It is in our power to change that in our own generation. As nations, we can apply to affairs of state the realism of science: holding to what works and discarding what does not. As individuals, we can grasp the commonsense ideas of science. And there is the most important lesson we must learn: it is the *ideas* of science that are remaking the world, not its mechanical achievements. [**Jacob Bronowski**][26]

CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF CIVILIZATION

ON BEING UNIQUELY HUMAN

In a work published in 1967, the philosopher Mortimer J. Adler made a point I believe is central in any serious effort to identify tendencies in human behavior that approach the consistency of physical laws. There are, says Adler, "*certain difficult questions that cannot be satisfactorily answered by scientific investigation or by philosophical thought alone.*"[27] One great scientific-philosophical question he attempts to resolve is "*[h]ow man differs from everything else in the universe.*"[28] The challenge and importance of this question is summarized by Adler, as follows:

> The distinction between men as persons and all else as things, and with it the attribution of a special dignity and or moral rights and responsibility to men alone, can be sustained only if man's difference is a radical difference in kind, one that cannot ultimately be explained by reference to an underlying difference of degree.[29]

We are tool makers and tool users, but so are several species of primates; hence, one is able to argue the possession of such abilities is a difference of degree. However, we are also creatures possessing conceptual thought; and, as Adler reminds us, "*only man with the power of conceptual thought can transcend the perceptual here and now and hold before himself a remote goal not to be attained" while one's actions are subject to moral and ethical constraints because of man's companion "freedom of choice.*"[30] In the language of positive law, an adult person is by virtue of the freedom to choose considered a *competent party*, responsible for his or her actions, unless (under limited circumstances) shown to have lost competency because of illness or insanity. Arguing much the same point as Mortimer Adler, Jacob Bronowski adds that "*[m]an is above the other animals not because he is alive as they are, but because he has a life unlike theirs.*"[31] There is in the lives of people a demonstrated qualitative difference between our intellect and that of our closest primate cousins, one aspect of that difference being the power of self-contemplation. At the same time, all humans demonstrate by qualitative similarity that we are members of the same species.

Another of the scientific proofs of our singularity is our sharing of the same genetic make-up and ability to procreate without regard to individual differences. One quickly observes that we are possessed of the same species-specific characteristics. Our capacity for adapting to regional environments and other external influences is, however, one of our very observable and measurable characteristics. Another is that individuals subjected to the same external influences do demonstrate differences in specific characteristics that are measurable by *degree.* No

two of us, even so-called *identical twins*, are exactly alike with respect to capabilities and personalities.

How we feel about the notion of equality is important. The empirical evidence cannot be denied; we are all of the same species and are, in that sense, equals. Yet, the nurturing we have received during our childhood as well as the prejudices held by those in our social groups are strong influences on our behavior toward one another. Family, friends and our immediate socio-political environment affect how we respond when exposed to unfamiliar socio-political concepts (or whether we respond at all). Over the last century and a half, the struggle for the minds and hearts of people has been between those who expound the virtues of building societies based on either *individualist* or *collectivist* principles. While generally opposed to the objectives put forth by one another, the individualists and the collectivists have also had as adversaries the overwhelming majority of people who are apathetic to socio-political change or have a strong vested interest in the status quo.

Even under circumstances where those holding positions of power act sincerely in what they feel is a just manner, little consideration is given to principle when laws are adopted or policies put into place that affect people's lives. We have not been very successful in articulating clearly the distinctions between notions of *equality of opportunity*, *equality of condition* or *equality of result*. One might argue that the average citizen need not be able to articulate the virtues of one form of equality over another, that one intuitively understands whether the appropriate degree of equality exists. In the United States and in other societies that can generally be described as *participatory republics* and *social democracies*, questions of equality tend to revolve around the degree to which equal treatment for all citizens exists under positive law, on the one hand, and equality of opportunity to achieve one's individual potential on the other. The subject of equality, then, is often framed in language that assesses the presence or absence of

discrimination based not on ability but on race, ethnic background, religious affiliation, and even socio-political philosophy. In answer to why so many people accept inequality, why inequality has become the "*ethos of capitalism*," Philip Green points to the tremendous courage and energy required to stand against oppression, reminding us that "*even those who suffer from it the most do not easily oppose or rebel against the system of inequality*" despite the fact that "*large numbers of people have inchoate ideals and beliefs which are more or less receptive to egalitarian persuasion.*"[32] Within different societies the extent to which these observations hold depends, clearly, on several conditions. For people whose material well-being is high (i.e., they have access to quantities of food, clothing, shelter, nurturing, education and medical care of a quality necessary for a decent human existence), egalitarian concerns are tempered by the extent to which these *goods* are widely held and by their own position in society. Reason suggests, however, that socio-political arrangements built on principles of equal treatment (of equals) under positive law and equality of opportunity to reach one's full potential yield certain positive results. This, I suggest, is what Mortimer Adler advances when he writes:

> [T]he economic equality that consists in *all men having* and *none being deprived* of the requisite economic goods is established when every man has *at least the indispensable minimum* he needs, not when every man has the *identical amount* of economic goods or possessions.[33]

Adler offers two challenges to one's personal value system in this statement. One need not accept these characteristics as having the force of principle—on their own—by which to evaluate a society's socio-political arrangements and institutions as just; as bench marks only, they are powerful indicators of the degree of equality and justice present in a given society. Almost everywhere we look in the modern world we find incontrovertible evidence that the few dominate and

oppress the many. If a rating of *ten* on a scale of *zero* to *ten* represented the truly just society, and one accepts that in such a society none are deprived, where would we place our own societies on that scale? On a positive note, we have at least entered into discussion and debate over not only the meaning of equality but also the practical meanings of philosophical concepts, such as *human rights* and *liberty*—as well as equality and justice.

A real question exists as to whether we have sufficient time to make necessary structural changes and thereby avoid the worst of the potential manmade environmental and societal disasters. Literally millions of people are dying prematurely each year because of the way we live and interact with the earth, other animals, and with one another.

A major stumbling block until very recently has been the close-mindedness of those in possession of socio-political power and economic wealth within the world's various geo-political States. The aggregate impact of existing arrangements is to benefit the few at the expense of the earth and the balance of its human population. Nevertheless, there is a renewed sense among activists that structural change is possible and, in some important respects, is underway. State socialism has collapsed in the societies that fell into the grasp of the Soviet Union following the Second World War. We are perhaps living through the early stages of a general decline of the large nation-state, stressed by people working outside of government to forge the basis for a new global citizenship. State socialism as a system failed to deliver on its promise of an equalitarian distribution of wealth and a high level of well-being for all citizens; centralized, bureaucratic controls work against the instinctive desire of people to bring their goods and services to market in pursuit of personal reward. At the same time, the social democracies have not delivered on their promise to create societies in which none are deprived. Today, more than ever before, the opportunity and necessity exist for debate over fundamental relationships between the individuals, between the individual and

groups, and between the individual and the State. An emboldened global community linked by common cause and by instant communication is challenging the conventional wisdoms that have operated to preserve an unjust status quo. The degree to which meaningful changes will occur depends on one quality more than any other—a thorough understanding of what is wrong and how to achieve positive change.

The questions at hand involve *first principles*. Do we, for example, possess certain rights solely on the basis of our humanness, as members of the same species; or, do what rights we possess depend upon our status as citizens within a particular geo-political, sovereign State? Historically, there have been two very different responses to this question, each representing a diverse school of thought and distinct socio-political philosophy. The first school of thought adheres to a *human rights* doctrine; the second, to the doctrine of *positive* (i.e., manmade) *law*. Political economists have naturally given a great deal of attention to the debate over which of these first principles, when invoked as the basis for constructing the socio-political arrangements and institutions of a society, yield the potential for a just society. Based on the day-to-day reality of our existence, we certainly perceive ourselves as either the beneficiaries or the victims of the systems under which we live—a fact which may cloud our ability to apply a detached perspective. The task of the political economist has been to develop a reasoned (if not always detached) approach to resolving this debate.

Accepting that we are of the same species and in that respect equal does not prevent us from acknowledging our differences. Yes, we are of the same *kind* and possess the same species-specific characteristics (and, by extension, reason dictates we share whatever rights accrue to us as persons). And yes, there are varying degrees of difference between us related to our potential for understanding, learning and skill development. If, then, as persons we possess certain rights, what might they be?

For those possessed with an intuitive sense of well-being, perhaps the bench mark provided by Mortimer Adler is sufficient to suggest that our human rights—whatever they might be—are being protected. To articulate what our rights are with a degree of specificity is, to be sure, far more difficult. The path to reasoned conclusions requires some discussion of cultural anthropology and the development of societies as amalgamations of smaller groups into larger ones. We must understand human nature, our needs and our tendencies to behave in certain ways, before those rights we possess become self-evident.

FROM INSTINCT TO CONTEMPLATIVE THOUGHT

The historical evidence suggests that the earliest groups acted more instinctively (as do other animals) than intellectually. The use of contemplative thought arose very gradually, perhaps stimulated by necessity as well as periodic but accidental discovery. Certainly, the struggle for survival in a dangerous environment provided little opportunity for ancient people to contemplate the experience of being human. With the retreat to cave living, the increasing use of tools and weapons and the knowledge of how to cause fire, the basic technologies required for the contemplative experience presented themselves. To reach this point required nearly all of the time our kind has existed. From that point on, however, the advances in societal organization have been comparatively rapid. Our survival in an often hostile environment depended on our ability to look into the future and to plan ahead, skills at which we came to excel.

That understood, we should consider ourselves fortunate that we have not been faced with competition from a more advanced life form alien to our portion of the universe. We can only hope that such aliens would have a high degree of respect for life than we have yet acquired during our brief history. By virtue of our ability to reason, we are also

shouldered with the responsibility of acting as trustee of the earth on behalf of its lesser creatures. Rational thought, argues Mortimer Adler, allows us no other course of action:

> That all men have the same species-specific powers, such as the power of propositional speech, the power of conceptual thought, and the power of free choice, powers that differentiate man from brute animals, leads to two conclusions about man that also differentiate him from brute animals.
>
> One is that all men, through conceptual thought and free choice, have the power to plan their own lives for good or ill, and so are under the moral obligation to try to make good lives for themselves. The fact that some men have these same powers to a lower degree does not mean that they are precluded from making the best use they can of whatever capacities they have.
>
> The second conclusion parallels the first. What makes men and men alone political animals are the specifically human powers of propositional speech, conceptual thought, and free choice, powers that all men have to some degree.[34]

These essential truths, powerful in their appeal to reason, strangely remain a subject of continued disagreement. One serious consequence has been our failure to achieve broad acceptance of a human rights doctrine. Until we do so, a generalized adherence to undefined principles of human rights cannot succeed as a means of testing the justness of positive law in its role of guiding the actions of individuals and groups within a society. A more in-depth examination of the qualities which make us uniquely human should contribute to such an understanding.

Despite all of the physiological characteristics we share with one another, the competitive aspects of group organization have led us to emphasize subtle individual differences. Certain physical attributes (e.g., height, skin tone, muscularity and facial features) are put forward as standards of what is desirable or not desirable. In virtually all societies, these attributes play an important role in the distribution of

greater or lesser privileges sanctioned by the socio-political institutions governing the citizenry. Examined in a purely objective fashion, certain characteristics inherited from previous generations may either promote or restrict development of one's physical or mental abilities. Moreover, both our genetic inheritance and our growth-period nurturing environment are powerful factors in our development as individuals. Inherited talent can be nurtured or ignored, intellect stimulated or thwarted, so that (as Aristotle keenly observed) child is very much father to the man. What is also true, however, is that these varying circumstances and qualities do not alter the fundamental species-specific characteristics shared by all of us.

What history reveals is that the experience of people in an environment of scarcity—whether such scarcity is contrived or actual—fosters an intensely competitive socio-political structure within which all manner of subterfuge is employed to institutionalize privilege at the expense of equality of treatment and equality of opportunity demanded under a doctrine of human rights.

A curious aspect of our behavior is that we tend to accept a greater degree of equality when the survival of the group is at risk. An immediate or pending disaster tends to stimulate an instinctive movement toward *cooperation*, at least temporarily, until the threat has passed. This interplay between the forces of *cooperation* and *competition* is instinctive, certainly, but also reveals itself in ways that suggest an added dimension of conscious pursuit. The history of mankind and of our civilization arises in a very concrete manner out of the actions stimulated by these two distinct—often opposing, often parallel—modes of behavior. To understand the dynamics of cooperative and competitive behavior is, therefore, necessary for a greater understanding of ourselves.

FROM THE BEGINNING: COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

A general understanding of our evolutionary history is familiar to most of us, even if not universally accepted. Based on the evidence thus far uncovered, the overwhelming majority of scientists who have investigated this aspect of our history concur in the conclusion that our forefathers first appeared on the African continent, near the equator, in an area called the Great Rift Valley. They existed as foragers and then eventually adopted hunting of animals. Our primary competitors in the struggle for survival were other species of animals; and then, as now, each species was dependent in one way or another on the earth's ecosystem for continued survival. For the earliest people that ecosystem presented tremendous challenges in an environment that was at once mysterious and life-giving. That we survived while countless other species faltered and became extinct indicates that we were from the very beginning a most adept creature, a quality that contributed to the rapid development of our intellectual capabilities in a way most of us have given little thought to. The crucial period in our evolutionary history is described by Jacob Bronowski in ***The Ascent Of Man***:

> Human evolution began when the African climate changed to drought: the lakes shrank, the forest thinned out to savannah. And evidently it was fortunate for the forerunner of man that he was not well adapted to these conditions. For the environment exacts a price for the survival of the fittest; it captures them. In a parched African landscape like Omo [a river in Ethiopia near Lake Rudolf], man first put his foot to the ground. Two million years ago, the first certain ancestor of man walked with a foot which is almost indistinguishable from the foot of modern man. The fact is that when he put his foot on the ground and walked upright, man made a commitment to a new integration of life and therefore of his limbs.[35]

The first people were forced by environmental conditions to leave the trees yet remained for a long period inhabitants of the savannah. Understanding why our ancestors did not immediately migrate as environmental changes occurred remains speculative; the end result, however, was the gradual evolution of our ancestral creature into the being we are, into the species we call *homo sapien.* The next stage in human development became social and socio-political—the building of relationships and bondings between people of the same families, clans and tribes:

> Skulls and skeletons of Australopithecus that have been found in largish numbers show that most of them died before the age of twenty. That means that there must have been many orphans. For Australopithecus surely had a long childhood, as all the primates do; at the age of ten, say, the survivors were still children. Therefore there must have been a social organisation in which children were looked after and adopted, were made part of the community, and in some general sense were educated. That is a great step towards cultural evolution.[36]

The care of orphaned young as an accepted responsibility of the adult group members reflects an equally important characteristic of ancient people; namely, an awareness of the future, a sense of necessity to protect the young in order to protect the survival of the group. We will never know the extent to which this adaptation was the result of contemplative thought as opposed to an instinctive reaction. In many respects, the answer to this mystery might seem irrelevant. Of one thing we can be certain: because the question remains unanswered there are those who will dedicate years of patient research and examination of archeological remains to the search. They will do so because of their desire for knowledge. In the doing, these individuals display the most important qualities that distinguish us from other species of animals.

There occurred about a million years ago another major breakthrough in *the ascent of man.* Some combination of increased

brain power and an improvement in the physical characteristics of our hands opened the gate for technological advancement. Our skills in tool-making became refined, we gained the ability to plan and, as a result, we achieved greater successes in the hunting of other animals.

From the ancestral light Australopithecus onwards, the family of man ate some meat: small animals at first, larger ones later. Meat is a more concentrated protein than plant, and eating meat cuts down the bulk and the time spent in eating by two-thirds. The consequences for the evolution of man were far-reaching. He had more time free, and could spend it in more indirect ways, to get food from sources (such as large animals) which could not be tackled by hungry brute force. Evidently that helped to promote (by natural selection) the tendency of all primates to interpose an internal delay in the brain between stimulus and response, until it developed into the full human ability to postpone the gratification of desire.

But the most marked effect of an indirect strategy to enhance the food supply is, of course, to foster social action and communication. A slow creature like man can stalk, pursue and corner a large savannah animal that is adapted for flight only by co-operation. Hunting requires conscious planning and organisation by means of language, as well as specific weapons.[37]

Nature yet overpowers us, and we are far from understanding some of its most intimate secrets. In fact, our imperfect understanding and our tendency to act against what our reasoning powers would direct has caused us to seriously damage the physical environment on which we are totally dependent. We have already destroyed many of the plant and animal species whose presence had contributed to our survival, and we are by our thoughtless acts rushing toward our own extinction. Many of us living at this moment are destined to experience the consequences of past and current acts of irresponsibility. We do possess the intellect and a considerable degree of the understanding necessary to end the harm we are doing to our environment and ourselves. We must recognize, however, that many of the changes needed are not merely those of

attitude but are fundamentally attached to our socio-political arrangements and institutions. First, we must identify those characteristics which impede the advance of civilization; then, and only then, will we be in a position to act with reasoned decisiveness to make appropriate changes. We must act with some swiftness, but we must not act hastily or on intuition alone.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

The predictable outcomes of improved technology and planning include an extended life span and an increase in population. For our ancestors, however, the pace of change was far slower than the pace of population growth. At some point, the technology of food production was no longer able to sustain the increased numbers of people. Moreover, gradual and at times rapid changes in the natural environment periodically created hardship and scarcity where there had been a natural richness. Under a wide range of changing conditions, our hunter-gatherer ancestors often found themselves faced with the problem of too many mouths to feed. As historian Lewis Mumford concluded, ancient humans were severely limited by what nature provided directly, much as were the other animals with whom man coexisted:

> Hunting and food gathering sustain less than ten people per square mile: to be sure of a living, paleolithic man needed a wide range and great freedom of movement. Chance and luck compete with cunning and skill in early man's economy: now he feasts, now he starves: and until he learns to smoke and salt his meat, he must live from day to day, keeping to small, mobile groups, not heavily impeded by possessions, not tied to a fixed habitation.[38]

Survival, then, eventually dictated that these small groups of related people depart the savannah in search of food. One obvious strategy was to adopt the seasonal migrations of animal herds and thereby ensure that food was always at hand. We know that some of the ancients dispersed in rather rapid fashion over great distances, eventually reaching the northern and eastern fringes of Eurasia and migrating throughout the African continent. Scientists estimate that four hundred thousand years ago the human population had reached one million.

We are told the Ancients spread across the northern hemisphere just about the time of the first Ice Age. Here again, it was the success in harnessing nature through the use of technology that contributed to this phase in the advance of civilization. People took to living in caves and discovered how to use fire to great advantage. Of equal importance was an apparent instinctive recognition of certain modes of behavior and socio-political arrangements the discarding of which has resulted in a long history of human suffering. With improved technology came a greater attachment to possessions and, eventually, a willingness to engage in *conflict* with one another to secure personal wants. Looking at the historical evidence, Henry George identified as the fundamental principle of human behavior that we *seek to satisfy our desires—whatever they might be—with the least exertion*, a characteristic that is bound to generate conflict when people with little or no special bonding relationship to one another are in competition for survival goods. That population growth and environmental changes triggered conflict is suggested by Bronowski's observation that "*[m]an survived the fierce test of the Ice Ages because he had the flexibility of mind to recognize inventions and to turn them into community property.*"[39] Under the wrong conditions, however, inventions became instruments of power with which those in possession of weapons dominated others.

What has challenged humans from this early period on has been to deal with questions of justice where property is concerned. The question has yet to be resolved of whether or not there is a just basis for

declaring certain forms of property as belonging to the community as a whole, while other forms justly belong to the individual. And, to which individual? The individual who applies labor directly to nature to produce something of value? The individual who by various means is in control of a particular location and its inherent natural resources? Or, the individual who provides tools to facilitate the labor of another? To what extent these questions were actually raised by individuals within the very ancient societies is unknown; the oral traditions of many societies have been lost to us because written language did not develop to record their histories. In our era, in most societies, some recognition exists that the preservation of *community property* is required to assure future generations will also be able to experience nature in its raw and unchanged state. We have taken steps to do this because we also recognize the drive in individuals to gain and hold control over large portions of the earth for their own advantage. This has been accomplished throughout history by the use of outright force whenever fraud or privilege granted under positive law could not achieve the desired result. Again and again, history describes how we have acted in ways consistent with Henry George's first principle of human behavior, the principle with which he approached his investigations into political economy.

Satisfying desires with the least exertion was, on the whole, still a very demanding enterprise for the early hunter-gatherers. For most groups this form of societal structure and lifestyle would not remain their chosen means of survival. Virtually all people lived as foragers and hunters, however, until roughly twenty thousand years ago. Ten thousand years after the first tentative settlements appeared at the end of the last Ice Age our ancestors had discovered some of the secrets of agriculture; they were also domesticating animals as sources of food and as beasts of burden. At this juncture, we began in earnest to discard the nomadic existence and settle into more or less permanent

communities. Civilization as we know it began, with many of its virtues and vices present almost from the very start.

THE BIRTH OF CIVILIZATION

With settlement came a number of important changes in the activities of individuals and to socio-political arrangements. More time became available for investigation of their surroundings; and with time, innovation and specialization appeared. One structural change in particular has had long-lasting consequences—the creation of *protector* subgroups within the larger societal structure. Members of the protector subgroup initially performed the dual function of hunting for food and alerting others to dangers. Once more, what appeared to be a positive short-run solution to a serious problem destroyed the most positive elements of the ancient societies.

The eventual result of cultivating in the hunter-protector subgroup a warrior mentality was a breakdown in the societal sanctions that limited their aggressiveness to the task of defending against external groups. In on society after another, given enough time, the protectors, resorted to extortion rather than protection as a way of life. The fiercest and most able among this subgroup often assumed the role of chieftain and, with time and increase in their control over wealth (including what was taken from other societies as well as that confiscated from their own citizens), power became institutionalized and surrounded by pageantry. And, "*when kingship appeared, the war lord and the law lord became land lord too* History also confirms that once power is acquired, those in possession will tend to do whatever is necessary to hold onto their power and the material benefits derived therefrom.

The socio-political arrangements associated with tyranny and oppression—which, by Mortimer Adler's bench mark—exist wherever some are being deprived of sufficient economic (and other) goods, have

their origins in the early appearance of subgroups whose members used force and intimidation to relieve producers of the material wealth this latter group generated. What made possible the beginning of systematic confiscation was, in part, the global warming, opening larger areas of the earth to cultivation. New forms of vegetation arose as the climate continued to moderate. Of particular importance was the appearance of a new hybrid form of wheat that contained a full head of seeds, easily scattered by the wind. When crossed with certain goat grasses, this new wheat produced a valuable food crop from which bread could be made. What is so remarkable and so fortunate for our forefathers was that the resulting hybrid plant had a very tight ear, so that its seeds did not spread with the wind; the new plant survived only because people learned to harvest the crop and scatter the seeds in a purposeful fashion. Fixed settlement built on the domestication of wheat and other formerly wild vegetation, and of certain animals, gave birth to changes in long-established social mores and to socio-political arrangements. Ancient people used their power of contemplative thought to change the form of nature to better satisfy their drive for survival. In the process, the potential for exploitation gradually increased. Some would seek to satisfy their desires by means of the use of force, coercion and fraud, a tendency that remains a burden on the advance of civilization and must be constrained if we are to build just societies on a framework of just positive law.

ANCIENT BUILDERS

The oldest known continuously occupied community in the world is the city of Jericho, located in ancient Judea (part of modern Israel). Jericho has long served as an oasis at the edge of a harsh desert region. However, Jericho's very growth and prosperity required the construction some nine thousand years ago of a protective wall to

secure its wealth and citizens[40] from attacks by nomadic tribes. Jericho remained an agricultural settlement until around 3000 B.C., when, as Lewis Mumford explains:

> [G]rain cultivation, the plow, the potter's wheel, the sailboat, the draw loom, cooper metallurgy, abstract mathematics, exact astronomical observation, the calendar, writing and other modes of intelligible discourse in permanent form, all came into existence...[41]

The competition among groups for the most arable and fertile lands intensified as the technology of agriculture yielded both increased production of food and growth in human population. During times of drought when famine threatened, the bonds between people dissolved and conflict occurred. Desperation dictated the use of force against those who controlled the lands and sources of water needed for survival. Around 1400 B.C. Jericho itself was invaded by the tribes of Israel. Thus, here in the heart of the ancient world our modern civilization had its origins, simultaneously influencing and being influenced by those who continued to wander back and forth across this centrally-positioned region. Even today, conflict dominates the relationship between the citizens of the State of Israel and their largely Arab and Moslem neighbors. This conflict is exacerbated by the dependency of the world's population on access to oil reserves deep below the region's surface lands. In many respects, then, the current circumstance represents only the latest phase in a conflict that has spanned all of recorded history.[42]

As the pattern of life established at Jericho was replicated in other regions of the Eurasian and African continents, the tribal societies engaged in hunting and gathering were either absorbed, decimated in warfare or migrated to the far reaches of the globe. The process began simply enough, as described in 1969 by Desmond Morris in ***The Human Zoo*** :

At first there was little trade or inter-action between one urban centre and the others. This was to be the next great advance, and it took time. The psychological barrier to such a step was obviously the loss of local identity. It was not so much a case of 'the tribe that lost its head', as the human head refusing to lose its tribe. The species had evolved as a tribal animal and the basic characteristic of a tribe is that it operates on a localized, inter-personal basis. To abandon this fundamental social pattern, so typical of the ancient human condition, was going to go against the grain. But it was the grain, in another sense, so efficiently harvested and transported, that was forcing the pace. As agriculture advanced and the urban elite, liberated from the labours of production, began to concentrate their brain-power on other, newer problems, it was inevitable that there would eventually emerge an urban network, a hierarchically organized interconnection between neighboring towns and cities.[43]

For those who remained within the confines and reach of civilization, the bonds which governed tribal societies would slowly dissolve, to be replaced by formal systems of administration, positive law and hierarchical socio-political institutions. Two important technological advances contributed to the changes that occurred in these agriculturally-based societies. These were the invention of the plough and the domestication of draught animals. Then, with the invention of the wheel around 3000 B.C. these societies reached a stage where they were able to materially alter that which nature had provided. Formal organization of societal norms then accelerated with each new technological improvement.

Matters affecting the entire community required regulation. Access to land, the upkeep and control of water resources, property rights in domesticated animals and agricultural products all demanded clear delineations of ownership, authority and responsibility.

The most important change in tribal socio-political arrangements is represented by the appearance of walled citadels within the ancient cities. As the hunter-protector subgroups evolved into *warrior-oppressors*, these self-appointed leaders increasingly needed to separate

themselves from the main body of citizens as a precaution against rebellion. In essence, the producers in these societies were coerced into paying tribute in grain or other commodities, in return for which they received few, if any, services from those who assumed power. The degree to which such power thwarted the advance of human civilization is suggested by Lewis Mumford:

> He who controlled the annual agricultural surplus exercised the powers of life and death over his neighbors. That artificial creation of scarcity in the midst of increasing natural abundance was one of the first characteristic triumphs of the new economy of civilized exploitation: an economy profoundly contrary to the mores of the village.[44]

The gradual displacement of a protection-oriented service sector by what amounts to a class of professional extortionists dramatically reduced the level of cooperative enterprise within these societies. The tribal respect for common property in both land and production was rapidly disappearing in favor of individual forms of ownership and control over land concentrated in the leadership hierarchies.

The horse, domesticated for carrying riders around 2000 B.C. changed not only the nature but the intensity of warfare between groups. Not only did armies on horseback require a high level of organization and command hierarchy to accumulate provisions and move over long distances, the expectation of attack stimulated a similar response on the part of their intended victims. For a growing majority of people, however, the issue of who won these wars meant primarily a change in who would be the next extortionist (although the payment of tribute was undoubtedly preferable to annihilation or enslavement. A cynical interpretation of history is that warfare is the normal relationship between societal groups, interspersed with brief and localized periods of peace. There is room to debate Bronowski's assertion that "*organized war is not a human instinct.*" However, whether this behavior is instinctive or learned, Bronowski is certainly correct in

stating that war is "*a highly planned and co-operative form of theft.*"[45] Writing several decades before the first global conflict began, Henry George (in ***Social Problems***) warned that if the leaders of nations could not reconcile differences, the destruction would be incalculable:

> [I]n the closely knit civilization to which we have attained, a war, a scarcity, a commercial crisis, in one hemisphere produces powerful effects in the other, while shocks and jars from which a primitive community easily recovers would to a highly civilized community mean wreck.[46]

That war continues to be viewed as a potentially-profitable means of acquiring control over new territories and resources confirms the fears expressed by the most thoughtful among us in every generation.

Throughout history there have been societies whose members wished nothing more than to live in peace, pursuing their livelihood in cooperative fashion. The one real alternative to subjecting themselves to the potential tyranny of a warrior subgroup was to become inaccessible, to hide from marauding invaders and external interference of any kind. The Incas left a striking example of just such a survival tactic in the mountains of Peru. Here, the city of Machu Picchu was built eight thousand feet up in the Andes, out of reach of the Spanish conquistadors and the weaponry they brought to the Americas.

A second, more common, method of defense set the stage for socio-political change throughout much of Eurasia. This was the system of alliances between neighboring societies designed initially to give pause to the ambitions of non-member groups. The longer run result was to consolidate the availability of manpower, wealth and natural resources for the purpose of empire-building.

SPREADING WESTERN CIVILIZATION
The Greeks Establish A New Direction

The earliest recorded effort in the Eastern Mediterranean to forge a unified State was made by the Mycenaean people between 2000 and 1200 B.C. Invasion and defeat by the technologically and socio-politically less advanced Dorian tribe around 1200 B.C. brought this first attempt at forced unification to an abrupt end. As a consequence, by the eighth century B.C. Greece had dissolved into hundreds of disunited city-states,[47] each cut off from its neighbors by a mountainous terrain, the surrounding seas and hostile invaders.

During the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. the individual Greek city-states embarked on a period of colonial expansion along the southern Mediterranean, reaching as far west as where Marseilles (called Massilia by the Greeks) is located in modern France. Within a relatively short time, however, most of the Greek colonies were given independence from their mother polis. The newly-independent colonies remained tied to their Greek homeland not by force but by tradition, culture and sentiment. Back within the core of the Greek homelands, wars still occurred with considerable frequency between the city-states; the historical record strongly suggests these conflicts were caused primarily by land-hunger in a region where nature only grudgingly yielded sufficient wealth to sustain an expanding population.

Over several centuries the population of the southernmost Greek city-states swelled with refugees fleeing from northern invasions, increasing the pressures on an already unstable food supply. As has often occurred throughout history, food shortages were aggravated by a shift local farmers had made from producing staples to cash crops. Colonial expansion had opened up lucrative markets for wine and olive oil, with fish and grain coming back as imports. The costs of growing grapes for wine and olive trees for oil put a heavy strain on poorer

farmers, who resorted to borrowing from wealthier landowners at high interest rates. Over time, unstable markets and poor crop yields caused a large number of these farmers to default on their debts and eventually lose the land to which they had acquired title. Many were then forced to work off their remaining debt as laborers in what had been their own vineyards. Contributing to the plight of the poorer farmers was the importation of metallic coins (and, perhaps more importantly, an understanding of the metallurgy to produce them) from Asia Minor in the seventh century B.C. With metal coins the wealthy now possessed a convenient method of stockpiling their personal wealth, reducing the need for locally produced crops and other items of exchange. Coinage facilitated the replacement of face-to-face barter by trade between unseen parties. The relations between societies and individuals within societies was beginning to change at an accelerated pace.

The vast expansion of trade throughout Greece also created a new subgroup of wealthy merchants, ship owners and craftsmen, many of whom resented the concentration of socio-political power within the Greek landed aristocracy (a story to be repeated again and again throughout the centuries to follow). An era of insurrection began that gradually displaced the aristocracy and allowed for a period of experimentation in different methods of governing; in the process, a new basis for status was established within the socio-political hierarchy. In Sparta this took the form of a military regime, an oligarchy of the warrior subgroup. Athens, at least for a time, traveled along a route described by many social scientists with considerable admiration. Athens during its golden period is, perhaps, best described by one of its own leading statesmen and champions, Pericles:

> We are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as

the reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition.[48]

By almost any measurement appropriate to a comparison with its contemporary sister city-states, Athens shines as the center of equalitarian practice. Many modern societies fall far short in a comparison with the Athens of this era. Measured against the standard of absolute principle, however, Athens still had far to go down the road toward either equality of treatment under positive law or equality of opportunity. Citizenship was restricted to what amounted to a large minority of males. Slaves, captured and taken from their homelands in Asia Minor and the region surrounding the Black Sea, comprised the Athenian labor force. The role of women was to be supportive but submissive, and they held no direct political power. This is not to say that the role of women was not a subject for discussion. In ***The Republic***, Plato has Socrates arguing that some women are the equals or betters of at least some men:

> [T]here is no occupation concerned with the management of social affairs which belongs either to woman or to man, as such. Natural gifts are to be found here and there in both creatures alike; and every occupation is open to both, so far as their natures are concerned, though woman is for all purposes the weaker...
>
> It follows that one woman will be fitted by nature to be a Guardian, another will not; because these were the qualities for which we selected our men Guardians. So for the purpose of keeping watch over the commonwealth, woman has the same nature as man, save in so far as she is weaker...[49]

Ironically, the golden age of Greek democracy had already passed during Plato's own lifetime. Plato, after reaching his eightieth year, died in 348 or 347 B.C. Socrates had been executed in 399 B.C. after Athens had been defeated in war and its democratic government deposed. The leadership of Greek intellectualism was then passed on to Aristotle, who was born in 384 B.C. and studied with Plato until well into his adult life.

In ***Politics***, Aristotle sets down the basis for the socio-political philosophy that would direct the destiny of *Western* civilization until well into the late sixteenth century:

> The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants. ...But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village...
>
> When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end...
>
> Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad man or above humanity...
>
> The proof that the state is a creation of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole...
>
> [J]ustice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.[50]

Aristotle, generally recognized as representing the highest development in Greek socio-political thought, argues that institutionalism is necessary for the advance of civilization. That we are during our nurturing period dependent upon others for our survival is certainly true. As societies increase in population and begin to experience a *division of labor* and the development of hierarchy, the family ceases to be self-sufficient and is in many ways dependent on the continuity of the socio-political arrangements and institutions within which it functions. Observing that this is the case, Aristotle raises the question of whether the State has a life of its own independent of the individuals comprising its citizenry. The State is an entity all societies

will eventually create when conditions have reached an appropriate stage of complexity and hierarchical structure. Thousands of years later, we have yet to reach consensus on what is the ideal form of societal organization. We should not be surprised that the ancient Greeks struggled themselves in the quest for this elusive truth.

Widespread discussion of the socio-political writings of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle would re-emerge from the Arab world during the Middle Ages to influence Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, only to be seriously challenged in the fifteenth century by John Calvin and Martin Luther, and in the seventeenth century most prominently by John Locke. In their own era, Greek discussion of philosophical and socio-political issues was overshadowed by long and destructive struggles between leadership groups for ever more concentrated power. There were to be no Greek philosopher-kings, although in Alexander the empire experienced something of its own renaissance.

Viewing history as a continuum, the dominant role of *democratic* Athens during the period of Greek ascendancy to a position of strength and power in the eastern Mediterranean can be seen as an interruption in the natural tendency toward autocratic rule. The Athenian leadership was largely responsible for bringing together the Greek city-states in an alliance against Persia between 490-480 B.C. The Greeks formed the Delian League, which eventually grew into a formidable Greek empire. However, within a relatively short period, democracy was supplanted by the warrior-chieftain leadership structure, out of which the predictable occurred and the Greeks themselves became oppressed by their own leaders. The Athenians attempted to exact tribute from their sister city-states, a miscalculation that brought war and disintegration of the Greek empire. To Lewis Mumford, the lessons to be learned from this early experience in empire-building were crystal clear:

In magnifying all that wealth and military power can bring, the Athenians had forgotten the essentially symbiotic and co-operative associations of the city, which flourish only when they are both internally balanced and in equilibrium within a wider environment.[51]

And yet the Greek experiment with a participatory socio-political structure served as the foundation upon which much of the future of *Western* civilization was eventually constructed. The concepts of democracy and republican government became formally incorporated into the institutionalism of the Greek city-states. Inherited power was challenged by a limited equality of opportunity based on principles of meritocracy that would instinctively appeal to certain eighteenth century radicals. Unfortunately, the Greeks themselves were not to be given time to learn from their mistakes. They had reached the heights of their power and were destined to be overtaken by others. Very much along the same lines as Mumford, Henry George wrote of them:

The principle of association was never strong enough to save Greece from intertribal war, and when this was put an end to by conquest, the tendency to inequality, which had been combated with various devices by Grecian sages and statesmen, worked its result, and Grecian valor, art, and literature become things of the past.[52]

An end of sorts came at the hands of the Macedonians, descending from the north in 338 B.C. Two years later, after the assassination of his father, Philip, the destiny of the Macedonian-Greek empire fell to Alexander.[53] After crushing the resistance of the remaining Greek city-states in the south, Alexander pushed eastward at the expense of the Persian empire. New territories and peoples were added to the Macedonian empire; however, Alexander did not live long enough to solidify his domain into a functioning State system. His plan, only partially set into motion, had been to permit considerable

self-government in the conquered regions while establishing new centers of Greek culture populated and governed by Greek colonists.

LULL BEFORE THE ROMAN STORM

One of Alexander's lasting contributions to *Western* civilization was the establishment of the city of Alexandria on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean at the mouth of the Nile River. By the first century B.C., Alexandria had become the most dynamic city of the ancient world and reached a population of a million people. This outward appearance of strength and prosperity was misleading, however. For a considerable period, Alexandria's prosperity rested not on expensive military adventures but on an openness to commerce and trade. Goods came from tropical Africa, from the Arabian peninsula, from the Persian Gulf and even from India. Exchanged in Alexandria, goods spread throughout the Mediterranean world. Yet, even in Alexandria, the framework upon which socio-political arrangements and institutions rested was inherently and significantly unjust. The city experienced great wealth and widespread poverty existing side by side, as do many of the world's large cities today, and with virtually the same forces at play:

> Businessmen, high officials, and great landowners led a comfortable existence, [but] for society as a whole...there was no advance.[54]

Sadly, along with the building of civilization's most extensive library of ancient texts and manuscripts, those who ruled over this great city did so by imposing their will on the majority of the population. The poor citizens suffered the burden of low wages and heavy taxation; an even larger number of enslaved labored for the benefit of their masters. Weakened by these internal disparities of wealth and power, the

Macedonian empire faltered. The core of Mediterranean power was shifting to the west, to Rome. To be sure, Rome would benefit from the Greek and Macedonian experiments in governing and empire-building. Alexander had attempted to secure a balance of power between political units larger than the city-states, and that of absolute rule. This yielded some short-lived successes but could not overcome the widespread disunity and desire for independence that undermines all empire-building efforts.

Rome itself came into its own as a city while still under domination by a foreign power, the Etruscans. By the end of the sixth century B.C., indigenous Romans and other Latin tribes rebelled against the Etruscans and formed an independent republic. To protect themselves from invasion and re-subjugation, these newly-independent city-states raised a permanent army and established an aristocratic government headed by a class of citizens known by the name *Patricians*, who by virtue of their ownership of landed property, alone enjoyed full rights of citizenship. Historians estimate that only 10 percent of the population fell into this group. Inevitably, conflict arose as the Patricians abused their power and attempted to confiscate more and more of the wealth produced by others.

In very much the same pattern as had occurred in Greece, many poorer farmers lost title to land they farmed. Patrician creditors took control and the farmers were forced into an indentured role as laborers in the fields. Civil strife occurred, which brought some compromise and benefit to the lesser, *Plebeian* class of citizens. Patrician estates were limited by law in an attempt to reduce the concentrated control over land, and enslavement as a penalty for nonpayment of debt was prohibited. Crucial to the future of Rome's ambitions for empire, newly acquired territories were opened to resettlement by Rome's landless citizens. Thus, even as a republic, Rome remained dominated by a wealthy, landed aristocracy; the empire, on the other hand, created opportunities for military leaders and other Plebeians to obtain vast

landholdings and material wealth—at the expense of the defeated and vanquished. In the process, a new upper class of Plebeians, the *Nobiles*, appeared, and the Roman empire gradually became a bastion of privilege more deeply entrenched as the generations passed.

THE LONG DECLINE

The art of writing history is much more than putting into prose information about people and events. Civilization's best historians have also excelled as storytellers. With the Roman empire, the historian is provided with a drama of epic proportions, full of twists and turns, intrigues, alliances and betrayals. As the eighteenth century neared its end, the British historian Edward Gibbon brought the Roman empire back to life on paper. In six volumes, Gibbon described in detail its rise and eventual fall.

As a member of the British Parliament, Gibbon was a staunch supporter of his own country's expansionist objectives. As a student of empire and the reasons for its collapse, he somehow failed to recognize the characteristics shared by Rome and his own British empire. As an example, Gibbon opposed the granting of equal citizenship rights to British subjects in North America, a measure that might have drawn the colonials closer to Britain and altered the course of history. As a writer, and to his credit, he relied on many of the tools of the political economist in his examination of the Roman empire. His research brought him to summarize the causes of Rome's decline into four categories: (1) the injuries of time and nature; (2) the hostile attacks of the barbarians and Christians; (3) the use and abuse of materials; and, (4) domestic quarrels. Despite his own blind spot, had his contemporaries studied Gibbon's history of Rome more closely, they would have gained valuable insight into the problems created when a society discards reason in favor of naked aggression. One example is

found in his description of what is meant by "*injuries of time and nature*" as a primary cause of decline:

> The art of man is able to construct monuments far more permanent than the narrow span of his own existence; yet these monuments, like himself, are perishable and frail; and in the boundless annals of time his life and his labours must equally be measured as a fleeting moment.[55]

Gibbon here reminds us that our time on earth is extremely brief and that the legacy of whatever we create of a material nature is short-lived. Only nature is permanent (or, nearly so), while individual persons and our products appear and disappear as just so much cosmic dust. As one might expect, these were views not altogether appreciated by the established Church; in the introduction to the referenced edition of Gibbon's work, Willson Whitman records that "*James Boswell, calling the author an 'infidel wasp', expressed the irritation felt by right-minded people...*" Gibbon still evoked controversy among his countrymen more than a century later. In ***The Outline Of History***, H.G. Wells relies on Gibbon as a primary source in a subtle yet effective condemnation of the idle rich as a universally exploitative class. In a later chapter on "The Nineteenth Century," Wells compares conditions in industrial Britain with those of ancient Rome:

> The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid advance in popular education throughout all the Westernized world. There was no parallel advance in the education of the upper classes, some advance no doubt, but nothing to correspond and so the great gulf that had divided that world hitherto into the readers and the non-reading mass became little more than a slightly perceptible difference in educational level. At the back of this process was the mechanical revolution, apparently regardless of social conditions, but really insisting inexorably upon the complete abolition of a totally illiterate class throughout the world.

The economic revolution of the Roman republic had never been clearly apprehended by the common people of Rome. The ordinary Roman citizen never saw the changes through which he lived, clearly and comprehensively as we see them. But the industrial revolution. as it went on towards the end of the nineteenth century, was more and more distinctly *seen* as one whole process by the common people it was affecting, because presently they could read and discuss and communicate, and because they went about and saw things as no commonalty had ever done before.[56]

Wells, who was an early leader of the Fabian Society in Britain, recognized important similarities in the socio-political arrangements and institutions of ancient Rome and those of Britain in the late nineteenth century. Writing from a more critical perspective than Gibbon, Wells observed that the Roman republic failed because it "*could not sustain unity*" in the absence of just law uniformly applied. Most importantly, Wells points to the reasons why Roman law ceased to protect the republic from internal disruption:

[T]he unforeseen invention and development of money, the temptations and disruptions of imperial expansion, the entanglement of electoral methods, weakened and swamped the tradition by presenting old issues in new disguises under which the judgment did not recognize them, and by enabling men to be loyal to the professions of citizenship and disloyal to its spirit. ...As the idea of citizenship failed and faded before the new occasions, there remained no inner, that is to say no real, unity in the system at all. Every man tended more and more to do what was right in his own eyes.[57]

Rome suffered the common fate of societies devoid of socio-political arrangements grounded in just principles—internal weakness that encouraged external invasion. In the end, the citizens of Rome were left only with what the conquering invaders did not carry away or destroy. They were left without a storehouse of wealth to use as capital and were forced to return to the fundamental relationship between themselves

and nature. Left free to use their accumulated knowledge, skills and abilities—and granted access to nature—the Roman Plebeians (and, perhaps, some of the former Patricians) would have soon rebuilt all and more of what had been lost. Rome's ultimate demise rested, then, not from invasion, but on the weight of privilege that pervaded Roman society and which could not be maintained without the coercive power of the State. Given the structure of its institutions, the fall of Rome was inevitable. As Gibbon notes:

> The happiness of an hundred millions depended on the personal merit of one or two men, perhaps children, whose minds were corrupted by education, luxury, and despotic power.[58]

Ironically, Gibbon failed to recognize the key similarities between the Roman and British empires that would eventually cause the latter to falter as well. In ***Progress And Poverty***, Henry George looked somewhat more deeply into this historical comparison than Gibbon was willing to do and uncovers a structural imbalance common in some degree to all States, empire-building and not:

> It was the struggle between [the] idea of equal rights to the soil and the tendency to monopolize it in individual possession, that caused the internal conflicts of Greece and Rome; it was the check given to this tendency...that gave to each their days of strength and glory; and it was the final triumph of this tendency that destroyed both.
>
> [A]s the soil, in spite of the warnings of great legislators and statesmen, passed finally into the possession of a few, population declined, art sank, the intellect became emasculate, and the race in which humanity had attained its most splendid development became a byword and reproach among men.[59]

Considerable detail is provided in later chapters of this work on the rise and (not quite so dramatic) fall of the British empire. As we follow the trail of history, we will do well to keep in mind the common threads

pointed to by Gibbon, Wells and George. More recently, historians Brinton, Christopher and Wolff added their voices to that of Henry George, writing that "the perennial trends toward the concentration of land and the consequent reduction of independent small farmers to the status of unemployed inhabitants of a city under cut Roman prosperity."[60] Even Frederick Engels brings very much the same insight to the demise of the Roman empire, summarized in a single paragraph:

> The banishment of the last *rex* [king], Tarquinius Superbus, who usurped real monarchic power, and the replacement of the office of *rex* by two military leaders (consuls) with equal powers (as among the Iroquois) was simply a further development of th[e] new constitution. Within this new constitution, the whole history of the Roman republic runs its course with all the struggles between patricians and plebeians for admission to office and share in the state lands, and the final merging of the patrician nobility in the new class of the great land and money owners, who, gradually swallowing up all the land of the peasants ruined by military service, employed slave labor to cultivate the enormous estates thus formed, depopulated Italy and so threw open the door not only to the emperors but also to their successors, the German barbarians.[61]

POSTSCRIPT ON THE LAND QUESTION

Gibbon can perhaps be forgiven for failing to make the connections between the socio-political conditions he so well described in Rome and his own society. Very few of his contemporaries, not even the great Scottish political economist Adam Smith made the general historical connection between the monopoly of nature by the few and the inevitability of collapse from the weight of oppression on the many. And yet, even those who wrote and spoke knowingly of this relationship did not often follow their observations through with a determined struggle on behalf of change. Winston Churchill, for example,

championed the cause against land monopoly during his early political career; yet, during the period of his greatest influence he fell strangely silent on the subject. Here, from a political tract titled ***The People's Rights***, written in the first decade of the twentieth century, we find Churchill speaking with great conviction on matters that seemed to have the utmost importance to the future of his country:

> It is of the first importance to the country—any country—that there should be vigilant and persistent efforts to prevent abuses, to distribute the public burdens fairly among all classes, and to establish good laws governing the methods by which wealth may be acquired. The best way to make private property secure and respected is to bring the processes by which it is gained into harmony with the general interests of the public. When and where property is associated with the idea of reward for services rendered, with the idea of reward for high gifts and special aptitudes displayed or for faithful labour done, then property will be honoured. When it is associated with processes which are beneficial, or which at the worst are not actually injurious to the commonwealth, then property will be unmolested; but when it is associated with ideas of wrong and of unfairness, with processes of restriction and monopoly, and other forms of injury to the community, then I think that you will find that property will be assailed and will be endangered.
>
> *Land differs from all other forms of property.* It is quite true that the land monopoly is not the only monopoly which exists, but it is by far the greatest of monopolies—it is a perpetual monopoly, and it is the mother of all other forms of monopoly. Land, which is a necessity of human existence, which is the original source of all wealth, which is strictly limited in extent, which is fixed in geographical position—land, I say, differs from all other forms of property in these primary and fundamental conditions.[62]

And so it does. To conclude otherwise is to fall victim to a crucial error in reasoning and observation, one that leads to a whole series of subsequent erroneous conclusions about the functioning of markets, of socio-political institutions and the course of history.

Land monopoly on the scale practiced by the Romans would have to wait until the arrival of the industrial revolution. Out of the ashes of the Roman empire there arose in the interim a form of political and social organization we now call *Feudalism*. The large-scale States, epitomized by Greece, Macedonia and Rome were supplanted by societal units that were relatively small and largely independent of one another. Significant isolation not only created an ever-present sense of distrust for outsiders but also greatly weakened the spread of culture and scientific understanding for so long nurtured, in particular, by Greek artisans and scholars. Also, the unifying influence of Latin as a primary language was lost with the appearance of localized dialects.

The specific events that finally split and reduced the Roman empire are well-documented. Germanic and Celtic tribes had for centuries tested the strength of Rome at its frontiers. In 378 the BalticVisigoths handed the Romans their first major defeat near the Black Sea in northeastern Greece. They then moved south, eventually capturing Rome itself in 410. Justinian later attempted to restore the western empire, and around 800 Charlemagne consolidated the holdings of the Franks into a short-lived centralized empire that encompassed all and more of the former Roman territories. With Charlemagne's death, however, the fragmentation of Europe began in earnest. The sons of Charlemagne fought over control of the empire, bringing about a division that set the stage for the emergence of a unified France, with German and Italian princes fighting one another for control over their own enlarged territories. The British Isles were invaded by three Germanic tribes, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, resisted by Britons of Celtic origin whose ancestors had stood before Roman invaders in 55 B.C. Vikings invaded Ireland during the ninth century, ending a long period of relative isolation for the Celtic tribes of Ireland and opening the door to later domination by the Normans after their conquest of Britain in 1066. The Vikings also gained territory along the French coast (Normandy) and continued periodic attacks into central Europe and

eastern Russia. Central and Eastern Europe gradually dissolved into small, feudalistic states. In much of Southern Europe and across North Africa, Moslem control was firmly established by the early eighth century.

Feudal Eurasia, then, from the fall of Rome in the fifth century experienced continuous invasion, conquest, absorption of new peoples and a gradual establishment of relatively small, sovereign states. Arab control over North Africa and the Middle East had emerged as the eastern Byzantine empire's great rival. In the end, it was the Arabs who kept alive the Greek intellectual heritage upon which the Renaissance of Mediterranean Europe arose.

THE ANCIENT WORLD'S LEGACY

I have in this chapter traced the ascent of man from hunter-gatherer to builder of empires. For most of our history, the struggle for survival has been against the forces of nature and other species. These threats diminished considerably as group organization and cooperative behavior became more sophisticated. Yet the organizational and technological advances achieved carried with them new threats to our survival associated with the more competitive and often darker side of our behavior. In the transition from hunter-protector to warrior-protector, to warrior-oppressor and warrior-king, those who possessed the physical strength and the knowledge of weaponry ***sought to satisfy their desires*** by force, fraud and extortion. Creatively shrouded in ritual and claims of divine origins to justify the usurpation of such power, leadership groups often secured their livelihood by extracting tribute from producers within their own societies or enslaving outsiders in order to appropriate nearly all of what these individuals could produce.

To what extent was the splendor of ancient Greece or Rome owed to the labor of slaves? One assessment is provided by economist Robert Heilbroner, who writes:

> [S]lavery on a massive scale was a fundamental pillar of nearly every ancient economic society. In Greece, for instance, the deceptively modern air of the Piraeus masks the fact that much of the purchasing power of the Greek merchant was provided by the labor of 20,000 slaves who labored under sickening conditions in the silver mines of Laurentium. At the height of "democratic" Athens, it is estimated that at least one-third of its population were slaves. In Italy of 30 B.C., some 1,500,000 slaves—on the latifundia, in the galleys, the mines, the "factories," the shops—provided a major impetus in keeping the economic machinery in motion.[63]

Slavery and the concentrated control of land combined to bring eventual ruin to the ancient empires. Slaves had little incentive or opportunity to experiment with new methods of production; theirs was largely an exercise of brute labor. The same was true for those forced to work the landed estates of others. The form of State that emerged excelled at harnessing societal resources for warfare and empire-expansion, and the model they brought to conquered peoples imposed a system of institutionalized privilege and mass extortion. As described by the noted Catholic historian, Christopher Dawson:

> Roman capitalists, moneylenders, slave-dealers and tax-gatherers descended on the East like a swarm of locusts and sucked the life out of the dependent communities. Every Roman, from the aristocratic capitalist...down to the meanest agent of the great financial corporations, had his share in the plunder. The age of the Republic culminated in an orgy of economic exploitation which ruined the prosperity of the subject peoples and brought Rome herself to the verge of destruction.[64]

And yet, at its best the establishment by the Roman courts of a system of international law operated to allow commerce and trade to

flourish within the empire. Legal scholars see in this branch of Roman law a lasting legacy and, under the influence of the Greek Stoic philosophers, the origins of the principles of natural law and reliance on reason to determine which laws were or were not consistent with principles of justice. In the sixth century, the emperor Justinian ordered a systematic coding of Roman law, judicial opinions and imperial edicts. These ideas would lie dormant throughout much of Eurasia until rediscovered during the Renaissance. Then, in a far more determined way, new generations of philosophers and activists would again challenge the status quo and raise questions related to the justness of existing socio-political arrangements.