

# 5/Hunting and Gathering Societies

*When Adam delved and Eve span  
Who was then the gentleman?  
John Ball*

HUNTING AND GATHERING SOCIETIES are the most primitive of all human societies with respect to technology in general and mode of production in particular. Nevertheless, throughout most of human history this was the only type of society known to man. It is only in the last ten thousand years that men have advanced to the point where they have been able to control and enlarge their food supply through the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals.

Fortunately for modern social scientists, these advances have been slow to spread and the older way of life survived into the modern era in certain of the more inaccessible and infertile areas of the world. Hence it has been possible for trained observers to study the ways of life of peoples whose productive systems are radically different from our own. Among such groups are the aborigines of Australia, the Tasmanians, the Semang and Sakai of Malaya, the Kubu

of Sumatra, the Punan of Borneo, the Vedda of Ceylon, the Andaman Islanders, the Pygmies and Bushmen of Africa, a number of South American Indian tribes in the Amazon basin, the Gran Chaco, and Patagonia, certain of the Indian tribes of North America in the region from the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast, and some of the Eskimos. It is on these peoples that we shall depend for empirical data to test our hypotheses about the influence of productive systems on the distributive process, and also for additional insights into the distinctive characteristics of distributive systems at this level of economic development.

Two types of societies which might seem to fit under the heading of hunting and gathering societies will be excluded. The first are societies in which *fishing* constitutes a major source of subsistence. While fishing might be regarded as simply a variant form of hunting, there is good reason for treating this as a doubtful hypothesis to be explored rather than as an assumption on which to build. Available evidence indicates that the yields from fishing are both greater and less variable than those from hunting, thus raising the level of productivity and otherwise altering the nature of societies.<sup>1</sup> Hence, this chapter will not attempt to deal with groups such as the Kwakiutl, Haida, Tlingit, and other fishing tribes of the Northwest Coast of North America, or the Guato, Mura, Yaruro, and other "aquatic nomads" of the rivers of South America.<sup>2</sup>

The second category to be excluded are those societies which did not come to the attention of Western observers until they had been substantially transformed by contact with European civilization and the introduction of technological traits which are completely alien to traditional hunting and gathering societies. Included here are the Plains Indians of the United States whose cultures were transformed by the influence of the horse and the gun (and sometimes the fur trade as well) long before the first direct contacts with Europeans. This category also includes the Plains Indians of southeastern South America who incorporated the horse and cattle into their cultures prior to direct contact with Europeans. For a time anthropologists were inclined to minimize the influence of these elements on native cultures, but more recent work strongly indicates that they exercised a revolutionary effect.<sup>3</sup> Most modern anthropologists be-

<sup>1</sup> For discussions of the difference fishing can make see Gordon Hewes, "The Rubric 'Fishing and Fisheries,'" *American Anthropologist*, 50 (1948), pp. 238-246; Julian Steward, *Theory of Culture Change* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1955), chap. 10; or John Honigsmann, *The World of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 308-311.

<sup>2</sup> For a good introduction to the Northwest Coast Indians, see Philip Drucker, *Indians of the Northwest Coast* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955); for the fishing tribes of South America, see Julian H. Steward and Louis Faron, *Native Peoples of South America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 437-444.

<sup>3</sup> For the earlier view, see Clark Wissler, "The Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Culture," *American Anthropologist*, 16 (1914), pp. 1-25. For the more

lieve that the horse and gun led to greatly increased mobility, warfare, numbers, wealth, and inequality, all of which represented marked departures from the usual pattern in hunting and gathering societies. In some instances the introduction of the horse and gun even led societies on the horticultural level of development to "revert" to hunting as their chief means of subsistence, further complicating the problems of analysis. For all these reasons these theoretically "contaminated" or "hybrid" societies have been excluded from the present analysis.

### Common Features of Hunting and Gathering Societies

Although hunting and gathering societies differ in a number of ways, they share a great many important characteristics simply because of their common means of subsistence. Were it not for these many associated characteristics it would be much more difficult to develop a special theory of stratification for these societies.<sup>4</sup>

To begin with, where techniques of food production are primitive and inefficient (in the sense of product value per unit of energy expended), other elements of technology are also primitive. These include techniques of providing shelter, making clothes (if these are used), making tools and weapons, transportation, etc. For example, the tools and weapons in these societies are invariably made of wood, stone, bone, and other materials taken directly from nature, since the techniques of metal working are unknown.<sup>5</sup>

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recent view, see A. L. Kroeber, "Native Culture of the Southwest," University of California Publications, *American Archaeology and Ethnology*, 23 (1928), pp. 375-398; Bernard Mishkin, *Rank and Warfare among the Plains Indians*, Monographs of the American Ethnological Society, 3 (1940), especially chaps. 2 and 6; Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact upon Blackfoot Culture*, Monographs of the American Ethnological Society, 6 (1942); John C. Ewers, "The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture, with Comparative Material from Other Western Tribes," (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology), Bulletin 159 (1955). On the South American Indians, see Steward and Faron, *op cit.*, pp. 384 and 408-413.

<sup>4</sup> See the essay by C. Daryll Forde, "Primitive Economics," in Harry Shapiro (ed.), *Man, Culture, and Society* (Fair Lawn, N.J.: Oxford Galaxy, 1960) for a good discussion of the many consequences of reliance on a primitive technology. Unfortunately, Forde fails to differentiate between the various types and levels of primitive technologies, thus creating some unnecessary confusion. His discussion lumps together hunting and gathering societies with many fishing, pastoral, and horticultural societies. See also Steward and Faron, chap. 13, for a good summary description of the common characteristics of the hunting and gathering tribes of South America, and Honigmann, pp. 303-308 for a more general discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, through trade, members of hunting and gathering societies have often been able to obtain metal tools and weapons from their more advanced neighbors. This has only been possible, however, in the last five or six thousand years (or since techniques of metal working were first invented). Throughout most of human history, hunting and gathering societies were completely dependent on tools of wood and stone.

There is, of course, a marked circularity or interaction among all the various elements in what might be called the hunting and gathering syndrome. For example, primitive techniques of food production hamper the development of tools and weapons by making occupational specialization impossible, while the primitive character of tools and weapons makes advances in methods of food production difficult. Though I shall not attempt to point out all of the combinations and permutations of the various elements in the hunting and gathering syndrome, the reader should keep in mind that most of these elements reinforce each other, thereby strengthening the system as a whole and rendering change and progress difficult. Once these interrelationships are recognized, one ceases to wonder why our prehistoric ancestors remained so long at this level and begins, instead, to wonder how they ever escaped it.

Because of the primitive character of their technology and tools, the members of hunting and gathering societies live close to the subsistence level for much of the year. There is, of course, variation in this respect, as in others discussed here, and a few of the most advanced hunting and gathering societies resemble the simplest horticultural societies in having a small economic surplus. In the typical hunting and gathering society, however, there is no sustained economic surplus, and life is often an alternation of periods of feast and famine, or abundance and shortage, with the latter usually more frequent.<sup>6</sup> Because most of these societies lack techniques and facilities for preserving and storing most types of food for any extended period of time, life is lived largely on a day to day basis.<sup>7</sup> This means that when conditions are favorable and food abundant, the members commonly gorge themselves, and then go hungry a few days or weeks later when food is again scarce. An early missionary among the Indians of Lower California reported that "twenty-four pounds of meat in twenty-four hours is not deemed an extraordinary ration for a single person" after a successful hunt; more recently an anthropologist among

<sup>6</sup> Allan Holmberg reports that two of the most frequent expressions one hears in a Siriono camp are, "My stomach is very empty," and "Give me some food." See *Nomads on the Long Bow: The Siriono of Eastern Bolivia*, Smithsonian Institution, Institute of Social Anthropology, Publication No. 10 (1950), p. 30. See also Honigmann's statement that "such people [i.e., hunters and gatherers] are often hungry but, unlike some agricultural people, their hunger is less one for specific nutrients than for food itself" (p. 306).

<sup>7</sup> Holmberg reports meat does not keep for more than three days among the Siriono (*ibid.*, p. 34). Less typical are the Paiutes, who stored certain products for weeks or months, and the Kung Bushmen, who dried meat and were able to keep it for some time. See C. Daryll Forde, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (London: Methuen, 1934), p. 36, on the Paiutes; and Lorna Marshall, "The Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert," in James L. Gibbs (ed.), *Peoples of Africa* (New York: Holt, 1965), p. 255, on the Kung Bushmen.

the Siriono of eastern Bolivia reported seeing men eat as much as thirty pounds of meat in a day.<sup>8</sup>

Another feature of hunting and gathering societies is that they are invariably small. If societies are defined as socially autonomous populations, then each local band or community constitutes a separate society. Larger and more complex systems of social organization are virtually impossible at this level of development.<sup>9</sup> Two separate studies have found that the average population of hunting, gathering, and fishing communities numbers about fifty.<sup>10</sup> The largest hunting and gathering societies seem to have numbered not more than a few hundred, and even this modest size was possible only because of unusually favorable environmental conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Another important characteristic of hunting and gathering groups is that they are usually nomadic or seminomadic. A sample of more than seventy hunting and gathering societies from the Human Relations Area Files indicates that only about 10 per cent were able to maintain a settled village life.<sup>12</sup> The reasons for this are not hard to find: within a short time the food-gathering techniques employed by hunters and gatherers normally reduce the supply of edible plants and animals in a given area below the level required to maintain the human population and the group is compelled to move on.<sup>13</sup> Often a group follows some more or less regular pattern of movement from place to place, so that in time it returns to the point from which it started.

The nomadic character of this way of life combines with the limited

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Baegert, S. J., *Account of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the California Peninsula*, translated and arranged by Charles Rau, *Smithsonian Institution: Annual Reports for 1863 and 1864*, reprinted in Carleton S. Coon (ed.), *A Reader in General Anthropology* (New York: Holt, 1948), p. 72; Holmberg, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> See p. 101 below for a further discussion of this matter.

<sup>10</sup> George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 81; and Julian Steward, "The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands," in *Essays in Anthropology Presented to A. L. Kroeber* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1936), p. 333. See also Steward's more recent statement that patrilineal bands average fifty individuals and seldom exceed a hundred (*Theory of Culture Change*, Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1955, p. 125).

<sup>11</sup> A. L. Kroeber, *Handbook of American Indians of California*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 78 (1925), pp. 491 and 689-690 on the Yokuts and Cupeño Indians.

<sup>12</sup> Calculated from George Peter Murdock, "World Ethnographic Sample," *American Anthropologist*, 59 (1957), pp. 664-687.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Colin Turnbull, "The Mbuti Pygmies of the Congo," in Gibbs, pp. 286-287. He writes, "After about a month, as a rule, the fruits of the forest have been gathered all around the vicinity of the camp, and the game has been scared away to a greater distance than is comfortable for daily hunting. As the economy relies on day-to-day quest, the simplest thing is for the camp to move. . . ." Though the figure of a month is lower than reports from most other groups, the basic pattern is the same.

productivity to prevent any substantial accumulation of capital. Lacking beasts of burden and mechanical means of transportation, these people are severely limited in what they can accumulate and their possessions are few. One observer found it possible to list all the possessions of one tribe in a single sentence:

Their whole furniture, if that expression can be applied at all, consists of a bow and arrows, a flint instead of a knife, a bone or pointed piece of wood for digging roots, a turtle-shell serving as basket and cradle, a large gut or bladder for fetching water and transporting it during their excursions, and a bag made like a fishing net from the fibres of aloe, or the skin of a wild cat, in which they preserve and carry their provisions, sandals, and perhaps other insignificant things which they happen to possess.<sup>14</sup>

While this is an extreme case, the possessions of even the most affluent hunting and gathering societies are not much more numerous.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the possessions of the members of such societies are largely items needed for subsistence activities.

Since community and society are normally one and the same at this level of technological development, each community tends to be a self-sufficient entity and *communal* specialization is limited. Where the rudiments of communal specialization and intercommunity trade are found, they are usually a function of environmental peculiarities. For example, among the Andaman Islanders there is a certain degree of commerce carried on between the coastal dwellers and those who live in the forests, reflecting the availability of different resources. Even in this type of situation, however, only a small percentage of the total product is traded between communities. Most of the goods and services enjoyed by the members of the local group are produced by the group itself.

Specialization at the *individual* level is also severely limited in hunting and gathering societies, particularly with respect to economic and political activities. As every introductory textbook notes, specialization in these areas normally occurs only along age and sex lines. Perhaps a more meaningful way of describing the situation would be to say that the crucially important role of adult male is still largely unspecialized or undifferentiated with respect to economic and political activities.

One of the few exceptions to this is the singling out of some individual to perform certain leadership functions. Even this, however, is not a uni-

<sup>14</sup> Baegert, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> For a comparable summary description of the possessions of the Yahgan of Patagonia, a shellfish-gathering group, see the Rev. Thomas Bridges, in Coon, p. 108. See, also, Marshall, pp. 256-257, on the Kung Bushmen.

versal pattern.<sup>16</sup> Owing to the limited productivity of the group, the leader or headman, can rarely be spared from the routine tasks of production. Hence, the role is usually no more than a part-time specialty. For example, Schapera writes of the headmen of the Bushmen and the Bergdama, "Their official duties . . . seldom take up the whole or even the greater part of their normal daily life, and may indeed require less frequent attention; and when not engaged on public business they follow the same occupations as all other people."<sup>17</sup>

In some of these groups there are a few other part-time specialties, such as the "food-master" among the Bergdama, whose special responsibilities include the making of decisions as to which wild foods can safely be eaten and the delivery of official messages between communities. This, however, is an infrequent type of specialization. Much more common is the role of shaman or medicine man. This role is found in the great majority of hunting and gathering societies, though the forms it takes are variable. Sometimes it is combined with that of headman, more often it is separate. Sometimes the shaman may be a woman, but usually the role is reserved for men. Sometimes this role is divided into various subspecialties, though in most cases the shaman is a general practitioner. Despite these variations, however, one universal feature seems to be that this role, like that of headman, is always a *part-time* specialty and the shaman, too, spends most of his time in the same basic activities as other adult males.

The same factors which inhibit the development of specialization at the individual level also inhibit the development of specialized subgroups and institutions within the society. The entire population (or at least, all of the adult males) tends to function as a unit in most basic activities. The chief exceptions are in the areas of marriage and reproduction, and of ritual and sociability. Hence families and sodalities are the only important subgroups within the populations of hunting and gathering communities.<sup>18</sup> Specialized work groups of an enduring character or specialized military or political groups are absent. Governments, standing armies, political parties, and business enterprises of an exclusive or specialized character are all unknown in hunting and gathering societies. The household and

<sup>16</sup> Julian Steward reports some cases of small bands without chiefs, *Basin-Plateau Aboriginal Socio-political Groups*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 120 (1938), p. 247. See also Colin Turnbull, "The Lesson of the Pygmies," *Scientific American*, 208 (January, 1963), pp. 31 and 35, or "The Mbuti," pp. 302-305, where he reports that the Pygmy bands have no headmen, except those appointed by outsiders, and these headmen have no powers to speak of.

<sup>17</sup> I. Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies* (London: Watts, 1956), p. 93. See also Holmberg's description of the Siriono chief, quoted on p. 107 below.

<sup>18</sup> For a brief discussion of sodalities, see Elman Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 73-76. See also Steward, *Theory*, pp. 138-139.

the local band, then, are the two basic units of social organization and most of the activities of the members are organized in terms of one or the other. Hunting and gathering societies are unique in this respect.

Especially significant in this connection is the absence of effective political organization beyond the local level noted earlier. While occasionally the headman of one local group gains a measure of influence over other local groups, this is quite uncommon and, furthermore, his influence is invariably tenuous. The relationships which he establishes rarely outlive him. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that among hunting and gathering peoples, each local community is politically autonomous.

#### Variable Features of Hunting and Gathering Societies

While these societies have many characteristics in common, there are certain variable features which, though of secondary concern for our analysis, it would be unwise to ignore.<sup>19</sup> Many of these differences are the direct result of differences in the physical environment. Each hunting and gathering society is obliged to obtain most of its necessities from its own limited territory and hence is obliged to adjust to the peculiarities of this area. As a consequence, there are inevitably differences between groups located in the tropics and those in temperate zones or the Arctic, between groups inland and those on coastal waters, between groups located in deserts and those in areas with ample rainfall. These differences are much greater than those between industrial societies in equally varied climes, since the latter are not so dependent on the immediate environment. Moreover, industrial societies are able to modify the environment itself to some extent, something which is not possible for hunting and gathering societies.

Hunting and gathering societies also differ in other ways which seem to have little or no relationship to variations in habitat. For example, they vary greatly in the degree to which they have developed beliefs about the supernatural. In some societies, these beliefs are highly developed; in others, only the barest rudiments are found.<sup>20</sup> Where they are found, beliefs vary considerably in form and content. Similarly, variations are found with respect to patterns of family organization. In some hunting and gathering societies, monogamy is the rule, in others, polygyny is practiced. Polygyny may be either sororal or nonsororal, widespread or

<sup>19</sup> For good summary discussions of such differences see either Forde, *Habitat*, chap. 18, or Steward, *Theory*, pp. 137-142 and compare chaps. 6-8.

<sup>20</sup> For a good short review of religious variation among the hunters and gatherers of South America, see Steward and Faron, pp. 389-391 and the relevant sections of chap. 14.



occasional. Marital residence may be patrilocal, matriloc, bilocal, uxori-patrilocal, or, in a few cases, uxorbilocal or uxorineolocal.<sup>21</sup> There is some reason for thinking that the patrilocal pattern is the "normal" pattern in the more primitive hunting and gathering societies prior to contact with more advanced societies, but this is still an imperfectly tested hypothesis.<sup>22</sup> In any case, it seems clear that there is considerable variation in marriage and kinship practices from one hunting and gathering society to another.

Last, but not least, these societies differ to some extent in the degree of their technological development. Some are so primitive that they have not yet mastered the techniques of making fire.<sup>23</sup> At the other extreme, some have mastered the rudiments of horticulture and plant small gardens to supplement their basic food supply.<sup>24</sup> Though other differences might also be cited, these should be sufficient to make it clear that while hunting and gathering societies have much in common, they are by no means identical.

### Common Features of Distributive Systems

Of all the various characteristics shared by hunting and gathering societies, the one of key importance for students of stratification is the absence of any appreciable economic surplus. According to the first and second laws of distribution set forth in Chapter 3, men are free to monopolize or expropriate only that portion of the product of the group which is not required to sustain the producers. If this is true, and if hunting and gathering societies are incapable of producing any appreciable economic surplus, then our theory leads us to predict that there will be relative equality in these societies, at least with respect to the distribution of goods and services.

The facts support this prediction. If any single feature of the life of hunting and gathering societies has impressed itself upon observers, it is the relative equality of the members. In fact, many untrained observers

<sup>21</sup> See Murdock, "World Ethnographic Sample," *American Anthropologist*, 59 (1957), pp. 664-687, for evidence on all these points. For example, his codes indicate that limited polygyny is the most common form of marriage among the sixty-four hunting and gathering societies for which data are available, but is practiced by only 31 per cent of the total. Similarly, with respect to residence, the patrilocal pattern is the most common, but practiced by only 37 per cent.

<sup>22</sup> See, especially, Service, chap. 3. Steward takes a somewhat similar view in *Theory*, chaps. 7 and 8, but the differences between his view and that of Service are probably more important than the similarities.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Colin Turnbull, *The Forest People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 58, on the Pygmies of the Congo.

<sup>24</sup> See Steward and Faron, p. 392, or Murdock, "World Ethnographic Sample," for examples of this.

have reported perfect equality in certain of these societies. While the more careful observations of trained observers force us to reject these extreme claims, the fact remains that the distributive process in hunting and gathering societies is radically different from that in industrial societies such as our own, or the agrarian societies from which industrial societies have so recently emerged.

The Andaman Islanders provide a good illustration of a relatively pure and uncontaminated hunting and gathering society, and one which has not developed even the more rudimentary forms of horticulture. In writing of their economic life, Radcliffe-Brown reports that "it approaches to a sort of communism."<sup>25</sup> Land, the basic resource of the group, is communally owned, thus insuring equal access to the necessities of life. While the produce of the land and all portable property are privately owned, the Andamanese have customs which offset the usual effects of private ownership. For example, though all food is private property, "everyone who has food is expected . . . to give to those who have none." The result is that "practically all of the food obtained is evenly distributed through the whole camp, the only inequality being that the younger men do not fare so well as their elders." In the case of other forms of privately owned property, an egalitarian distribution is assured by the Andamanese custom of exchanging presents. This practice, when combined with the tradition of according honor to persons who are generous with their possessions, insures near equality in the distribution of goods. In such a society a man stands to gain more by sharing than by hoarding.<sup>26</sup>

While no one hunting and gathering society is completely representative of all, a person familiar with the distribution of goods in Andamanese society is not likely to be greatly surprised by what he finds in most of the others. In those societies, too, one finds a close approximation to equality in the distribution of goods. This is usually achieved, as among the Andamanese, by the communal ownership of land and by some type of institutionalized redistributive process.<sup>27</sup> Often there is some limited

<sup>25</sup> A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders* (New York: Free Press, 1948, originally published 1922), pp. 43ff.

<sup>26</sup> As Forde points out, he gains not only honor but also security by his generosity, since those who receive from him recognize a moral obligation to repay later if he should ask it. See "Primitive Economics," p. 337.

<sup>27</sup> In some hunting and gathering societies, even the concept of communally owned land is lacking. Anyone may seek food anywhere, and the local group does not deny access to outsiders. See, for example, Steward, *Socio-political Groups*, pp. 254ff. On the other hand, there are some societies in which the redistributive process does not seem to be firmly established and hence there is frequent hoarding. The Siriono are noteworthy in this respect (see Holmberg, pp. 36 and 61-62), though the manner of hoarding and the reported attitudes of the people strongly suggest that the principle of sharing is not absent even in this very uncooperative group. Thus there is some variation, but it is limited.

inequality, with certain segments of the population faring a bit better than others. In the case of the Andamanese the old men enjoy some advantage over the younger. Among the Siriono, the senior wife in a polygynous family and her children are reported to fare somewhat better than the junior wife and hers. In some societies men fare better than women. These differences, however, represent little more than secondary variations on the basic theme of substantial equality.

The one significant exception occurs in the case of those societies which practice the elimination of the unproductive members of the group. In many of these societies, those who are helpless because of old age, injury, or illness are denied the necessities of life and in some instances are put to death by their fellow tribesmen. For example, the Rev. Thomas Bridges wrote that the Yahgan occasionally hastened the end of their relatives by strangulation, but he was careful to point out that "this was kindly meant and there were good reasons for it."<sup>28</sup> It was done only when the individual was completely helpless and only with the consent of all except the victim, who was normally incapable of responding at this point. A much more common practice has been to abandon such persons at the time of breaking camp. In many hunting and gathering societies, infanticide has been practiced also, thereby eliminating children who are born defective or who otherwise appear to threaten the security of the group. These practices seem always based on the simple logic that the limited resources of the group cannot long support unproductive individuals. Hence, those who have no reasonable prospect of becoming self-supporting members of the group have no legitimate claim on what others produce. This is a very specific exception to the more general rule of equal, or near equal, access to the necessities of life, and furthermore does not apply in all hunting and gathering societies.

The distribution of prestige is a very different matter from the distribution of goods. Here there is no problem of short supply, and inequality does not threaten the group's chances of survival. As a consequence, the unequal distribution of honor tends to be the rule rather than the exception in hunting and gathering societies, just as our theory would lead us to expect.<sup>29</sup> However, for reasons which will become evident shortly, the degree of prestige inequality falls far short of that with which members of more advanced societies are familiar.

Once again we may turn to Andamanese society as one which is reasonably typical, at least in the more basic aspects of the matter. Radcliffe-

<sup>28</sup> Bridges, in Coon, p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> This expectation is based on our assumptions that it is man's nature to strive to maximize his status in the eyes of others and that men are unequally endowed by nature to compete for the rewards society has to offer.

Brown, the leading authority on these people, reports that honor and respect are accorded to three kinds of people: (1) older people, (2) people endowed with supernatural powers, and (3) people with certain valued personal qualities, notably, "skill in hunting and warfare, generosity and kindness, and freedom from bad temper." Though it is not completely clear from Radcliffe-Brown's account, there is some indication that men are more likely than women to be highly honored.

Such inequality might properly be called "functional inequality."<sup>30</sup> In other words, the benefits and honors enjoyed by the few represent *a return for services rendered to the many under conditions free from any form of social coercion or man-made shortage*. This can be seen most clearly in the case of an individual who is honored for his skill in hunting and for his generosity. The less able members of the group reward such a person with prestige and influence in exchange for a share in the game he kills. By this spontaneous and uncoerced exchange, those who are generously endowed by nature with talent and energy are stimulated to produce more, and those who are not have greater assurance of obtaining the necessities of life. The alternative would be deprivation, suffering, and possible death for the less able, and, for the more able, surfeit of food and loss of prestige and the respect of others. Thus, *potentially disastrous inequalities in subsistence are transformed into inequalities in prestige and influence, a much safer and more satisfying arrangement*.

One may question whether *all* the inequality in honor and influence in Andamanese and similar societies results in genuine gains for the less favored. For example, are the services of most primitive medicine men of real value to others? This leads into an area of possible disagreement. One observer may feel that the peace of mind a skillful shaman creates for his patients justifies the prestige he receives, while another may not. In this situation it may be wiser to rely on the natives' judgment of the matter and differentiate between functional and nonfunctional inequality on the basis of the relative freedom of the individuals involved. If the exchange is free of man-made coercive elements, then it is reasonable to view such inequality as is generated as functional. If one takes this approach, it is clear that most of the inequality evident in primitive hunting and gathering groups is of just this type.

In hunting and gathering societies, prestige usually goes hand in hand with political influence. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Government by coercion is an impossibility in these societies. The leader

<sup>30</sup> This label is suggested by R. H. Tawney's distinction between "the functional society" and "the acquisitive society," in his book, *The Acquisitive Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1920).

of the group is not supported by a force of specialists in violence who are dependent on his favor and therefore motivated to follow his orders. All men are trained and equipped for fighting and the same weapons and training are available to all. The only differences among them are those inherent in the physical constitutions and personalities of the individuals and, while a single man who is unusually well endowed by nature may be the equal, or even the master, of two less favorably endowed men, he is not likely to be able to coerce or defend himself against three who join forces against him. Furthermore, dissatisfied followers may always desert their leader and attach themselves to another band.<sup>31</sup> It follows, therefore, that government must be by persuasion. This means that in any situation in which there is no one obviously correct course of action, effective leadership is possible only if a majority of the population is predisposed to follow the direction of certain individuals and to reject that of others. In short, the limited political development of these societies creates a situation in which honor and respect are necessary prerequisites to political influence.<sup>32</sup>

The same conditions which make honor and respect necessary qualifications for political influence also serve to limit the extent of political inequality possible. The extremes of political domination and subordination are impossible in a society where men must govern by persuasion. This is manifested in various ways, one of the most important being the practice of government by council. This practice is so widespread that Gunnar Landtman, the Finnish sociologist, was led to conclude from his study of stratification in primitive societies that "among the most primitive races tribal authority is exercised almost universally in the democratic form of a general council, while governments representing the monarchic principle are almost entirely absent among peoples usually relegated to the lowest group."<sup>33</sup> While Landtman exaggerates somewhat the prevalence of this mode of government, the fact remains that most ethnographic reports from hunting and gathering societies contain some reference to groups of this type and often indicate that they are of considerable importance.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Schapera, p. 193.

<sup>32</sup> Julian Steward provides a good illustration of this in the case of the Northern Paiutes, of whom he writes, "The chief was succeeded by his son, provided he were intelligent, good, and persuasive. Otherwise a brother or some other member of his family, or even an unrelated person *who was assured of popular support*, succeeded him." Of the Shoshoni he writes, "A chief's authority was consequently of uncertain scope and duration and depended largely upon his *persuasiveness*." See *Socio-political Groups*, pp. 56 and 251 (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> Gunnar Landtman, *The Origin of the Inequality of the Social Classes* (London: Routledge, 1938), pp. 309-310.

Even in those groups which are governed by a headman, his powers are usually quite limited. To begin with, they seldom extend beyond the bounds of his own band and when they do, they are extremely tenuous. More serious limitations arise from the fact that the headman has virtually no tenure or authority. Time and again we read, as in the case of the Northern Maidu Indians of California, that the headman "held his place only so long as he gave satisfaction."<sup>34</sup> If the people were dissatisfied, he was quickly replaced. In the case of the Arunta of Australia we are told that the headman ". . . has, *ex officio*, a position which, if he be a man of personal ability, *but only in that case*, enables him to wield considerable power. . . ." <sup>35</sup> Radcliffe-Brown makes the same point in writing of the Andamanese headman, of whom he says, "Of authority the leading men have little or none, but of influence they have a good deal," at least when they are popular with their people.<sup>36</sup>

One of the best descriptions of the position of a "typical" headman in a hunting and gathering society has been written by Allan Holmberg, an American anthropologist who lived among the Siriono of eastern Bolivia. He writes:

Presiding over every band of Siriono is a chief, who is at least nominally the highest official of the group. Although his authority theoretically extends throughout the band, in actual practice its exercise depends almost entirely upon his personal qualities as a leader. In any case, there is no obligation to obey the orders of a chief, no punishment for nonfulfillment. Indeed, little attention is paid to what is said by a chief unless he is a member of one's immediate family. To maintain his prestige a chief must fulfill, in a superior fashion, those obligations required of everyone else.

The prerogatives of chieftainship are few. . . . The principal privilege of a chief, if it could be called such, is that it is his right to occupy, with his immediate family, the center of the [communal] house. Like any other man he must make his bows and arrows, his tools; he must hunt, fish, collect, and plant gardens. He makes suggestions as to migrations, hunting trips, *etc.*, but these are not always followed by his tribesmen. As a mark of status, however, a chief always possesses more than one wife.

While chiefs complain a great deal that other members of the band do not satisfy their obligations to them, little heed is paid to their requests. I was told, for instance, both by Indians and by whites who had contact with them, that the chief was entitled to a share of every catch of game that was made. While I was living at Tibaera, I had an excellent chance to check this matter empirically, and I found that this was not, as said, usually the case, but rarely so. The more general rule was to avoid giving the chief anything, if possible. . . .

<sup>34</sup> Roland Dixon, "The Northern Maidu," in Coon, p. 272.

<sup>35</sup> Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People* (London: Macmillan, 1927), vol. I, p. 10 (emphasis added).

<sup>36</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, p. 47.

In general, however, chiefs fare better than other members of the band. Their requests more frequently bear fruit than those of others because chiefs are the best hunters and are thus in a better position than most to reciprocate for any favors done them.<sup>37</sup>

As the foregoing indicates, personal qualities are tremendously important in Siriono society, and the same is true of all other hunting and gathering societies. If a headman is a better man than the others in his group he will fare better than they, but not otherwise. As Holmberg states, headmen generally fare better than others only because they "are the best hunters."

In some hunting and gathering societies, however, the position of headman offers certain special advantages, though only for a man of ability. Spencer and Gillen report that the headman's position could provide the basis for considerable power among the Arunta, though they stress that this was true only for an able man. In the case of the Bergdama of southwest Africa it is reported that the headman "is treated with universal respect, being specified as a 'great man' by adults and 'grandfather' by children; he usually has the most wives (sometimes three or more); he has the pick of all wild animal skins for clothing himself and his family, and only his wives wear necklaces or girdles of ostrich egg-shell beads; and he receives special portions of all game killed in the chase, and tribute from men finding honey or growing tobacco."<sup>38</sup> The Bergdama headmen are more fortunate than most; the typical pattern probably lies between the Siriono and Bergdama patterns. Even in the Bergdama case, however, it may be seen that the perquisites of office are not very great, but then it would be surprising if they were, in view of the limited productivity of these groups.

The same general patterns may be observed in the case of the shaman, a role also associated with prestige, influence, and special perquisites. In fact, this role sometimes brings greater rewards than that of headman. For example, in the case of the Northern Maidu it is reported that the shamans are "as a rule obeyed much more than the chief." Furthermore, "the chief was chosen largely through the aid of the shaman who was supposed to reveal to the old men the choice of the spirits."<sup>39</sup> Among the Northern Maidu this office was not inherited, though in other societies it sometimes is. However, inherited or not, the benefits of the role go only to those who can prove their rights to them. Shamans are constantly on trial and those who are unable to demonstrate their com-

<sup>37</sup> Holmberg, pp. 59-60. Quoted by permission.

<sup>38</sup> Schapera, p. 117.

<sup>39</sup> Dixon, pp. 282 and 272, respectively.

petence and power are not likely to benefit greatly. In addition to the usual tests of their powers in the case of illness and other crises, some societies provide institutionalized tests which pit shaman against shaman to see whose powers are the greatest. For example, the Northern Maidu held an annual dance to which all shamans were invited. At this dance each attempted to overcome the others by means of magic. The dance continued until only one man was left standing and he was declared the foremost shaman of all. Undoubtedly those who were eliminated in the early stages suffered a serious loss of status and with it most of the benefits of their position.<sup>40</sup>

The perquisites of the shamans have been substantial in many societies. Radcliffe-Brown reports that once an Andamanese shaman has established his reputation, "he not only receives the respect of others but also makes a considerable personal profit."<sup>41</sup> Father Baegert reports that successful shamans among the Indians of Lower California were able "to obtain their food without the trouble of gathering it in the fields, for the silly people provided them with the best they could find, in order to keep them in good humor and to enjoy their favor."<sup>42</sup> Such advantages, however, are always contingent on performance, and ethnographic reports make it clear that success is dependent on distinctive personality traits which the majority lack.

Much of the foregoing may be summarized by saying that *in primitive hunting and gathering societies, power, privilege, and prestige are largely a function of personal skills and ability*. Inheritance only provides opportunity; to be of value to the individual, confirming actions based on personal qualities are required. Where these are lacking, the possession of an office is of little benefit. In this respect hunting and gathering societies differ greatly from more advanced societies.

The reason for this is that these societies lack certain things which facilitate the transmission of advantage from one generation to the next. To begin with, they possess little wealth, and wealth is one of the best means for passing advantages from father to son. Given sufficient wealth, children of limited ability can hire talented men to manage their affairs, and thus continue to enjoy both power and privilege. This simply is not possible in societies where a man's possessions are so meager. Second, these societies have no hereditary roles with established prerogatives which accrue to the incumbent *regardless of ability*. The limited resources of hunting and gathering societies preclude such luxuries; every office-

<sup>40</sup> For a good description of this contest, see *ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

<sup>41</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, p. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Baegert, p. 79.



holder must, of necessity, continuously validate his right to the office and its associated prerogatives. Finally, these societies are too small to develop differentiated class-based subcultures such as those found in more advanced societies. In the latter, there are marked differences in the way of life from one class to another and children born into the upper classes, and therefore socialized in families sharing a distinctive culture, enjoy a special advantage over children raised in lower strata. In hunting and gathering societies opportunities for differential socialization are very limited and the children of headmen and shamans normally grow up in close association with other children.

All this indicates that the rate of *intergenerational* mobility is very high in hunting and gathering societies. There is little to prevent the talented son of an untalented father from rising to a position of leadership. While he may be denied the office of headman or shaman in a society where these positions are inherited, he can usually become a more powerful figure than the official headman if his abilities warrant it. Ethnographic accounts contain a number of reports of figurehead chiefs who deferred to other, abler, men.<sup>43</sup>

The rate of *intragenerational* mobility is also high in these societies. Age makes a great difference in the advantages which an individual enjoys, though the specific nature of the relationship varies from one society to another. In many groups, perhaps most, the aged are highly honored and enjoy considerable influence. This is well illustrated by the Australian aborigines, whose societies are often described as gerontocracies. In these societies the position of the individual steadily improves with advancing age. In other societies, such as the Eskimo, the Siriono, and the Indians of Lower California, aging is associated with declining advantages and the middle or early adult years are the best years of life.

This difference seems to be a function of variations in environment and technology. In less difficult environments and in societies where technology has advanced somewhat, the aged can be supported and may, in fact, be an asset to the group by virtue of the knowledge and wisdom they have accumulated through a lifetime of experience. The Tiwi of northern Australia provide a good example of this. In this island tribe, older women are much more highly valued than young, simply because they are more efficient food gatherers.<sup>44</sup> In the case of the Arunta, Spencer and Gillen indicate that the older men are influential because they are usually "more learned in ancient lore or more skilled in matters of magic." However, if

<sup>43</sup> For example, Spencer and Gillen report that the headman of an Arunta band is not always the most important member of the council (vol. I, pp. 9-10).

<sup>44</sup> C. W. M. Hart and Arnold R. Pilling, *The Tiwi of Northern Australia* (New York: Holt, 1960), p. 35, etc.

these qualities are lacking in the elderly, younger people are more highly regarded.<sup>45</sup> In short, it is not old age per se, but rather the special qualities that accompany it which lead to special power and influence.

Sex, like age, is a factor in the distributive process in these societies, though its importance is variable. Women invariably occupy a position inferior to men, though in some societies the differential is not great. Women are almost always excluded from the role of headman and usually are ineligible to become shamans or participate in council meetings. To what extent such inequality can be called functional is difficult to say, but it would be a mistake to suppose that the superior position of the men is simply a reflection of their greater physical strength. By virtue of their unique role in childbearing and child nurture, women appear unable to become skilled hunters or warriors.<sup>46</sup> In a society in which the welfare of the group is intimately connected with, and dependent on, the skills of hunters and warriors, it is inevitable that nonparticipants in the critical functions of hunting and fighting will not enjoy the same measure of honor and influence as participants. On the other hand, women do not suffer so far as the distribution of food is concerned; in fact, given the absence of any significant surplus, it seems likely that women approach equality with men in this area.

Though, as a group, women enjoy less prestige and influence than men, all women are not equal. Usually the status of a married woman reflects the status of her husband. For example, Holmberg writes, "to be married to a man who is a good hunter and to have several children are the most important status marks of a woman."<sup>47</sup> Radcliffe-Brown reports that among the Andamanese "the wife of a leading man generally exercises the same sort of influence over the woman as her husband does over the men."<sup>48</sup> Howitt reports a similar pattern among the Kulin of Australia.<sup>49</sup> In a few instances there are reports that certain women enjoyed more influence than some of the men. In writing of the Kurnai, another Australian tribe, Howitt states that some women had considerable influence by

<sup>45</sup> Spencer and Gillen, vol. I, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Edwin Thompson Denig reports the dramatic tale of a Crow Indian woman who became an outstanding warrior and chief, but it is significant that she never married a man, and never assumed womanly responsibilities except in her early years. In later years she "married" four "wives" who performed the necessary women's tasks in her household. This case strongly suggests that no individual, however talented, is able to fill successfully the roles of both wife-mother and hunter-warrior. See *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), pp. 195-200.

<sup>47</sup> Holmberg, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Radcliffe-Brown, p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 308.

virtue of their age and ability, and adds that "such women were consulted by the men, and had great weight and authority in the tribe."<sup>50</sup>

One final factor which influences the life chances of individuals in hunting and gathering societies is their family connections. As we have already noted, the roles of headman and shaman are often hereditary, thus providing some with opportunities for special advantages by the simple accident of birth. In addition, there are occasional reports that the brothers or other close relatives of important men share their benefits to some extent. However, this seems to be a very secondary factor in the total picture, since all the evidence indicates that nothing can compensate for personal incompetence in these societies, and little can block a man of demonstrated abilities either in hunting and fighting or in magic. Holmberg's description of the situation among the Siriono is typical. He writes:

Within the band, those people who are most closely related to the chief probably enjoy the greatest number of privileges, but I was unable to confirm this as an outstanding feature of Siriono society. It is probably true, to be sure, that the brother of a chief enjoys more privileges than a distantly related cousin. But in a society like the Siriono, where the food supply is both scarce and insecure, a person's status necessarily depends more on his ability as a provider of food than on any other single factor. This was clearly brought home to me time and time again while I was at Tibaera.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, we return to the point from which we started: *the central fact of life for all hunting and gathering societies is the absence of any appreciable economic surplus.* The distributive system of every such society is influenced by this. While some variation is possible, as we have seen, it is so limited that there is a pronounced similarity among the distributive systems of every society at this level. Though it would be a mistake to ignore the differences, it would be a more serious mistake to exaggerate them.

#### **Variable Features of Distributive Systems and Their Causes**

Turning to the variable features of the distributive systems of hunting and gathering societies, it is important to keep in mind that these variations cover only a small part of the total range possible in human societies. Marked forms of inequality, such as are regularly found in agrarian and industrial societies, are completely absent in hunting and gathering societies.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>51</sup> Holmberg, p. 58. Quoted by permission.

The most significant variations in the distributive systems of hunting and gathering societies are as follows:

1. Variations in the pattern of leadership or government, ranging from the absence of any office above the family head (rare) to the presence of a headman or chief with limited influence over several local bands (very uncommon), the usual pattern being a headman with limited influence over his own band
2. Variations in the influence of shamans or medicine men, ranging from the absence of such persons (rare or uncommon) to the situation in which such individuals are the most influential members of the group (frequent), the most common pattern apparently being one in which such individuals occupy a position of influence and prestige equal or nearly equal to that of the headman of the band
3. Variations in pattern of landownership, ranging from the private ownership of land by families (very rare) to the absence of any concept of landownership (infrequent), the usual pattern being communal ownership by local bands
4. Variations in the importance of redistributive techniques ranging from the situation in which they are not very important (rare or uncommon) to one in which they are a major feature of the economy (most common)

On theoretical grounds there are a number of possible explanations for such differences. These include:

- Differences in the physical environment
- Differences in the social situation or environment
- Differences in the level of technology
- Cultural diffusion
- Differing influences of great men
- Differences in traditions
- Chance

One of the best discussions of this problem is contained in Julian Steward's important ecological study of the Western Shoshoni Indians of Nevada and nearby areas, and their Ute and Paiute neighbors.<sup>52</sup> By comparing the social organization of several local bands which share a common cultural tradition but live in differing physical environments, Steward is able to make some estimate of the extent to which variations in social

<sup>52</sup> Steward, *Socio-political Groups*. See also his earlier paper, "The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands," pp. 331-350, and Forde, *Habitat*, chap. 18.

organization are a function of *variations in the physical environment*, and to what extent the explanation must be sought elsewhere.

His analysis strongly indicates that certain differences involving the distributive process are a function of environmental differences. For example, the Paiute Indians of Owens Valley practiced the communal ownership of land while the others did not. Steward maintains that this was because their land was more fertile and provided sufficient plant and animal life to sustain a stable human population. In contrast, the territory occupied by the Western Shoshoni, Utes, and other Paiutes was much less fertile and, even more important, notoriously erratic in its yield. An area producing an abundance one year might produce almost nothing the next. This uncertain situation compelled those groups to go wherever the quest for food might lead, and precluded any system of landownership.<sup>53</sup>

Steward's analysis also indicates that the presence or absence of the role of headman is linked with environmental variations. He found this role absent only in rather small bands. Since the size of the band is greatly influenced by the fertility of the immediate area, it seems that this difference, too, can be linked with environmental variation.

Steward also attributes certain differences in the powers of headmen to the *social situation of the group*. Specifically, he attributes the temporary development of interband leadership in the nineteenth century to the struggle with white settlers. Faced with this crisis, the Indians of this area responded by delegating a measure of interband authority to certain leaders which they had not previously done.<sup>54</sup> Serrano reports a similar pattern among the Charrua of South America, and Gunnar Landtman came to the conclusion on the basis of his broadly comparative study of primitive peoples that war or intertribal conflict has been one of the major factors strengthening the authority of leaders and promoting social inequality.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, Steward indicates that certain variations in the life of the Basin-Plateau tribes were due to *cultural diffusion*. For example, he explains the presence of the special office of "chief's speaker" in certain bands as a borrowed element. The same, he feels, was true of the requirement in some bands that headmen experience visions.<sup>56</sup>

Steward does not discuss the influence of variations in *level of tech-*

<sup>53</sup> Steward, *Socio-political Groups*, especially pp. 255-256.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-251.

<sup>55</sup> See Antonio Serrano, "The Charrua," in Julian Steward (ed.), *Handbook of South American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1946), vol. I, p. 194, and Landtman, p. 320 in particular, and chaps. 7 and 16 in general.

<sup>56</sup> Steward, *Social-political Groups*, p. 252.

*nology* among the tribes he studied, presumably because they were minimal. However, a more broadly comparative examination indicates, as our theory would lead us to expect, that such variations have a similar effect to those produced by variations in environmental conditions. Thus, in societies which practice a rudimentary horticulture, populations tend to be larger, settlements more permanent, and leadership roles more sharply defined.<sup>57</sup> One suspects that there may also be increased rewards for the occupants of these roles.

During the last generation, the hypothesis that *great men* are capable of influencing culture and social organization has been anathema to most sociologists and anthropologists.<sup>58</sup> In the main their rejection of this hypothesis has been sound, since the influence of great men was obviously overrated in an earlier period. Furthermore, this hypothesis too often led to the psychologizing of social analysis.

Today, however, the great-man theorists have been driven from the field and it is possible to reexamine the problem somewhat more dispassionately. Sidney Hook, the philosopher, has provided an excellent beginning in his provocative book, *The Hero in History*.<sup>59</sup> Hook believes the social determinists of the last hundred years have thrown out the baby with the bath water in their eagerness to get rid of exaggerated hero worship. He bases his conclusion on an analysis of several specific historical events, including the Russian Revolution.

Ethnographic evidence from hunting and gathering societies supports Hook. For example, Howitt describes a famous chief of the Dieri tribe in Australia who was able, simply by virtue of his unique personal powers, to influence tribes as much as a hundred miles distant, an extraordinary achievement.<sup>60</sup> In addition, he exercised various powers over his own people which were not customary. For example, he separated married couples when they could not agree, and gave away in marriage young women who were not related to him. At the other extreme, there have been numerous headmen who lacked the personal qualities necessary to insure the enjoyment of the traditional prerogatives of their office. Such differences in distributive systems can be explained only if one takes into account the personal characteristics of leading men.

Many social determinists and environmentalists have also been reluc-

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Steward and Faron's discussion of the various Ge-speaking peoples in the eastern Brazilian highlands (pp. 362-372).

<sup>58</sup> For one of the most vigorous attacks on the great-man hypothesis, see Leslie White, *The Science of Culture* (New York: Grove Press, 1949), chap. 9.

<sup>59</sup> Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, original edition 1943).

<sup>60</sup> Howitt, pp. 297-299.

tant to give *tradition*, or *the cultural heritage of a group*, its due. Patterns of action once established are not quickly erased and, despite the arguments of functionalists such as Malinowski, there is an element of inertia in the life of human groups which is not easily or quickly overcome.<sup>61</sup> Patterns of action which become habitual and which do not cause obvious difficulties are often retained simply because the mastery of new behavior patterns is an inconvenience and hence resisted by most people, and especially by older people, who learn more slowly but usually occupy the seats of power.

To say that men respond to their group's traditions is simply to say that no generation begins with a *tabula rasa* or blank slate. In the highly impressionable early years of life, each individual is exposed to the culture of his group and internalizes much of it so that it becomes difficult to destroy. Both culture and personality work to preserve many elements from the past in ways of which people are largely oblivious, e.g., in various aspects of language. Thus it is reasonable to hypothesize that some of the differences between distributive systems of societies currently at the same level of economic development and in comparable environmental settings (both social and physical), and with comparable technology and leadership may be reflections of differences in their pasts. This seems especially likely considering the strongly conservative character of primitive men, which anthropologists have so often noted.

Finally, it seems probable that *chance* is also a factor contributing to variations in distributive systems. Even Friedrich Engels, one of the fathers of modern social determinism, did not deny its influence. In fact, he developed a definition of chance, or historical accidents, which he described as those "things and events whose inner connection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, or negligible."<sup>62</sup> Only those who still believe in the possibility of complete knowledge, the dream of certain nineteenth-century scientists, can omit chance, so defined, from their theories.

<sup>61</sup> See Bronislaw Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), chap. 3, for a vigorous attack on the concept of "survivals." Unfortunately, as in the rejection of the great-man theory cited earlier, there is a mixture of sense and nonsense here, due to an element of semantic legerdemain. For an alternative approach, see Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 304-308.

<sup>62</sup> In Lewis Feuer (ed.), *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1959), p. 398.