

Chapter 11

The Creative Double Negation and the Non-Non-Cascade

Abstract This chapter describes how the Adam and Eve-like event unfolded to create the human being with its cascade of unique features. Employing a dialectical scheme, the negation of the negation, it is argued that a contradiction in the new way of being created human consciousness, self-consciousness, and language as new templates for evolution to fill out. An educated guess places the first time event with the Australopithecines. With reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is further described how the event led to the development of human institutions like exogamy, totem and taboo, marriage, and social contracts. A brief sketch of society's subsequent economical history follows. A pivot in this history is the introduction of slavery, which fatefully changes the status of women, here quoted from Friedrich Engels' rendition of Lewis H. Morgan's work.

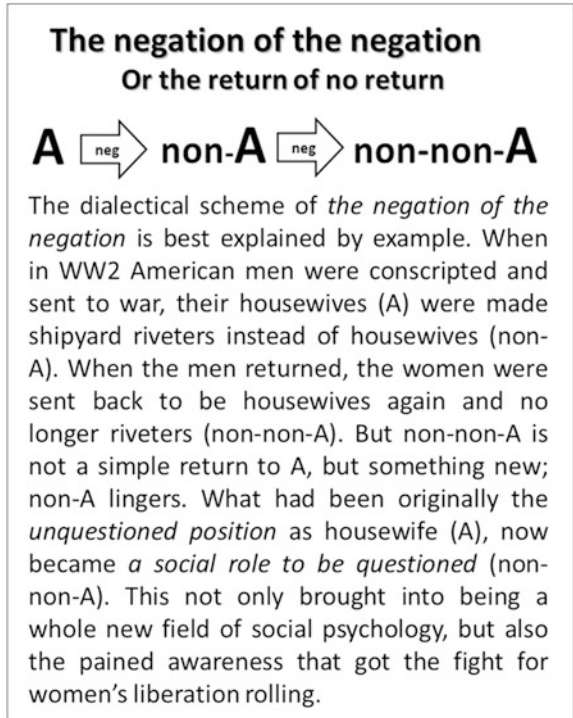
The Primal Scene

If this was how the *zoon politikon*, the societal animal, was born, how did we also become Aristotle's *zoon logon echon*, the animal with consciousness and language? To answer that question, we return to the primal scene where female gatherers were first confronted with a young male asking for food.

What happened I like to imagine was this. Watching his approach with hostile suspicion and bewilderment, the tension was suddenly released when the females burst into a joyous giggle. Humor had defused an unsettling and threatening situation. But what is humor? The archetype of humor is found in the children's riddles. Excitedly they ask: 'What runs and runs and never gets anywhere?' And when you, as you should, give up, they clap their little hands and laugh: 'A clock, dummy.' Humor is simply a solution to a cognitive contradiction, which releases tension in laughing and amusement.¹

¹You get the same sudden feeling of elation when in stereoscopy you manage to fuse two disparate images into 3D depth, and when in problem-solving an Heureka-moment is reached.

Fig. 11.1 The negation of the negation



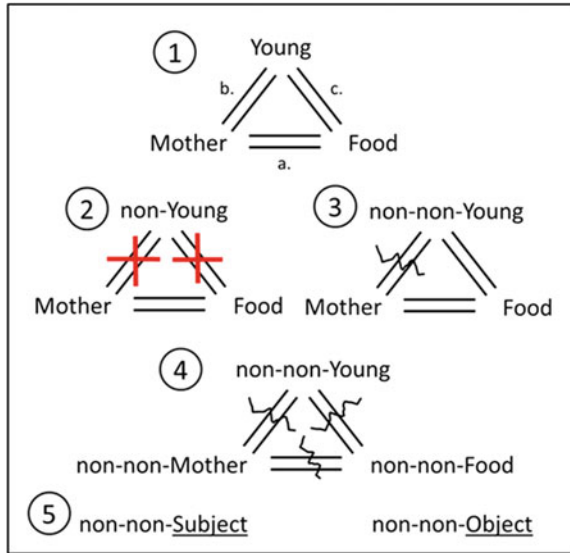
A cognitive contradiction was exactly what faced the females. A child once (A), the youngster had come of age and was no longer a child (non-A); now he effectively claimed to be a child again (A). In mechanical physics you can turn back the clock, but you cannot undo human development, so, with his manly physique, voice, and genitals, to accept him as a child was impossible. Humor, however, makes the impossible possible when it allows the coexistence of contradictory claims, and this happened here. Instead of seeing him as a child, or a non-child, the females suddenly saw him as simultaneously both, a *non-non-child*.

With this wondrous construction, we are back in Hegel’s land of dialectics, where the new is created from negations of negations (see Fig. 11.1).

The new that was created by the entering of the non-non-child is unfolded in Fig. 11.2.

1. In the natural state, as earlier explained, a biological identity relation exists between an organism and its food (a). An identity relation also exists between a mother and her change (b). By a rule of biological transitivity, an identity relation between the food and the young follows and (c) makes the young a legitimate recipient.
2. Place a *non-young* in the young’s place and the identity relation with the mother, as well as with the food, is broken and void.

Fig. 11.2 The non-non dialectics



3. Place a *non-non-young*, however, and the triangle might still work, because the double negation *in a sense* restores the young. But only in a sense; in development return is the return of no return, the non-young, *in a sense*, is still in place. And because of the double sense, the relation between mother and non-non-young becomes wavering.
4. The wavering spreads to all the sides of the triangle, where the entering of the non-non-young results in the mother becoming a non-non-mother, and the food becoming non-non-food.
5. If we generalize, we can say that the event has transformed the biological subject into a *non-non-subject*, and the biological object into a *non-non-object*. This transformation is the arrival of the human consciousness and self-consciousness.

The double sense renders the object *a part of me* and something *apart from me*, my thing and a thing of its own; a duality precisely carried in the equivocal term ‘object’. Objects do have this dual existence in nature as explained in the chapter on intentionality, but until the human being, animals could have no awareness of this. Only we can keep the object inside the hand (subjectively) and at the same time look at it from an outside position (objectively). Appropriately in the context of our Adam and Eve story, the latter has been called ‘*the God’s Eye View*’. Not surprisingly, considering the non-non-complexity of the case, among philosophers its possibility has been heavily contested. If we are to base our decision on the evidence, however, the unique development of human science and technology proves that in some way at least it has been possible. The earlier quote from Leontiev sums it all perfectly up: “The transition to consciousness is the beginning of a new, higher stage in the evolution of the psyche. In contrast to the psychic reflection peculiar to animals, conscious reflection is reflection of material reality in its separateness from

the subject's actual attitudes to it, i.e., reflection that distinguishes its objective stable properties."²

What happened to the object also happened to the subject when transformed into a non-non-subject. In contrast to the animal's monolithic sense, the new double sense made the human subject view herself from both the inside (subjectively) and the outside (objectively). Observe that an inside view requires an outside view, inside has no meaning without outside. It was when the subject became an object for herself that subjectivity and self-consciousness came into existence. Leontiev got that right also: "The distinguishing of the reality reflected in man's consciousness as objective has as another aspect the distinguishing of the world of inner experiences and the possibility of developing self-observation on that basis."³ Only it did not start with communal hunting, as Leontiev believed.

Language

Now human language, the enigma of enigmas, has become easy. In nature, the identity relation between mother and young is maintained and constantly confirmed by vocal and nonvocal signals passing between the two. When the non-non-young enters the equation, the communicative link must waver too. This transforms the signal into a *non-non-signal*. The non-non-signal shares the same duality as the non-non-object. Whereas the signal is locked in and part of the present situation, the non-non-signal, being both part and apart, reaches beyond the situation given. Potentially it can point to things not here and not now. A signal with this transcending duality is called a *sign*, and the sign is the soul of language. "Signification, that is, creation and use of signs", Vygotsky writes, is "the basic and most general activity of man that differentiates man from animals in the first place."⁴ As long as we remember that signification began as a carryover from another activity, we can only agree.

While signals are sensory and make immediate local sense, signs, going beyond the situation given, have meanings that need interpretation; what do the issuers intend, what do they have in mind? The step from signal to sign therefore brings into being the distinction between sense and social meaning studied by Leontiev.⁵ But as words became transferable vehicles of intention and meaning, so did any other man-made thing. As later explored by ingenious French philosophers, artifacts were signs too, and to understand what the makers had in mind, children, in addition to the vocabulary of words, had to be instructed in the semantics of things. As the curriculum expanded, so must childhood, and in time, the extra stretch was

²Leontiev (1981, p. 181).

³Ibid.

⁴Vygotsky (1997, p. 55).

⁵As the subjective is born with the objective, objective *social meaning* is immediately followed by subjective *personal meaning* or *personal sense*, which Leontiev (1978) also deals with.

inserted that Freudians call the latency stage. Cultural transmission, not unknown in the animal world, now simply took off. Mythology may have originated here too, as the notion of makers with intentions implied in the concept of meaning was projected onto the whole of nature. Externalizing what the makers had in mind, the artifacts created a world of *mind-products*. Mind-products now surround us everywhere. Hardly anything in our environment is not man-made, and not made for the maker to use but for the benefit of someone else. It is so pervasive that we do not give it a thought, but nothing proves better the importance of surplus labor in the constitution of the human world.

The evolution of language has invited some lame explanations, Engels perhaps taking the prize when he wrote that “the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate letter after another.”⁶ Convinced that human language must have arrived in a leap, and despairing of the insufficiency of the proffered explanations, Noam Chomsky in sheer mockery proposed that “some random mutation took place, maybe after some strange cosmic ray shower, and it reorganized the brain, implanting a language organ in an otherwise primate brain.”⁷ A ‘fairy-tale,’ he admitted, but at least a better one than the other fairy-tales on offer.⁸ Chomsky is certainly right about the discontinuous leap; only our fairy-tale is vastly preferable to his about the cosmic ray-gun.

Still the pedestrian explanations could be right also if we keep in mind Ferdinand de Saussure’s crucial distinction between *language* and *speech*. Basically, language is the sign system and speech the act of communicating with signs. Chomsky’s point was that you cannot get from the latter to the first. Once language came into being, however, speech must have followed, developing in the Darwinian way, step by step, as natural selection began to shape brain and vocal organs in accordance with the new answer key introduced with the demands and potentials of language.

Having one, we automatically think that a big brain must be of great advantage, but if it was, more animals would have one, surely. In fact, big energy-guzzling brains are a liability spurned in nature. Representing only two percent of our body weight, the brain consumes twenty percent of our bodily energy. Obviously, only the most extraordinary circumstance—threatening or promising—would justify energy expenditure so excessive and skewed, and no such circumstance existed in nature prior to the non-non-world of the human being. The main growth—ballooning—of the human brain has been in the neocortical layers. They can be thought of as pattern analyzing neural filters, and facing the human beings were precisely patterns of unprecedented complexity.

Consider only that the first word uttered in human history was a lie. In every physical aspect, the utterance—‘me-child-food’—was the same as it had been in the past, only now the youngster’s begging grunt had become a non-non-signal, not only a dual sign, but a duplicitous one at that.

⁶Engels (1876).

⁷Ulbaek (1998).

⁸Chomsky (2000, p. 4).

The theory that our brains grew to enable us to identify social cheaters may not be wrong, but even more important than exposing such trickery was upholding the illusion when the new human way of life *required* the acceptance of the non-non-child. The identity triangle between mother, young, and food (Fig. 11.2: 1) now called into question and no longer a natural given, to persist had to become an artificial given. This ‘artificing’ happened when the wavering turned instinctive signals into signs and symbols. This was only the start, of course, but the start was decisive. In time, the first artificial identity triangle (Fig. 11.2: 4) in the hunters and gatherers evolved into *totemism*, an elaborate symbolic code linking kinship and food objects. But totemism was also only a start; later, all subsequent societies have worked their pants thin to establish and uphold symbolic identity triangles between the society’s opposing participants and the societal surplus. Marxists sometimes refer to this as illusion and false consciousness, but this is perfunctory if it fails to recognize also that illusion has been the cement that made the human non-non-society possible, and that false consciousness is also consciousness.

An Impostor to Be Believed

More than communicative spin was required, however, to uphold the illusion that the man was a child; he also had to act like one. Thus a show of boyish charm and impish behavior became a priority. It still is. As denounced the man-child is in our modern culture, as beloved he also is, the paradox a reflection of the non-non-child problematic.

The roguish man-child is found in most ancient mythologies in the archetypical character of the *trickster*, a boundary crosser, says Paul Mattick, who violates principles of social and natural order, playfully disrupting normal life and then reestablishing it on a new basis.⁹ The description fits, and even more evoking is the analysis of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Insisting that mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution, he saw the trickster in Native American mythology—usually rendered as a raven or coyote—as a contradictory and unpredictable character mediating between the opposites of life and death. Science needs two kinds, dot collectors and dot connectors; with their particular limitations, they rarely see eye to eye. A dot connector of the first order, Lévi-Strauss was heavily criticized, and he did go a bridge too far. He should have stopped his chain of reasoning where the trickster was made out to be the ambiguous halfway between the plant eater and the meat eater! Then again, the bridge between gatherers and the hunters was a matter of life of death; it hardly is an accident that Hermes, who in Protagoras’ story brought society to the humans, was a trickster in Greek mythology.

⁹Mattick (1998).

It should be mentioned also that natural selection, impressed by the need to make the non-non-child more convincing, lent a hand by selecting for childish facial features. This development, called *neotony* or *juvenilization*, explains why even our top alpha males resemble the juvenile chimpanzee much more than they resemble the juvenile's severe looking father.

Taboo, Exogamy, and the Importance of Being the Man

Childish theatrics was fine, but most importantly was not immediately to give the game away by behaving manly. As Rule Number One, it meant that the man-child must NOT behave sexually in his mother group, not flaunt his private parts, not propose any females, nor accept any advances from their side. In the antediluvian report, we read that their eyes were opened, and they discovered nudity—no animal could ever have discovered nudity—and consequently felt the need to cover themselves. In the hunters and gatherers, the need to keep separate food subvention and sex in time evolved into another symbolic code, the cultural institution of *taboo*, which dictated where you could not feed and who you could not have sex with.¹⁰ Together with totemism, it laid the groundwork for an incredibly elaborate social order; no later society can show anything this intricate, but neither have any lasted more than a fraction as long.

If you cannot have sex in your mother group, you must have it in somebody else's mother group. This brought into being *exogamy*, another universal human institution.¹¹ For mating away from home to work, another mother group—or *matriclan*—had to be within reach, but would the males there accept such an approach? The threat of marauding males being real, they would certainly be wary of trespassers, but here communal hunting worked its wonders. Males hunting together, bonded together, and with the sharing of hardship, danger, and meat, enough trust was built for a fellow to visit another fellow's sister, or her him. The best hunter with most meat to share became *The Man*, able to parlay his social status and prestige “into powerful social alliances, the deference of other men and greater mating success.”¹² Thus the ring was closed; *hunting made exogamy possible, exogamy made provisioning by females possible, and female surplus labor made hunting possible*.

Men, as has been argued by the American anthropologist Kristen Hawkes, did not hunt so much to provide for their own families but rather to gain the status benefits of sharing their bounty with neighbors.¹³ So crucial were these benefits that

¹⁰Most illustratively described in Evelyn Reed's *Woman's Evolution*, 1975. Together with Elaine Morgan's *Descent of Woman*, 1972, it has been an original inspiration of mine.

¹¹Chimpanzees outbreed too as a rule, but not as a law.

¹²Buss (2015, p. 79).

¹³Hawkes (1991).

hunters went out of their way to give away meat. In the original societies first visited by Western anthropologists, *The Big Man* willingly spent everything he had in great feasts, and often ruined himself. It took the anthropologists some figuring to understand why this irrational behavior was rational. As Lévi-Strauss showed, it all came down to sharing as the key to social control. In the end, to be king, you had to have meat in abundance to share with your brothers, with your sisters too on occasion. The American anthropologist Harris (1978) has convincingly argued that this was the reason Aztec rulers, when their game became exhausted, turned to the hunting of people and mass cannibalism. And it explains why kings and nobles through history have been such obsessive hunters, clearing large tracts of land of farming villages to make game reserves, and exacting terrible punishments on poachers. And while they may not know it, when elites today pay crocks of gold to blast away at birds and hares, and fight to the death for the right to trash through woods on the heels of yelping dogs, there are deeper things in play than just love of the great outdoors.

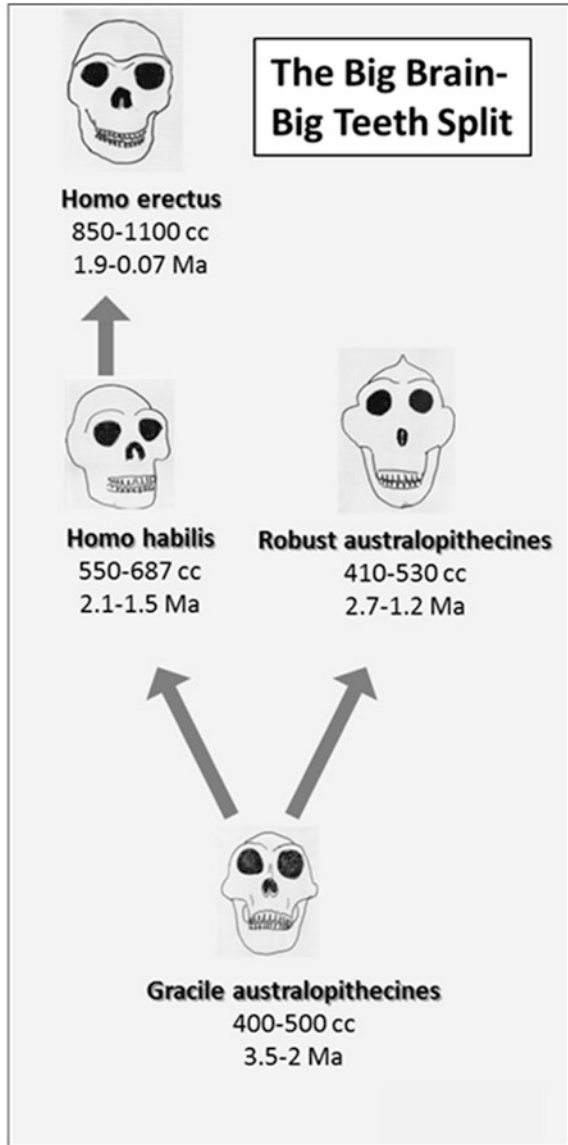
The Human Choice

While the fateful event may have happened in different places and more than once, an educated guess places *the first time* in Eastern Africa a little more than two million years ago. The argument is this.

When the food crisis struck, and our ancestors had to seek out new and difficult food, there were two options. Males could try to become hunters, or failing that, they could become gatherers too. The first would lead to big brains, the second to big teeth. Big brains we have explained; big teeth are explained as an adaptation to difficult chewable grains and gritty plant fibers. With a mixed diet, a grinding denture would be a mixed blessing and the hunters and gatherers were therefore spared; if both sexes took up tough plant foods, however, natural selection would go full out for massive molars and huge masticatory muscles. If therefore we find a branching on our family tree leading to big brains and big teeth, respectively, the event would have happened somewhere prior to that. As seen in Fig. 11.3, this is precisely what we find. The event that changed natural selection's answer key and brought the human way into being may first have happened with the small African australopithecines.

If so, the next big thing that happened was big-game hunting. It created a crisis of its own. As the large hoofed grass eaters and the elephants were migrating animals, to chase them hominids had to migrate too. That the females would have been reluctant to leave behind their familiar tracts, and thus their intimate local flora knowledge, is not difficult to imagine. For those who chose to follow the hunters, general abstract botanical concepts had to replace their former local concrete experience, but with the nascent linguistic consciousness ready to be filled out, they came prepared for that. Starting right away, this *general knowledge* in time grew into a syllabus of rhymes and song lines taught to new generations.

Fig. 11.3 The telltale split



The new hunting way of life made the little community highly dependent on meat, but not only was its procurement unreliable, as a source of energy, it was uneconomical. Raw meat costs nearly as much energy to digest as is gained. Until that problem was solved, big-game hunting remained a questionable proposition. It was solved with the invention of *cooking and use of fire*. *Homo erectus*, the next brain size up from *Homo habilis*, used fire and became a big-game hunter.

Marriage

Depending on the fickle game resource, the traveling hunting bands had to be small and widely dispersed. The necessity of smallness placed the original *support/sex arrangement* under great strain and big-game hunting would hardly have been feasible without a new invention. The new invention was the *support—sex arrangement* called *marriage*. As an extension of parental care, the male had received his female support from genetically *related* females, which in turn required that his sexual needs were met by *unrelated* females. With fewer people around, an obvious rationalization would be to half this personnel requirement by turning the food-supporter and the sex-partner into one and the same. The male could have opted for the *related-related* combination and taken off with his sister, but if any did, they were never heard of again; exogamy being the linchpin of the societal order, only the *unrelated-unrelated* combination had any future.

With the introduction of *unrelated* female support, the genetic bond ceased to be the basis for surplus labor, a most crucial turning point. You could say that the human being had made the final switch from biology and ecology to culture and economy, only culture and economy *are* the specific human biology and ecology.

Marriage holds a deep secret too, and Lévi-Strauss found it out. Marriage is not—at least not until very recently—a contract between a man and a woman; it is a contract between a man and other men about the right to a woman. Starting out from Marcel Mauss’ inspired book about *the gift* as the ultimate means of social control, (‘by gifts one makes slaves and by whips one makes dogs,’ an Eskimo saying goes), Lévi-Strauss identified the woman as the ultimate gift. This in turn explained taboo. “While men see the women who belong to their group as potential sexual partners, they recognize that these same women are also desired by men from other groups and are therefore means of securing alliances with them.”¹⁴ As alliances based on exchange is the foundation of the human society, “the prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter than obliging the mother, sister, or daughter to be given to others.”¹⁵ This ‘give away’ is marked by the stippled arrow in Fig. 11.4. It is named ‘control’ because the giver remained in control of the gift; the woman and her children remained her brother’s ‘belongings’ and he had a great say in their lives.

The central role of the maternal uncle was long an enigma to anthropologists, but Lévi-Strauss had the explanation: “The primitive and irreducible character of the basic unit of kinship...is actually a direct result of the universal presence of an incest taboo. This is really saying that in human society, a man must obtain a woman from another man who gives him a daughter or a sister. Thus we do not need to explain how the maternal uncle emerged in the kinship structure. He does

¹⁴Lévi-Strauss (1969, p. 51).

¹⁵Ibid., p. 481.

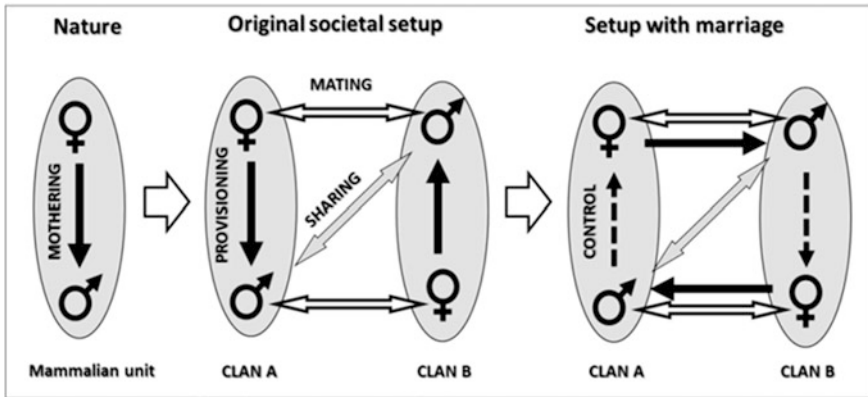


Fig. 11.4 The evolution of the human family structure

not emerge—he is present initially. Indeed, the presence of the maternal uncle is a necessary precondition for the structure to exist.”¹⁶

Like Hegel, obviously a creative genius, Lévi-Strauss had numerous dazzling ideas and it should not detract much that he turned things on their head. Taboo is not explained by the need to exchange women; it is the other way around. Exchange of women is not explained by the need to make alliances; it is the other way around. And the need to marry a woman is really not about sex; it is basically about the female surplus labor.

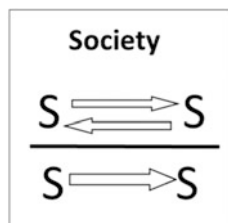
Today in the West, where even the nuclear family is on the verge of dissolution, we are stunned by the extremes to which some traditional societies are willing to go to uphold the control of women. The fervor of the zealots is less inexplicable when we realize that at stake is the original foundation of society, ancient long before it was codified in holy books, now under mortal threat from Western modernization. But if the original extended family and clan structure is fast becoming obsolete, the *general societal model* remains undisturbed. The human society is still, as it always was, *socially controlled surplus labor*, as shown in Fig. 11.5.

Humanity on the March

With marriage, general knowledge, fire, and long legs, *Homo erectus* was ready to move into the world, and in wave after wave out of Africa, the hominins began to populate the planet, *Homo sapiens* the last emanation.

¹⁶Lévi-Strauss (1958/1963, p. 46).

Fig. 11.5 Socially controlled surplus labor



Arguably, the last ice age was the heyday of the *Homo sapiens*. Plains teeming with big game like mammoths, wild horses, and bison, made possible a life of leisure¹⁷ and rich culture, as attested by the magnificent rock cave art in the river valleys of France and Spain. But when the weather warmed and forests spread, the big herds could not be sustained, and the days of the big hunter were permanently over. A crisis no doubt ensued, but with a heightened need for gathering, the women rose to the occasion. Starting in tracts in the Middle East where many domesticable plants and animals were to be found, clever women began tending to the plants, seeding, watering, and weeding, and soon *agriculture* was invented. If the revered status of women had shifted to men with the advent of the big hunter, it now shifted back again. But not for long.

Our cousin, the chimpanzee, is a violent species, routinely warring on its neighbors, and so apparently are we. There was not much that hunters and gatherers could do with defeated enemies, however. They could kill their captives in some gruesome way to steal their souls; they could adopt them; or they could set them free. With the invention of agriculture, a new possibility presented itself. They could be put to work, laboring in the fields to produce a surplus. The *slave* had been invented, and history turned again.

History in a Thimble

Society as an engine that creates, accumulates, invests, distributes, and preserves wealth began with female surplus labor and the hunters and gatherers. The hunters and gatherers obviously wanted no more material wealth than they could carry; the great wealth they created was the nonmaterial social, intellectual, and spiritual capital that made the human being. Agriculture, however, meant a stationary life, which for the first time made the creation and accumulation of *material* wealth a worthwhile proposition; if you could find a large enough labor pool, very worthwhile. Thus with slavery, and the ensuing property relations, expanded material wealth became possible, and with this *civilization* began with all its achievements, towns and temples, priests and schools, markets and money, mathematics and

¹⁷Sahlins (1972) famously has argued for affluence among hunters and gatherers.

science, and administration and taxes. With serfs less costly and negligent than slaves, and fine-tuned by the invention of birth right and primogeniture, the accumulation of wealth reached a high point in the following *feudal society* as attested by its splendid treasures, ponderous castles, and magnificent cathedrals. It had an Achilles heel though. The excessive emphasis on accumulation caused congestion in the flow of circulation, and made the engine stutter.

What the nobles did not fathom was brilliantly grasped by the budding class of enterprising townspeople and merchants. Self-enrichment is fine, but if you want to accumulate wealth, you must spend it first! With this new emphasis on investment, *capitalist production* was born, and with it the *bourgeois society* with all its marvels, not least the Enlightenment the bourgeoisie unleashed in its struggle for emancipation. Yet, this society also had an Achilles heel. Having easily out-produced the feudal economy, it began to out-produce itself. To make a profit possible, the price of the commodity must exceed the cost of its production; thus wages must be less than the exchange value of the commodity. This surplus value is not theft, as Marx correctly saw, but it means that the production by necessity will exceed the buying power of the working population, and with unsold goods lying idle in the warehouses, there would be no profit to invest in new rounds of capitalist production. Industrial innovation would still make some growth possible, but as growth in time meant mass production, calling for mass consumerism, the problem was just exacerbated. There were two ways to muddle through this impasse. You could export your problem away by aiming at foreign populations; only opening up foreign markets usually meant colonial conquest and trade wars with huge overheads added. You could also let your own population go into debt to keep them buying, but besides being risky, there is a limit to how far people can mortgage their future. In other words, *capitalism*, its wonders of productivity and creative entrepreneurship notwithstanding, came riddled with crisis.

Here the working class and its struggle for emancipation entered history. As the slave owners had been dedicated to the *creation* of a material surplus, the nobles preoccupied with its *accumulation*, the capitalists fixated on its *investment*, the workers now made its *distribution* the issue. By organizing in trade unions and political parties, they gained the clout to improve wages and working conditions, win the suffrage—men first, women later—and redress the political balance of power. In the East, the workers simply took over the shop and began building a socialist society; in the West, they settled for social democracy and the welfare state, to which the capitalists grudgingly acquiesced as the lesser evil. Rather than an evil, however, the trade unions and the welfare state proved a gift to capitalism. By forcing through a wider distribution, the workers helped create the aggregate demand without which industrial capitalism could not function. For a time overcoming the economy's inherent contradictions, in the West this ushered in a golden age with unprecedented productivity, progress, prosperity, spread of wealth, and public services, creating a general mood of future optimism. But only for a time; after socialism stumbled and fell in the East (partly from envy), the priority in the West went back to cutting wages and dismantling public benefits with the

foreseeable return of escalating inequality and permanent crises. The capitalists were not to blame, though; they merely played their role, and the distribution of wealth was not part of it.

Morgan

The surrender of socialism would have been a surprise, otherwise the above history is basically the one Marx and Engels wrote about in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another.”¹⁸ Of course, starting human society off with slavery was a little late; by the time this institution was invented, humans had already been around for immeasurable ages. Marx and Engels knew, but this was how it was told in the classical anthropogenesis, and they had no better source to the secrets of prehistory. Lewis H. Morgan changed that.

In the classical anthropogenesis, society grew out of the family as here described by Rousseau “The habit of living together soon gave rise to the finest feelings known to humanity, conjugal love, and paternal affection. Every family became a little society, the more united because liberty and reciprocal attachment were the only bonds of its union. The sexes, whose manner of life had been hitherto the same, began now to adopt different ways of living. The women became more sedentary, and accustomed themselves to mind the hut and their children, while the men went abroad in search of their common subsistence.”¹⁹ In seeming agreement, Marx and Engels in 1845 in *The German Ideology* wrote that the first social structure was “limited to an extension of the family,” but their remarks about “the slavery latent in the family” in the next line²⁰ indicates that they did suspect that something was amiss in the standard story.

Morgan, an American railroad lawyer doubling as an anthropologist, discovered what it was during his field studies of the Iroquois and their kinship systems. Couching in terms of matrilineality and patrilineality, what Morgan discovered was basically that the marital family was not first, but had been preceded by a matrilineal (or gens). Evidence of this could be found not only with the Iroquois, but with many other indigenous people, and also in Greek and Roman historical sources, and led Morgan to his grand theory published as *Ancient Society* in 1877. Subsequently Morgan’s theory raised as much criticism as had Lamarck’s, but critical points notwithstanding,²¹ we obviously think that his discovery of the original sequence is

¹⁸Marx and Engels (1848, 1).

¹⁹Rousseau (1754).

²⁰Marx and Engels (1845, 1A).

²¹For a critical survey of the current consensus see Knight (2008).

correct and important. So did Marx. Morgan's discovery had "the same significance for the history of primitive society as Darwin's theory of evolution, and Marx's theory of surplus for political economy," Engels later wrote.²² In other words, Morgan's prehistory filled the gap between Darwin's natural history and Marx's history, only a bridge was needed. Wanting to build that bridge himself, Marx started extensive studies of the anthropological literature, setting aside his work with the last volumes of *Capital*, which Engels eventually had to finish. Engels also had to finish Marx's anthropological work, "the execution of a bequest," he called it. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* was published in 1884—in Zürich to bypass the German antisocialist laws.

The work is of historical importance, but as we want to keep it simple and do not want to lose our way in the maze of anthropological intricacies, we shall stay at helicopter height and only quote this observation: "The overthrow of mother-right [matrilineality] was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman, especially conspicuous among the Greeks of the heroic and still more of the classical age, has gradually been palliated and glozed over, and sometimes clothed in a milder form; in no sense has it been abolished."²³

Another Fall

For maybe a million years everybody knew that females shouldered the main burden, gathering, cooking, bearing and rearing children; they were respected for it, revered, even feared; still were with the Iroquois into the modern times. As Morgan observed, "the women were the great power among the clans, as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, to 'knock off the horns,' as it was technically called, from the head of a chief, and send him back to the ranks of the warriors."²⁴ The 18th century Jesuit missionary and anthropologist Joseph-Francois Lafitau was duly impressed too: "Nothing...is more real than this superiority of the women. It is essentially the women who embody the Nation, the nobility of blood, the genealogical tree, the sequence of generations, and the continuity of families. It is in them that all real authority resides, the land, the fields and all their produce belongs to them: they are the soul of the councils, the arbiters of peace and war..."²⁵ The original prominence of women was reflected in the prehistoric mythologies where mother goddesses were in the lead; in Greece, for instance, *Gaia*

²²Engels (1884/1972), preface to the fourth Edition.

²³Ibid., II, 3.

²⁴Morgan (1877, Chap. IV, footnote 1).

²⁵Knight (2008, p. 66).

was the Great Mother of all, creator and giver of birth to the Earth and the Universe and to all the deities to follow in the pantheon.

Slavery changed all that. What happened to the skilled Detroit auto workers when cheap foreign labor took over their jobs, happened to the proud women when slavery was introduced; they lost their former status and became like slaves themselves. The women fought it; the echo is still there to be heard in the pre-historic legend. Monumental, for instance, was the primordial battle in *Enûma Elis*, the Babylonian creation myth, in which *Marduk*, rising male god and lord supreme, defeats and—in gory detail—destroys *Tiamat*, the reigning mother goddess, who resisted the takeover. Tiamat was referred to as the dragon or snake, which may explain the mischievous reptile in the Adam and Eve story, penned during the Jews' Babylonian captivity. Another example of early propaganda was the disturbances in Greece; where the killing of a male opponent by a party of angry women on Mount Pangaion has come down as the work of sex mad Maenads high on orgies and drugs. Women had suffered a 'world-historical historical defeat,' and the victors told the story.

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