, less than 12 percent prescribed monogamy.

Human Societies

This sample became the basis of the developing Ethnographic Atlas and the Human Relations Area Files. By April 1966, the Ethnographic Atlas reported data on 915 societies. These were distributed on the basis of their economies on the following societal types:

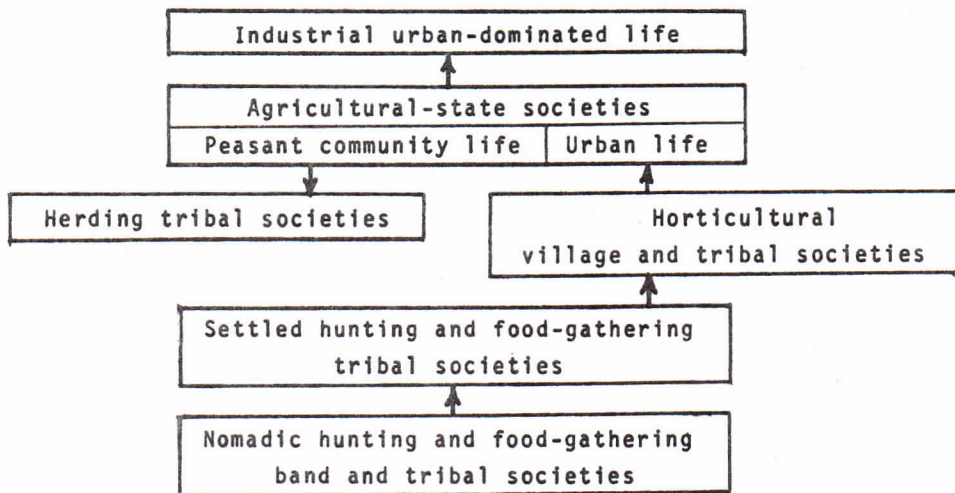
Hunting and Gathering	151
Simple Horticultural	76
Advanced Horticultural	267
Agrarian (both simple and advanced)	96
Fishing	44
Herding	60
Hybrids, maritime, industrial and unclassifiable	<u>221</u>
	915

This gives us an idea of the distribution of the societies around the world and demonstrates the very high percentage of pre-industrial societies.

TYPOLOGIES OF SOCIO-CULTURAL EVOLUTION

I want to present here to you two typologies of sociocultural evolution before briefly outlining some of the salient features of social organization associated with these various types.

A. Goldschmidt's Societal Typology² (1959)

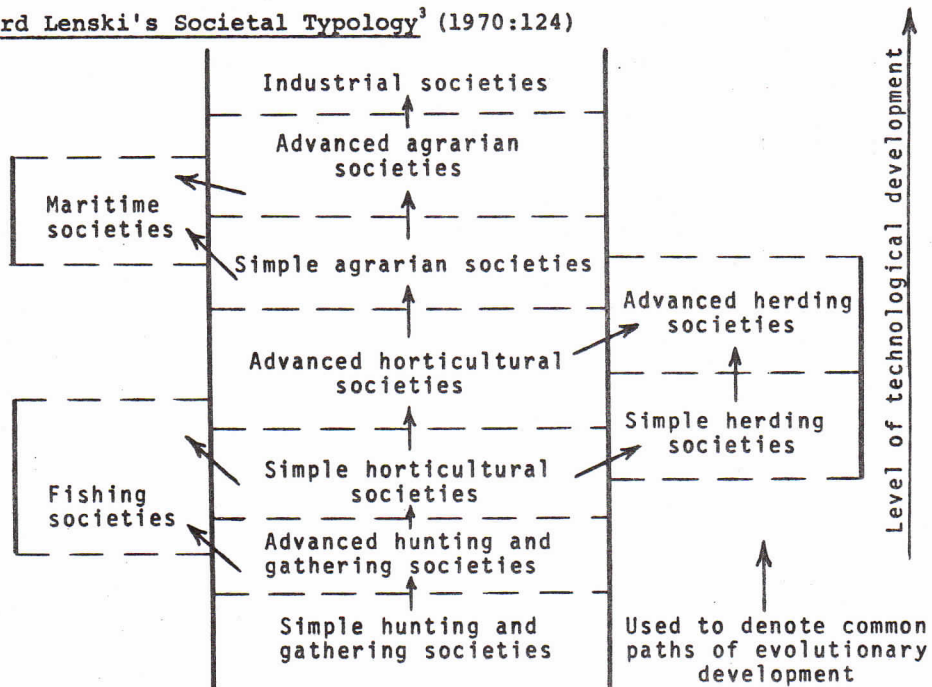


In his book *Man's Way* (1959), Goldschmidt suggested there were five fundamental changes which resulted from a society's technological advance:

2. From Goldschmidt, 1959, p. 183. Used with the author's permission.

1. technological advance means a more efficient utilization of the environment and this usually leads to population growth.
2. technological advance reduces the need for migration in the past (especially with the change from hunting and gathering economies to horticultural ones and from slash and burn methods to crop rotation), and settlements become more permanent.
3. technological advance leads to an increased production of goods and services and hence the potential for development of greater economic and political inequalities.
4. technological advance leads to greater specialization and division of labour and increased organizational complexity (as the technological advances of the economy freed more and more people from an all day, daily task of labouring simply to supply that individual with a subsistence level of food).
5. finally, technological advance made possible increased 'leisure' in human societies. By this we mean time not consumed in providing for such basic material needs as food and shelter, so that more time is available for the wide variety of other activities such as art, religion, and the production of non-essential goods and services.

B. Gerhard Lenski's Societal Typology³ (1970:124)



3. From *Human Societies: A Macrolevel Introduction to Sociology*, by Gerhard Lenski, p. 124. Copyright 1970 by McGraw-Hill Book Company. Used with permission of McGraw-Hill Book Company.

This typology represents a refinement of Goldschmidt's typology and a recognition that finer distinctions at all levels of the former typology provide for the very meaningful differences in forms of social organization. For detailed discussion of the rationale behind this typology see Lenski (1970).

In hunting and gathering societies there is typically only a sexual division of labour, with some age differentiation as well. These and simple horticultural societies tend to have what political organization they do possess, based on kinship status. Ties of kinship are vital in most hunting and groups, often to the virtual exclusion of social roles based on non-kinship status. It is hard for us to realize the totally encompassing economic, political and ritual significance of kinship-based societies because most of the social interactions in our society are organized on the basis of non-kinship roles (e.g. student, client, teacher, customer, judge). In general, there is very little economic inequality, although in advanced horticultural societies, kinship groups may be ranked. There may, for example, be chiefly and commoner lineages. Lineages are unilineal descent groups in which membership is ascribed at birth; you become a member of your father's lineage if the society has patrilineages or you become a member of your mother's lineage if the society is matrilineal, possessing matrilineages. (In a few societies there is double unilineal descent; each person is a member of two lineages - his/her father's and mother's). Matrilineal societies are most frequently associated with an agrarian economy but even in this form of economy they are less frequent than are patrilineal descent systems.

Tribes in the past had no permanent political organizational structure but existed as informal structures. A tribe is a group, or more accurately often an aggregate of people who speak a distinctive language or dialect, possess a common culture that distinguishes them from their neighbours, and know or are known by a definite name. Only in times of extreme crisis does the tribe as a whole collectively act as a political unit.

Archaeologists estimate that simple horticultural societies developed somewhere in the Middle East about 7,000 B.C. and many archaeologists refer to the emergence of horticultural societies as the first great social revolution in history. The power of political leaders remains very limited in these societies and village chiefs are often leaders more by example or because of greater knowledge or special skills, such as being the ritual specialist and/or healer.

With advanced agrarian societies you get more occupational specialization, status hierarchies, social classes, more centralized political

power, especially so with the emergence of urban centres.

There is a great deal of literature which discusses the characteristics associated with the formation of states, the development of industrial societies and the relationships of industrialized nations to the Third World. In particular, I would refer you to Lenski (1970), Lawrence Krader *Formation of the State* (1968) and Peter Worsley *The Third World* (1964).

CONCLUSION

Since the topic of the nature and types of human social organization around the world is so vast, I could only sketch out for you some of the dimensions of the range of variability. I want to emphasize that humans are culture-bearing animals and I have attempted to illustrate some aspects of this cultural diversity to make it clear that some of the problems that face the world today are of our own or other cultures' making and that these problems cannot be solved, as previous lectures have already made clear, by technological innovation alone. We will need radical change in some of our cultural values, value priorities and tastes. For example, it is our culture's definitions that lead us to prefer beef to alfalfa as our protein source. Indeed, it is often the culture's definitions (which are very arbitrary and differ from one culture to another) of what gives status that have lead us to create some of the major problems we now face. If the old Irish saying "...A child every year to you, and may you die in Ireland" is maladaptive today because of over-population, so also are other status symbols such as a new car every year. I think we are going to have to be willing to take a good hard look at - and be willing to alter - our cultural assumptions and definitions of "status" and "success". We may very soon have to alter our cultural measurement of national "success" by the level of the G.N.P. and radically alter our very strong cultural emphasis on consumerism. Through such changes and changes in our political ideology, political system and economies we may be able to start solving the massive world problems that face us today. Indeed, we may need to not only alter our notions of what gives status, and our national priorities, but it may be necessary for the countries of the West to increase the technological level of other, Third World nations but decrease rather drastically our own standard of living if the human species, ourselves and our children included, is to successfully overcome the major problems confronting us. How we manage this will depend on how successfully we can cope in a cooperative manner with the problems of scarce resources, pollution of

our environment and over-population. We must develop the will to alter some of our traditional cultural ways to permit the human solutions to the problems which we as humans and cultures have now brought most vividly into the human destiny.

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