The Original Affluent Society

Marshall Sahlins

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Searching for the Culprit

An Introduction by the Fifth Estate Collective

> "Without government life is nasty, brutish and short."
>
> —Thomas Hobbes

Every person gazing even casually at the sordid history of government realizes that the Hobbesian dictum is nonsense and, in fact, just the opposite is true: with government, humanity has thusly had its life defined.

Viewing the organized political state as the culprit in human affairs for the presence of universal misery is standard fare for the anarchist and libertarian tradition and as a theory is not without merit as far as it goes. Certainly, other attempts historically to locate the culprit in evil spirits, the Devil, human nature or even capitalism, are much more shortsighted as they fail to deliver an explanation of the daily mechanism through which people have been subjugated during the epoch of Civilization.

The appearance on the planet of the political state as well as social classes, private property, the patriarchy and the like are the apparatuses of domination, but the larger framework in which they all appear, the reigning code, that of Civilization itself, is usually taken for granted and only recently has come under critical scrutiny.

The essay by Marshall Sahlins reprinted on the following page undertakes such an examination through the mirror of the societies which immediately preceded establishment of Civilization. The willingness to indict the entire edifice of Civilization as being responsible for the long history of human misery is one that parts company with all existing social theory and opens the way for a larger examination of the entire human experience on the planet, not just that of the last ten thousand years. Although Sahlins' subject matter is limited by design, it immediately suggests many other questions.

For instance, what brought about in such a relatively short period of time the epochal changes that discarded 50 millennia of small-band living marked by extremely low levels of technology, stable populations, and group members highly integrated into the most intimate details of the ecosphere which they inhabited? What features caused these nomadic bands of gatherers and hunters to become the domesticated "citizens" of emerging nation states, their life's purpose altered dramatically to the filling of state coffers, becoming cannon fodder for a suddenly universal state of warfare and consumers of ideology which made them less, rather than more, able to understand their lives and the social relationships around them.

To move technology to the centerpiece of this equation, as we do, meets with resistance from almost every quarter. Yet even the simplest technological development has been part of a continuing process of separation from the world which first bore and succored our emerging species to a situation where now we stand at the apex of that separation as strangers on our own planet, divorced completely from the world about us. Rather than possessing the skills, knowledge and craft which allowed for

5,000,000 years of human evolution, today, we depend almost exclusively upon experts and officials to feed, clothe, govern and perform every function once carried out by individuals themselves.

The links between technology, Civilization and domination appear almost immediately upon examination. The most dramatic technological development in human history was the Neolithic Revolution, the shift from Stone Age gathering and hunting economies (the Paleolith), to a mode of production based upon fixed populations involved in agriculture and capable of producing an expropriable surplus. This innovation of farming as a means of subsistence guaranteed a population that could not run off in times of adversity and which was easily subjected to an ideology of domination containing the mass social and psychological drive needed to obliterate all of the past desire to be wild and free, replacing it with the desire for subservience.

Marxists see this civilizing process as "progressive"—the myth-imbued dynamic which is supposed to eventually result in socialism—so that every horror, every deprivation is vindicated as a necessary step toward a utopian future in which every slave, every serf, every wage worker becomes part of a continuum which will eventually free humanity. The problem with this perspective is that unless you are willing to accompany this mystical view of human affairs with a religious certainty, you are left with a staggering amount of sacrifices for absolutely nothing other than the reproduction of the dominant society.

Civilization has been aptly described as a "bloody sword" and when its mounting victims are measured against its reward for the survivors, it's difficult to make a case for it. The "high standard" of living argument as Civilization's justification always attempts to disguise the fact that the benefits of any given epoch are always enjoyed by a few at the expense of the many and usually for only short periods of time. Other than those exceptions the daily misery experienced by most people is coupled with calamities of such magnitude that they become difficult to comprehend. The physical carnage alone is so vast—100 million dead in ten thousand years of warfare (please compute the yearly average), tens of millions dead from diseases directly attributable to excessive population densities, millions more dead and injured in "accidents" from machinery (millions dead from car accidents alone), starvation as well as explosions, mine disasters, chemical mishaps, etc.—as to define the epoch of organized society as one steeped in blood. Also, there is an upward curve of both technological development and slaughter, and technological development and oppression: they are inextricably linked.

Let us anticipate the critics who would accuse us of wanting to go "back to the caves" or of mere posturing on our part—i.e., enjoying the comforts of civilization all the while being its hardiest critics. We are not posing the Stone Age as a model for our Utopia nor are we suggesting a return to gathering and hunting as a means for our livelihood. Rather, an investigation into pre-civilized modes combats the notion that humans have always lived with alarm clocks and factories. It assails the prevalent amnesia which the species exhibits as to its origins and the varieties of social association which existed

for tens of thousands of years before the rise of the state. It announces that work has not always been the touchstone of human existence and that cities and factories did not always blight the terrain. It asserts that there was a time when people lived in harmony with each other and with their natural surroundings, both of which they knew intimately.

In the modern epoch it is the marxists who are the leading exponents of taking current technology as a starting point for their vision of the future—a future which, when brought into being, has always produced nightmare police states. Reduced to its most basic elements, discussions about the future sensibly should be predicated on what we desire socially and from that determine what technology is possible. All of us desire central heating, flush toilets, and electric lighting, but not at the expense of our humanity. Maybe they are all possible together, but maybe not.

A discussion generated' by Sahlins' article will hopefully begin to bring some of these questions into focus. We welcome reader remarks on the issue.

The Original Affluent Society

How we used to live before the rise of the state, technology and government

By Marshall Sahlins

If economics is the dismal science, the study of hunting and gathering economies must be its most advanced branch. Almost universally committed to the proposition that life was hard in the paleolithic, our textbooks compete to convey a sense of impending doom, leaving one to wonder not only how hunters managed to live, but whether, after all, this was living? The specter of starvation stalks the stalker through these pages. His technical incompetence is said to enjoin continuous work just to survive, affording him neither respite nor surplus, hence not even the "leisure" to "build culture." Even so, for all his efforts, the hunter pulls the lowest grades in thermodynamics—less energy/capita/year than any other mode of production. And in treatises on economic development he is condemned to play the role of bad example: the so-called "subsistence economy."

The traditional wisdom is always refractory. One is forced to oppose it polemically, to phrase the necessary revisions dialectically: in fact, this was, when you come to examine it, the original affluent society. Paradoxical, that phrasing leads to another useful and unexpected conclusion. By the common understanding, an affluent society is one in which all the people's material wants are easily satisfied. To assert that the hunters are affluent is to deny then that the human condition is an ordained tragedy, with man the prisoner at hard labor of a perpetual disparity between his unlimited wants and his insufficient means.

For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithean way, makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable: thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that "urgent goods" become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty—with a low standard of living.

That, I think, describes the hunters. And it helps explain some of their more curious economic behavior their "prodigality" for example—the inclination to consume at once all stocks on hand, as if they had it made. Free from market obsessions of scarcity,

hunters' economic propensities may be more consistently predicated on abundance than our own. Destutt de Tracy, "fish-blooded bourgeois doctrinaire" though he might have been, at least compelled Marx's agreement on the observation that "in poor nations the people are comfortable," whereas in rich nations, "they are generally poor."

This is not to deny that a pre-agricultural economy operates under serious constraints, but only to insist on the evidence from modern hunters and gatherers, that a successful accommodation is usually made. After taking up the evidence, I shall return in the end to the real difficulties of hunting-gathering economy, none of which are correctly specified in current formulas of paleolithic poverty.

Sources of the Misconception

"Mere subsistence economy" "limited leisure save in exceptional circumstances," "incessant quest for food," "meager and relatively unreliable" natural resources, "absence of an economic surplus," "maximum energy from a maximum number of people"—so runs the fair average anthropological opinion of hunting and gathering...

But the traditional dismal view of the hunters' fix is also pre-anthropological and extra-anthropological, at once historical and referable to the larger economic context in which anthropology operates. It goes back to the time Adam Smith was writing, and probably to a time before anyone was writing. Probably it was one of the first distinctly neolithic prejudices, an ideological appreciation of the hunter's capacity to exploit the earth's resources most congenial to the historic task of depriving him of the same...

Current low opinions of the hunting-gathering economy need not be laid to neolithic ethnocentrism, however. Bourgeois ethnocentrism will do as well. The existing business economy, at every turn an ideological trap from which anthropological economics must escape, will promote the same dim conclusions about the hunting life.

Is it so paradoxical to contend that hunters have affluent economies, their absolute poverty notwithstanding? Modern capitalist societies, however richly endowed, dedicate themselves to the proposition of scarcity. Inadequacy of economic means is the first principle of the world's wealthiest peoples. The apparent material status of the economy seems to be no clue to its accomplishments; something has to be said for the mode of economic organization.

The market-industrial system institutes scarcity, in a manner completely unparalleled and to a degree nowhere else approximated. Where production and distribution are arranged through the behavior of prices, and all livelihoods depend on getting and spending, insufficiency of material means becomes the explicit, calculable starting point of all economic activity. The entrepreneur is confronted with alternative investments of a finite capital, the worker (hopefully) with alternative choices of remunerative employ, the consumer... Consumption is a double tragedy: what begins in inadequacy will end in deprivation. Bringing together an international division of labor, the market

makes available a dazzling array of products: all these Good Things within a man's reach—but never all within his grasp.

Worse, in this game of consumer free choice, every acquisition is simultaneously a deprivation, for every -purchase of something is a foregoing of something else, in general only marginally less desirable, and in some particulars more desirable, that could have been had instead. (The point is that if you buy one automobile, say a Plymouth, you cannot also have the Ford—and I judge from current television commercials, that the deprivations entailed would be more than just material.)

That sentence of "life at hard labor" was passed uniquely upon us. Scarcity is the judgment decreed by our economy—so also the axiom of our Economics: the application of scarce means against alternative ends to derive the most satisfaction possible under the circumstances. And it is precisely from this anxious vantage that we look back upon hunters. But if modern man, with all his technological advantages, still hasn't got the wherewithal, what chance has this naked savage with his puny bow and arrow? Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance.

Yet scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We should entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and that bow and arrow are adequate to that end.

But still other ideas, these endemic in anthropological theory and ethnographic practice, have conspired to preclude any such understanding.

The anthropological disposition to exaggerate the economic inefficiency of hunters appears notably by way of invidious comparison with neolithic economies. Hunters, as Lowie put it blandly, "must work much harder in order to live than tillers and breeders" (1946, page 13). On this point evolutionary anthropology in particular found it congenial, even necessary theoretically, to adopt the usual tone of reproach. Ethnologists and archaeologists had become neolithic revolutionaries, and in their enthusiasm for the Revolution spared nothing denouncing the Old (Stone Age) Regime. Including some very old scandal. It was not the first time philosophers would relegate the earliest stage of humanity rather to nature than to culture. ("A man who spends his whole life following animals just to kill them to eat, or moving from one berry patch to another, is really living just like an animal himself" (Braidwood, 1957, page 122). The hunters thus downgraded, anthropology was free to extol the Neolithic Great Leap Forward: a main technological advance that brought about a "general availability of leisure through release from purely food-getting pursuits"

Remote and Exotic Environments

In an influential essay on "Energy and the Evolution of Culture," Leslie White explained that the neolithic generated a "great advance in cultural development...as a

consequence of the great increase in the amount of energy harnessed and controlled per capita per year by means of the agricultural and pastoral arts" (1949, p. 372). White further heightened the evolutionary contrast by specifying human effort as the principal energy source of paleolithic culture, as opposed to the domesticated plant and animal resources of neolithic culture. This determination of the energy sources at once permitted a precise low estimate of hunters' thermodynamic potential—that developed by the human body: "average power resources" of one-twentieth horsepower per capita (1949, p. 369)—even as, by eliminating human effort from the cultural enterprise of the neolithic, it appeared that people had been liberated by some labor-saving device (domesticated plants and animals). But White's problematic is obviously misconceived. The principal mechanical energy available to both paleolithic and neolithic culture is that supplied by human beings, as transformed in both cases from plant and animal sources, so that, with negligible exceptions (the occasional direct use of non-human power), the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is the same in paleolithic and neolithic economies—and fairly constant in human history until the advent of the industrial revolution.

Another specifically anthropological source of paleolithic discontent develops in the field itself, from the context of European observation of existing hunters and gatherers, such as the native Australians, the Bushmen, the Ona or the Yahgan. This ethnographic context tends to distort our understanding of the hunting-gathering economy in two ways.

First, it provides singular opportunities for naivete. The remote and exotic environments that have become the cultural theater of modern hunters have an effect on Europeans most unfavorable to the latter's assessment of the former's plight. Marginal as the Australian or Kalahari desert is to agriculture, or to everyday European experience, it is a source of wonder to the untutored observer "how anybody could live in a place like this." The inference that the natives manage only to eke out a bare existence is apt to be reinforced by their marvelously varied diets. Ordinarily including objects repulsive and inedible by Europeans, the local cuisine lends itself to the supposition that the people are starving to death. Such a conclusion, of course, is more likely met in earlier than in later accounts, and in the journals of explorers or missionaries than in the monographs of anthropologists; but precisely because the explorers' reports are older and closer to the aboriginal condition, one reserves for them a certain respect...

The surviving food collectors, as a class, are displaced persons. They represent the paleolithic disenfranchised, occupying marginal haunts untypical of the mode of production: sanctuaries of an era, places so beyond the range of main centers of cultural advances as to be allowed some respite from the planetary march of cultural evolution, because they were characteristically poor beyond the interest and competence of more advanced economies. Leave aside the favorably situated food collectors, such as Northwest Coast Indians, about whose (comparative) well-being there is no dispute. The remaining hunters, barred from the better parts of the earth, first by agriculture, later by industrial economies, enjoy ecological opportunities something less than the later-

paleolithic average. Moreover, the disruption accomplished in the past two centuries of European imperialism has been especially severe, to the extent that many of the ethnographic notices that constitute the anthropologist's stock in trade are adulterated culture goods. Even explorer and missionary accounts, apart from their ethnocentric misconstructions, may be speaking of afflicted economies.

The hunters of eastern Canada of whom we read in the Jesuit Relations were committed to the fur trade in the early seventeenth century. The environments of others were selectively stripped by Europeans before reliable reports could be made of indigenous production: the Eskimo we know no longer hunt whales, the Bushmen have been deprived of game, the Shoshoni's pinon has been timbered and his hunting grounds grazed out by cattle. If such peoples are now described as poverty-stricken, their resources "meager and unreliable," is this an indication of the aboriginal condition—or of the colonial duress?...

"A Kind of Material Plenty"

Considering the poverty in which hunters and gatherers live in theory, it comes as a surprise that Bushmen who live in the Kalahari enjoy "a kind of material plenty," at least in the realm of everyday useful things, apart from food and water...

Want not, lack not. But are hunters so undemanding of material goods because they are themselves enslaved by a food quest "demanding maximum energy from a maximum number of people," so that no time or effort remains for the provision of other comforts? Some ethnographers testify to the contrary that the food quest is so successful that half the time the people seem not to know what to do with themselves. On the other hand, movement is a condition of this success, more movement in some cases than others, but always enough to rapidly depreciate the satisfactions of property. Of the hunter it is truly said that his wealth is a burden...

As Owen Lattimore wrote in a not too different context, "the pure nomad is the poor nomad." Mobility and property are in contradiction...

The hunter, one is tempted to say, is "uneconomic man." At least as concerns non-subsistence /gods, he is the reverse of that standard caricature immortalized in any General Principles of Economics, page one. His wants are scarce and his means (in relation) plentiful. Consequently he is "comparatively free of material pressures," has "no sense of possession," shows "an undeveloped sense of property," is "completely indifferent to any material pressures," manifests a "lack of interest" in developing his technological equipment.

In this relation of hunters to worldly goods there is a neat and important point. From the internal perspective of the economy, it seems wrong to say that wants are "restricted," desires "restrained," or even that the notion of wealth is "limited." Such phrasings imply in advance an Economic Man and a struggle of the hunter against his own worse nature, which is finally then subdued by a cultural vow of poverty. The

words imply the renunciation of an acquisitiveness that in reality was never developed, a suppression of desires that were never broached. Economic Man is a bourgeois construction—as Marcel Mauss said, "not behind us, but before, like the moral man." It is not that hunters and gatherers have curbed their materialistic "impulses"; they simply never made an institution of them...

We are inclined to think of hunters and gatherers as poor because they don't have anything; perhaps better to think of them for that reason as free. "Their extremely limited material possessions relieve them of all cares with regard to daily necessities and permit them to enjoy life."

Subsistence

When Herskovits was writing his *Economic Anthropology* (1958), it was common anthropological practice to take the Bushmen or the native Australians as "a classic illustration of a people whose economic resources are of the scantiest," so precariously situated that "only the most intense application makes survival possible." Today the "classic" understanding can be fairly reversed—on evidence largely from these two groups. A good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travail, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society...

The hunter's attitude towards farming introduces us, lastly, to a few particulars of the way they relate to the food quest. Once again we venture here into the internal realm of the economy, a realm sometimes subjective and always difficult to understand where, moreover, hunters seem deliberately inclined to overtax our comprehension by customs so odd as to invite the extreme interpretation that either these people are fools or they really have nothing to worry about. The former would be a true logical deduction from the hunter's nonchalance, on the premise that his economic condition is truly exigent. On the other hand, if a livelihood is usually easily procured, if one can usually expect to succeed, then the people's seeming Imprudence can no longer appear as such. Speaking to unique developments of the market economy, to its institutionalization of scarcity, Karl Polanyi said that our "animal dependence upon food has been bared and the naked fear of starvation permitted to run loose. Our humiliating enslavement to the material, which all human culture is designed to mitigate, was deliberately made more rigorous" (1947, p. 115).

But our problems are not theirs, the hunters and gatherers. Rather, a pristine affluence colors their economic arrangements, a trust in the abundance of nature's resources rather than despair at the inadequacy of human means. My point is that otherwise curious heathen devices become understandable by the people's confidence, a confidence which is the reasonable human attribute of a generally successful economy.

Consider the hunter's chronic movements from camp to camp. This nomadism, often taken by us as a sign of a certain harassment, is undertaken by them with a certain abandon. The Aboriginals of Victoria, Smyth recounts, are as a rule "lazy travelers. They have no motive to induce them to hasten their movements It is generally late in the morning before they start on their journey, and there are many interruptions by the way." ...

Certainly, hunters quit camp because food resources have given out in the vicinity. But to see in this nomadism merely a flight from starvation only perceives the half of it; one ignores the possibility that the people's expectations of greener pastures elsewhere are not usually disappointed. Consequently their wanderings rather than anxious, take on all the qualities of a picnic outing on the Thames...

Rethinking Hunters and Gatherers

Reports on hunters and gatherers of the ethnological present—specifically on those in marginal environments—suggest a mean of three to five hours per adult worker per day in food production. Hunters keep banker's hours, notably less than modern industrial workers (unionized), who would surely settle for a 21–35 hour week. An interesting comparison is also posed by recent studies of labor costs among agriculturalists of neolithic type. For example, the average adult Hanunoo, man or woman, spends 1,200 hours per year in swidden cultivation (Conklin, 1957, p. 151); which is to say, a mean of three hours twenty minutes per day. Yet this figure does not include food gathering, animal raising, cooking and other direct subsistence efforts of these Philippine tribesmen. Comparable data are beginning to appear in reports on other primitive agriculturalists from many parts of the world. The conclusion is put conservatively when put negatively: hunters and gatherers need not work longer getting food than do primitive cultivators. Extrapolating from ethnography to prehistory, one may say as much for the neolithic as John Stuart Mill said of all labor-saving devices, that never was one invented that saved anyone a minute's labor. The neolithic saw no particular improvement over the paleolithic in the amount of time required per capita for the production of subsistence; probably, with the advent of agriculture, people had to work harder.

There is nothing either to the convention that hunters and gatherers can enjoy little leisure from tasks of sheer survival. By this, the evolutionary inadequacies of the paleolithic are customarily explained, while for the provision of leisure the neolithic is roundly congratulated. But the traditional formulas might be truer if reversed: the amount of work (per capita) increases with the evolution of culture, and the amount of leisure decreases. Hunters' subsistence labors are characteristically intermittent, a day on and a day off in such activities as daytime sleep. In the tropical habitats occupied by many of these existing hunters, plant collecting is more reliable than hunting itself. Therefore, the women, who do the collecting, work rather more regularly than the

men, and provide the greater part of the food supply. Man's work is often done. On the other hand, it is likely to be highly erratic, unpredictably required; if men lack leisure, it is then in the Enlightenment sense rather than the literal. When Condorcet attributed the hunter's un-progressive condition to want of "the leisure in which he can indulge in thought and enrich his understanding with new combination of ideas," he also recognized that the economy was a "necessary cycle of extreme activity and total idleness." Apparently what the hunter needed was the assured leisure of an aristocratic philosophe.

Hunters and gatherers maintain a sanguine view of their economic state despite the hardships they sometimes know. It may be that they sometimes know hardships because of the sanguine views they maintain of their economic state. Perhaps their confidence only encourages prodigality to the extent the camp falls casualty to the first untoward circumstance. In alleging this is an affluent economy, therefore, I do not deny that certain hunters have moments of difficulty. Some do find it "almost inconceivable" for a man to die of hunger, or even to fail to satisfy his hunger for more than a day or two. But others, especially certain very peripheral hunters spread out in small groups across an environment of extremes, are exposed periodically to the kind of inclemency that interdicts travel or access to game. They suffer—although perhaps only fractionally, the shortage affecting particular immobilized families rather than the society as a whole...

Still, granting this vulnerability, and allowing the most poorly situated modern hunters into comparison, it would be difficult to prove that privation is distinctly characteristic of the hunter-gatherers. Food shortage is not the indicative property of this mode of production as opposed to others; it does not mark off hunters and gatherers as a class or a general evolutionary stage...

Above all, what about the world today? One-third to one-half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night. In the Old Stone Age the fraction must have been much smaller. This is the era of hunger unprecedented. Now, in the time of the greatest technical power, is starvation an institution. Reverse another venerable formula: the amount of hunger increases relatively and absolutely with the evolution of culture.

Technology—The Final Triumph

This paradox is my whole point. Hunters and gatherers have by force of circumstances an objectively low standard of living. But taken as their objective and given their adequate means of production, all the people's material wants usually can be easily satisfied. The evolution of economy has known, then, two contradictory movements: enriching but at the same time impoverishing, appropriating in relation to nature but expropriating in relation to man. The progressive aspect is, of course, technological. It has been celebrated in many ways: as an increase in the amount of need-serving goods and services, an increase in the amount of energy harnessed to the service of culture,

an increase in productivity, an increase in division of labor, and increased freedom from environmental control. Taken in a certain sense, the last is especially useful for understanding the earliest stages of technical advance. Agriculture not only raised society above the distribution of natural food resources, it allowed neolithic communities to maintain high degrees of social order where the requirements of human existence were absent from the natural order. Enough food could be harvested in some seasons to sustain the people while no food would grow at all; the consequent stability of social life was critical for its material enlargement. Culture went on then from triumph to triumph, in a kind of progressive contravention of the biological law of the minimum; until it proved it could support human life in outer space—where even gravity and oxygen were naturally lacking.

Other men were dying of hunger in the market places of Asia. It has been an evolution of structures as well as technologies, and in that respect like the mythical road where for every step the traveler advances his destination recedes by two. The structures have been political as well as economic, of power as well as property. They developed first within societies, increasingly now between societies. No doubt these structures have been functional, necessary organizations of the technical development, but within the communities they have thus helped to enrich they would discriminate in the distribution of wealth and differentiate in the style of life. The world's most primitive people have few possessions, but they are not poor. Poverty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status. As such it is the invention of civilization. It has grown with civilization, at once as an invidious distinction between classes and more importantly as a tributary relation—that can render agrarian peasants more susceptible to natural catastrophes than any winter camp of Alaskan Eskimo...

I must raise the possibility that the ethnography of hunters and gatherers is largely a record of incomplete cultures. Fragile cycles of ritual and exchange may have disappeared without trace, lost in the earliest stages of colonialism, when the inter-group relations they mediated were attacked and confounded. If so, the "original" affluent society will have to be rethought again for its originality, and the evolutionary schemes once more revised. Still this much history can always be rescued from existing hunters: the "economic problem" is easily solvable by paleolithic techniques. But then, it was not until culture neared the height of its material achievements that it erected a shrine to the Unattainable: Infinite Needs.

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