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**The Truth About Primitive
Life: A Critique of
Anarchoprimitivism**

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1. As the Industrial Revolution proceeded, modern society created for itself a self-congratulatory myth, the myth of “progress”: From the time of our remote, ape-like ancestors, human history had been an unremitting march toward a better and brighter future, with everyone joyously welcoming each new technological advance: animal husbandry, agriculture, the wheel, the construction of cities, the invention of writing and of money, sailing ships, the compass, gunpowder, the printing press, the steam engine, and, at last, the crowning human achievement—modern industrial society! Prior to industrialization, nearly everyone was condemned to a miserable life of constant, backbreaking labor, malnutrition disease, and an early death. Aren’t we so lucky that we live in modern times and have lots of leisure and an array of technological conveniences to make our lives easy? Today I think there are relatively few thoughtful, honest and well-informed people who still believe in this myth. To lose one’s faith in “progress” one has only to look around and see the devastation of our environment, the spread of nuclear weapons, the excessive frequency of depression, anxiety disorders and psychological stress, the spiritual emptiness of a society that nourishes itself principally with television and computer games . . . one could go on and on.

The myth of progress may not yet be dead, but it is dying. In its place another myth has been growing up, a myth that has been promoted especially by the anarchoprimitivists, though it is widespread in other quarters as well. According to this myth, prior to the advent of civilization no one ever had to work, people just plucked their food from the trees and popped it into their mouths and spent the rest of their time playing ring-around-the-rosie with the flower children. Men and women were equal, there was no disease, no competition, no racism, sexism or homophobia, people lived in harmony with the animals and all was love, sharing and cooperation.

Admittedly, the foregoing is a caricature of the anarchoprimitivists’ vision. Most of them — I hope — are not quite as far out of touch with reality as that. They nevertheless are pretty far out of touch with it, and it’s high time for someone to debunk their myth. Because that is the purpose of this article, I will say little here about the positive aspects of primitive societies. I do want to make clear, however, that one can truthfully say about such societies a great deal that is positive. In other words, the anarchoprimitivist myth is not one hundred percent myth; it does include some elements of reality.

2. Let’s begin with the concept of “primitive affluence”. It seems to be an article of faith among anarchoprimitivists that our hunting-and-gathering ancestors had to work an average of only two to three hours a day, or two to four hours a day . . . the figures given vary, but the maximum stated never exceeds four hours a day, or 28 hours a week (average).¹ People who give these figures usually do not

state precisely what they mean by “work”, but the reader is led to assume that it includes all of the activities necessary to meet the practical exigencies of the hunter-gatherers’ way of life.

Characteristically, the anarchoprimitivists usually fail to cite their source for this supposed information, but it seems to be derived mainly from two essays, one by Marshall Sahlins (*The Original Affluent Society*²), and the other by Bob Black (*Primitive Affluence*³). Sahlins claimed that for the Bushmen of the Dobe region of Southern Africa, the “work week was approximately 15 hours.”⁴ For this information he relied on the studies of Richard B. Lee. I do not have direct access to Lee’s works, but I do have a copy of an article by Elizabeth Cashdan in which she summarizes Lee’s results much more carefully and completely than Sahlins does.⁵ Cashdan flatly contradicts Sahlins: According to her, Lee found that the Bushmen he studied worked more than forty hours per week.⁶

In a part of his essay that many anarchoprimitivists have found convenient to overlook, Bob Black acknowledges the forty-hour work-week and explains the foregoing contradiction: Sahlins followed early work of Lee that considered only time spent in hunting and foraging. When all necessary work was considered, the work-week was more than doubled.⁷ The work omitted from consideration by Sahlins and the anarchoprimitivists was probably the most disagreeable part of the Bushmen’s work-week, too, since it consisted largely of food-preparation and firewood collection.⁸ I speak from extensive personal experience with wild foods: Preparing such foods for use is very often a pain in the neck. It is far more pleasant to gather nuts, dig roots, or hunt game than it is to crack nuts, clean roots, or skin and butcher game — or to collect firewood and cook over an open fire.

The anarchoprimitivists also err in assuming that Lee’s findings can be applied to hunter-gatherers generally. It’s not even clear that those findings are applicable on a year-round basis to the Bushmen studied by Lee. Cashdan cites evidence that Lee’s research may have been done at the time of year when his Bushmen worked least.⁹ She also mentions two other hunting-and-gathering peoples who have been shown quantitatively to spend far more time in hunting and foraging than Lee’s

¹ Example: “What is ‘Green Anarchy’?”, by the Black and Green Network, *Green Anarchy* #9, September 2002, page 13 (“the hunter-gatherer workday usually did not exceed three hours”).

² Sahlins, pages 1–39.

³ Bob Black, *Primitive Affluence*; see **List of Works Cited**.

⁴ Sahlins, page 21.

⁵ Cashdan, *Hunters and Gatherers: Economic Behavior in Bands*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, page 23.

⁷ Bob Black, pages 12–13. Cashdan, page 23.

⁸ Cashdan, pages 23–24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, page 24.

Bushmen did,¹⁰ and she points out that Lee may have seriously underestimated women's working time because he failed to include time spent on childcare.¹¹

I'm not familiar with any other exact quantitative studies of hunter-gatherers' working time, but it is certain that at least some additional hunter-gatherers worked a great deal more than the forty-hour week of Lee's Bushmen. Gontran de Poncins stated that the Eskimos with whom he lived about 1939–1940 had “no significant degree of leisure”, and that they “toiled and moiled fifteen hours a day merely in order to get food and stay alive.”¹² He probably did not mean that they worked fifteen hours every day; but it's clear from his account that his Eskimos worked plenty hard.

Among the Mbuti pygmies principally studied by Paul Schebesta, on days when the women did not fetch a supply of fruits and vegetables from the gardens of their village-dwelling neighbors, their gathering excursions in the forest lasted between five and six hours. Apart from their food-gathering, the women had considerable additional work to do. Each afternoon, for example, a woman had to go again into the forest and come back to camp panting and bowed under a huge load of firewood. The women worked far more than the men, but it seems clear from Schebesta's account that the men nevertheless worked much more than the three or four hours a day claimed by the anarchoprimitivists.¹³ Colin Turnbull studied Mbuti pygmies who hunted with nets. Due to the advantage conferred by the nets, these Mbuti only needed to hunt about twenty hours per week. But for them: “Netmaking is virtually a full-time occupation . . . in which both men and women indulge whenever they have both the spare time and the inclination.”¹⁴ The Siriono, who lived in a tropical forest in Bolivia, were not pure hunter-gatherers, since they did plant crops to a limited extent at certain times of the year. But they lived mostly by hunting and gathering.¹⁵ According to the anthropologist Holmberg, Siriono men hunted, on average, every other day.¹⁶ They started at daybreak and returned to camp typically between four and six o'clock in the afternoon.¹⁷ This makes on average at least eleven hours of hunting, and at three and a half days a week it comes to 38 hours of hunting per week, at the least. Since the men also did a significant amount of work on days when

¹⁰ Ibid., pages 24–25.

¹¹ Ibid., page 26.

¹² Poncins, pages 11–126.

¹³ Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 9, 17–20, 89, 93–96, 119, 159–160 (men make implements during their “leisure” hours), 170, Bildtafel X (photo of women with huge loads of firewood on their backs).

¹⁴ Turnbull, *Change and Adaptation*, page 18; *Forest People*, page 131.

¹⁵ Holmberg, pages 48–51, 63, 67, 76–77, 82–83, 223, 265.

¹⁶ Ibid., pages 75–76.

¹⁷ Ibid., pages 100–101.

they did not hunt,¹⁸ their work-week, averaged over the year, had to be far more than 40 hours. And but little of this was agricultural work.¹⁹ Actually, Holmberg estimated that the Siriono spent about half their waking time in hunting and foraging,²⁰ which would mean roughly 56 hours a week in these activities alone. With other work included, the work-week would have had to be far more than 60 hours. The Siriono woman “enjoys even less respite from labor than her husband”, and “the obligation of bringing her children to maturity leaves little time for rest.”²¹ Holmberg’s book contains many other indications of how hard the Siriono had to work.²²

In *The Original Affluent Society*, Sahlins gives, in addition to Lee’s Bushmen, other examples of hunting-and-gathering peoples who supposedly worked little, but in most of these cases he either offers no quantitative estimate of working time, or he offers an estimate only of time spent in hunting and gathering. If Lee’s Bushmen can be taken as a guide, this would be well under half the total working time.²³ However, for two groups of Australian Aborigines Sahlins does give quantitative estimates of time spent in “hunting, plant collecting, preparing foods and repairing weapons.” In the first group the average weekly time each worker spent in these activities was about 26 1/2 hours; in the second group about 36 hours. But this does not include all work; it says nothing, for example, about time spent on child care, in collecting firewood, in moving camp, or in making and repairing implements other than weapons. If all necessary work were counted, the work-week of the second group would surely be over 40 hours. The work-week of the first group did not represent that of a normal hunting-and-gathering band, since the first group had no children to feed. Sahlins himself, moreover, questions the validity of inferences drawn from these data.²⁴ Of course, even if occasional examples could be found of hunting-and-gathering peoples whose total working time was as little as three hours a day, that would matter little for present purposes, since we are concerned here not with exceptional cases but with the typical working time of hunter-gatherers. Whatever hunter-gatherers’ working hours may have been, much of their work was physically very strenuous. Siriono men typically covered about fifteen miles a day on their hunting excursions, and they sometimes covered as much as forty miles.²⁵ Covering such a distance in

¹⁸ Ibid., pages 63,76,100.

¹⁹ Ibid., page 223.

²⁰ Ibid., page 222.

²¹ Ibid., page 224.

²² Ibid., pages 87, 107, 157, 213, 220, 246, 248–49, 254, 268.

²³ Cashdan, page23.

²⁴ Sahlins, pages 15–17, 38–39.

²⁵ Holmberg, pages 107, 222.

trackless wilderness²⁶ requires far more effort than covering the same distance over a road or a groomed trail.

“In walking and running through swamp and jungle the naked hunter is exposed to thorns, to spines, and to insect pests . . . While the food quest is differentially rewarding because food for survival is always eventually obtained, it is also always punishing because of the fatigue and pain inevitably associated with hunting, fishing and collecting food.”²⁷ “Men often dissipate their anger toward other men by hunting. . . . Even if they do not kill anything they return home too to be angry.”²⁸

Even picking wild fruit could be dangerous²⁹ and could take considerable work³⁰ for the Siriono.³¹ The Siriono made little use of wild roots,³² but it is well known that many hunter-gatherers relied heavily on roots for food. Usually, gathering edible roots in the wilderness is not like pulling carrots out of the soft, cultivated soil of a garden. More typically the ground is hard, or covered with tough sod that you have to hack through in order to get at the roots. I wish I could take certain anarchoprimitivists out in the mountains, show them where the edible roots grow, and invite them to get their dinner by digging for it. By the time they had enough yampa roots or camas bulbs for a halfway square meal, their blistered hands would disabuse them of any idea that primitives didn't have to work for a living . Hunter gatherers', work was often monotonous, too. This is true for example of root-digging when the roots are small, as is the case with many of the roots that were used by the Indians of western North America, such as bitterroot and the aforementioned yampa and camas. Picking berries is monotonous if you spend many hours at it.

²⁶ The Siriono's wilderness was not strictly trackless, since they did develop paths by repeatedly using the same routes. Holmberg, page 105. How little these paths resembled the groomed trails found in our national forests may be judged from the fact that they were “scarcely visible” (page 51), “never cleared” (page 105), and “impossible for the uninitiated to follow” (page 106).

²⁷ Holmberg, page 249.

²⁸ Ibid., page 157.

²⁹ Ibid., pages 65,249.

³⁰ Ibid., page 65.

³¹ There was nothing exceptional about the strenuousness of the Siriono's hunting and foraging activities. E.g.: “The bushmen had followed the wildebeest's trail through thorns and over the parching desert . . .” Thomas. page 198. “The men had followed the buffalo's track for three Days . . .” Ibid., page 190. The strenuousness of the Eskimos. life can be judged from a reading of Poncins, Kabloona. See the accounts of hunting excursions by Wooden Leg, a Northern Cheyenne Indian (fatigue, snow-blindness, frozen feet). Marquis. pages 8–9.

³² Holmberg, page 65.

Or try tanning a deerskin. A raw, dry deerskin is stiff, like cardboard, and if you bend it, it will crack, just as cardboard will.

In order to become usable as clothing or blankets, animal skins must be tanned. Assuming you want to leave the hair on the skin, as for winter clothing, there are only three indispensable steps to tanning a deerskin. First, you must carefully remove every bit of flesh from the skin. Fat in particular must be removed with scrupulous care, because any bit of fat left on the skin will rot it. Next, the skin must be softened. Finally, it must be smoked. If not smoked it will dry stiff and hard after a wetting and will have to be softened all over again. By far the most time-consuming step is the softening. It takes many hours of kneading the skin in your hands, or drawing it back and forth over the head of a spike driven into a block of wood, and the work is very monotonous indeed. I speak from personal experience. An argument sometimes offered is that hunter-gatherers who survived into recent times lived in tough environments, since all of the more hospitable lands had been taken over by agricultural peoples. Supposedly, prehistoric hunter-gatherers who occupied fertile country must have worked far less than recent hunter-gatherers living in deserts or other unproductive environments.³³ This may be true, but the argument is speculative, and I'm skeptical of it.

I'm a bit rusty now, but I used to have considerable familiarity with the edible wild plants of the eastern United States, which is one of the most fertile regions in the world, and I would be surprised if one could live and raise a family there by hunting and gathering with less than a forty-hour work-week. The region contains a wide variety of edible plants, but living off them would not be as easy as you might think. Take nuts, for example. Black walnuts, white walnuts (butternuts), and hickory nuts are extremely nutritious and often abundant. The Indians used to collect huge piles of them.³⁴ If you found a few good trees in October, you could probably gather enough nuts in an hour or less to feed yourself for a whole day. Sounds great, doesn't it? Yes, it does sound great — if you've never tried to crack a black walnut. Maybe Arnold Schwarzenegger could crack a black walnut with an ordinary nutcracker — if the nutcracker didn't break first — but a person of average physique couldn't do it. You have to whack the nut with a hammer; and the inside of the nut is divided up by partitions that are as thick and hard as the outer shell, so you have to break the nut into several fragments and then tediously pick out the bits of meat. The process is time-consuming. In order to get enough food for a day, you might have to spend most of the day just cracking nuts and picking out the bits of meat. Wild white walnuts (not to be confused with the domesticated English walnuts that you buy in the store) are much like black

³³ This argument is suggested, for example, by Haviland, page 167.

³⁴ Fernald and Kinsey, page 149.

ones. Hickory nuts are not as difficult to cack, but they still have the hard internal partitions and they are usually much smaller than black walnuts. The Indians got around these problems by putting the nuts into a mortar and pounding them into tiny bits, shells, meats, and all. Then they would boil the mixture and put it aside to cool. The fragments of shell would settle to the bottom of the pot while the pulverized meats would settle in a layer above the shells; thus the meats could be separated from the shells.³⁵ This was certainly more efficient than cracking the nuts individually, but as you can see it still required considerable work. The Indians of the eastern U.S. utilized other wild foods that required more-or-less laborious preparation to make them edible.³⁶ It is hardly likely that they would have used such foods if foods that were more easily prepared had been readily available in sufficient quantity.

Euell Gibbons, an expert on edible wild plants, reported an episode of living off the country in the eastern United States.³⁷ It's difficult to say what his experience tells us about primitive people's working hours, since he did not give a quantitative accounting of the time he spent in foraging. In any case, he and his partners only foraged for food and processed it; they did not have to tan skins or make their own clothing, tools, utensils, or shelter; they had no children to feed; and they supplemented their diet with high-calorie store-bought foods: cooking-oil, sugar, and flour. On at least one occasion they used an automobile for transportation.

But let's assume for the sake of argument that in the fertile regions of the world wild foods were once so abundant that it was possible to live off the country year round with an average of only, say, three hours of work per day. With such abundant resources it would not be necessary for hunter-gatherers to travel in search of food. One would expect them to become sedentary, and in that case they would be able to accumulate wealth and form well-developed social hierarchies. Hence they would lose at least some of the qualities that anarchoprimitivists value in nomadic hunter-gatherers. Even the anarchoprimitivists do not deny that the Indians of the Northwest Coast of North America were sedentary hunter-gatherers who accumulated wealth and had well-developed social hierarchies.³⁸ The evidence suggests the existence of similar hunting-and-gathering societies elsewhere where the abundance of natural resources permitted it, for example, along the major rivers of Europe.³⁹ Thus the anarchoprimitivists are caught in a bind: Where natural resources were abundant enough to minimize work, they

³⁵ Ibid., page 148. Gibbons, page 217.

³⁶ Examples are found in Fernald and Kinsey, *passim*.

³⁷ Gibbons, chapter titled "The Proof of the Pudding".

³⁸ Coon, pages 36, 179–180, 226, 228, 230, 262.

³⁹ Cashdan, page 22. Coon, pages 268–69, 390; see also page 253.

also maximized the likelihood of the social hierarchies that anarchoprimitivists abhor.

However, I have not been trying to prove that primitive man was less fortunate in his working life than modern man is. In my opinion the contrary was true. Probably at least some nomadic hunter-gatherers had more leisure time than modern employed Americans do. It's true that the roughly forty-hour work-week of Richard Lee's Bushmen was about equal to the standard American work-week. But modern Americans are burdened with many demands on their time outside their hours of employment. I myself, when working at a forty-hour job, have generally felt busy: I've had to shop for groceries, go to the bank, do the laundry, fill out income-tax forms, take the car in for maintenance, get a haircut, go to the dentist . . . there was always something that needed to be done. Many of the people I now correspond with likewise complain of being busy. In contrast, the male Bushman's time was genuinely his own outside of his working hours; he could spend his non-working time as he pleased. Bushman women of reproductive age may have had much less leisure time because, like women of all societies, they were burdened with the care of small children.

But leisure is a modern concept, and the emphasis that anarchoprimitivists put on it is evidence of their servitude to the values of the civilization that they claim to reject. The amount of time expended in work is not what matters. Many authors have discussed what is wrong with work in modern society, and I see no reason to go over that ground again. What does matter is that, apart from monotony, what is wrong with work in modern society is not wrong with the work of nomadic hunter-gatherers. The hunter-gatherer's work is challenging, both in terms of physical effort and in terms of the level of skill required.⁴⁰ The hunter-gatherer's work is purposeful, and its purpose is not abstract, remote, or artificial but concrete, very real, and directly important to the worker: He works to satisfy the physical needs of himself, his family, and other people to whom he is personally close. Above all, the nomadic hunter-gatherer is a free worker: He is not exploited, he is subservient to no boss, no one gives him orders;⁴¹ he designs his own work-day, if not as an individual then as a member of a group that is small enough so that every individual can participate meaningfully in the decisions that are

⁴⁰ For skill see. e.g., Poncins. pages 14–15, 38–39, 160. 209–210; Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, page 7; Holmberg. pages 120–21, 275; Coon. pages 14. 49, 75, 82–83.

⁴¹ This is somewhat of an oversimplification, since compulsory authority and the giving of orders were not unknown among nomadic hunter-gatherers, but generally speaking a high level of personal autonomy in such societies is indicated by a reading of the works cited in this article. See. e.g.. Turnbull, *Forest People*. page 83; Poncins, page 174.

made⁴². Modern jobs tend to be psychologically stressful, but there are reasons to believe that primitive people's work typically involved little psychological stress.⁴³ Hunter-gatherers' work often monotonous, but it is my view that monotony generally causes primitive people relatively little discomfort. Boredom, I think, is largely a civilized phenomenon and is a product of psychological stresses that are characteristic of civilized life. This admittedly is a matter of personal opinion, I can 't prove it, and a discussion of it would take us beyond the scope of this article. Here I will only say that my opinion is based largely on my own experience of living outside the technoindustrial system. How hunter-gatherers felt about their own work is difficult to say, since anthropologists and others who visited primitive peoples (at least those whose reports I've read) usually do not seem to have asked such questions. But the following from Holmberg's worth noting: "They are relatively apathetic to work (*taba taba*), which includes such distasteful tasks as housebuilding, gathering firewood, clearing, planting, and tilling of fields. In quite a different class, however, are such pleasant occupations as hunting (*gwata gwata*) and collecting (*deka deka*, 'to look for'), which are regarded more as diversions than as work."⁴⁴

This despite the fact that, as we saw earlier, the Siriono's hunting and collecting activities were exceedingly time-consuming, fatiguing, strenuous, and physically demanding.

3. Another element of the anarchoprimitivist myth is the belief that hunter-gatherers, at least the nomadic ones, had gender equality. John Zerzan, for example, has asserted this in *Future Primitive*⁴⁵ and elsewhere.⁴⁶ Probably some hunter-gatherer societies did have full gender equality, though I don 't know of a single unarguable example. I do know of hunting-and-gathering cultures that had a relatively high degree of gender equality but fell short of full equality. In other nomadic hunter-gatherer societies male dominance was unmistakable,

⁴² Nomadic hunter-gatherers ordinarily lived in bands that contained between 30 and 130 individuals, including children and babies, and in many cases these bands split up into still smaller groups. Coon, page 191. Cashdan, page 21. Siriono often hunted singly or in pairs; maximum size of hunting party was six or seven men. Holmberg, page 51. Efe pygmies commonly hunted in groups of two to four. Coon, page 88.

⁴³ I'll reserve the discussion of stress for some other occasion, but see. e.g., Poncins, pages 212-13, 273. 292. Schebesta. II. Band. I. Teil. page 18, writes: "The economic activity of the hunter-gatherer knows neither haste nor hurry. nor agonizing worry over the daily bread."

⁴⁴ Holmberg, page 101.

⁴⁵ "[L]ife before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure. . . . sexual equality." Zerzan, *Future Primitive*, page 16.

⁴⁶ "[U]ntil just 10.000 years ago . . . humans lived in keeping with an egalitarian ethos with ample leisure time. gender equality . . ." Zerzan, "Whose Future?", *Species Traitor* N° 1. Pages in this publication are not numbered.

and in some such societies it reached the level of out-and-out brutality toward women. Probably the most touted example of gender equality among hunter-gatherers is that of Richard Lee's Bushmen, whom we mentioned earlier in our discussion of the hunter-gatherer's working life. It should be noted at the outset that it would be very risky to assume that Lee's conclusions concerning the Dobe Bushmen could be applied to the Bushmen of the Kalahari region generally. Different groups of Bushmen differed culturally;⁴⁷ they didn't even all speak the same language.⁴⁸ At any rate, relying largely on Richard Lee's studies, Nancy Bonvillain states that among the Dobe Bushmen (whom she calls "Ju/'hoansi"), "social norms clearly support the notion of equality of women and men,"⁴⁹ and that their "society overtly validates equality of women and men."⁵⁰ So the Dobe Bushmen had gender equality, right?

Well, maybe not. Look at some of the facts that Bonvillain herself offers in the same book: "Most leaders and camp spokespersons are men. Although women and men participate in group discussions and decision making, . . . men's talk in discussions involving both genders amounts to about two-thirds of the total."⁵¹

Much worse are the forced marriages of girls in their early teens to men much older than themselves.⁵² It's true that practices that seem cruel to us may not be experienced as cruel by people of other cultures on whom they are imposed. But Bonvillain quotes words of a Bushman woman that show that at least some girls did experience their forced marriages as cruel: "I cried and cried";⁵³ "I ran away again and again. A part of my heart kept thinking: 'how come I'm a child and have taken a husband?'"⁵⁴ Moreover, "because seniority confers prestige. . . , the greater age, experience, and maturity of husbands may make wives socially, if not personally, subordinate."⁵⁵ Thus, while the Dobe Bushmen no doubt had some of the elements of gender equality, one would have to stretch a point pretty far to claim that they had full gender equality. On the basis of his personal experience, Colin Turnbull stated that among the Mbuti pygmies of Africa, a "woman is in no way the social inferior of a man,"⁵⁶ and that "the woman is not discriminated against."⁵⁷ That sounds like gender equality . . . until you look at the concrete facts

⁴⁷ Thomas, pages 11.284–87.

⁴⁸ Encycl. Brit., Vol. 22, article "Languages of the World", section "African Languages", subsection "Khoisan Languages", pages 757–760.

⁴⁹ Bonvillain, page 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., page 24.

⁵¹ Ibid., page 21.

⁵² Ibid., pages 21–22.

⁵³ Ibid., page 22.

⁵⁴ Ibid., page 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pages 21–22.

⁵⁶ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 270.

that Turnbull himself offers in the very same books: “ A certain amount of wife-beating is considered good, and the wife is expected to fight back;⁵⁸ “He said that he was very content with his wife, and he had not found it necessary to beat her at all often,”⁵⁹; Man throws wife to the ground and slaps her;⁶⁰ Husband beats wife;⁶¹ Man beats sister;⁶² Kenge beats his sister;⁶³ “Perhaps he should have beaten her harder, Tungana [an old man] said, for some girls like being beaten,”⁶⁴; “Amabosu countered by smacking her firmly across the face. Normally Ekianga would have approved of such manly assertion of authority over a disloyal wife.”⁶⁵ Turnbull mentions two instances of men giving orders to their wives.⁶⁶ I have not found any instance in Turnbull’ s books of wives giving orders to their husbands. Pipestem obtained by wife is referred to as husband’s property.⁶⁷ “[A boy] has to have [a girl’s] permission before intercourse can take place. The men say that once they lie down with a girl, however, if they want her they take her by surprise, when petting her, and force her to their will.”⁶⁸ Nowadays we would call that “date rape”, and the young man involved would risk a long prison sentence.

For the sake of balance, let’s note that Turnbull found among the Mbuti no instance of what we would call “street rape” as opposed to “date rape”;⁶⁹ husbands were not supposed to hit their wives on the head or in the face;⁷⁰ and in at least one case in which a man took to beating his wife too frequently and severely, his campmates eventually found means to end the abuse without the use of force and without overt interference.⁷¹ It should also be borne in mind that the significance

⁵⁷ Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 154.

⁵⁸ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 287.

⁵⁹ Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 205.

⁶⁰ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 211.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, page 192.

⁶² Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 204.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pages 207–08.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, page 208.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, page 122.

⁶⁶ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, pages 288–89. *Forest People*, page 265.

⁶⁷ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 115–16.

⁶⁸ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 137.

⁶⁹ “I know of no cases of rape.. “ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 121. I can account for the apparent contradiction between this statement and the passage quoted a moment ago only by supposing that since Turnbull was writing before the concept of “date rape” had emerged, he did not consider that forced intercourse in the elima hut, under the circumstances he described, constituted rape. Hence, when he said he knew of no rape among the Mbuti, he was probably referring to something more or less equivalent to what we would call “street rape” as opposed to “date rape”

⁷⁰ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 189. However, Turnbull is perhaps inconsistent on this point. Note the passage I quoted a moment ago about Amabosu smacking his wife across the face and Ekianga’s reaction.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pages 287–89.

of a beating depends on the cultural context. In our society it is a great humiliation to be struck by another person, especially by one who is bigger and stronger than oneself. But since blows were commonplace among the Mbuti,⁷² it is probably safe to assume that they were not felt as particularly humiliating. Nevertheless it is quite clear that some degree of male dominance was present among the Mbuti. Among the Siriono: "A woman is subservient to her husband";⁷³ "The extended family is generally dominated by the oldest active male";⁷⁴ "[Women] are dominated by the men";⁷⁵ "If a man is out in the forest alone with a woman, . . . he may throw her to the ground roughly and take his prize [sex] without so much as saying a word";⁷⁶ Parents definitely preferred to have male children;⁷⁷ "Although the title ererekwa is reserved by the men for a chief, it one asks a woman: 'who is your ererekwa?' she will invariably reply: 'my husband'."⁷⁸ On the other hand, the Siriono never beat their wives,⁷⁹ and "Women enjoy about the same privileges as men. They get as much or more food to eat, and they enjoy the same sexual freedom."⁸⁰ According to Bonvillain, Eskimo men "dominate their wives and daughters. Men's dominance is not total, however . . ."⁸¹ She describes gender relations among the Eskimos in some detail,⁸² which may or may not be slanted to reflect her feminist ideology.

Among the Eskimos with whom Gontran de Poncins lived, husbands clearly held overt authority over their wives⁸³ and sometimes beat them.⁸⁴ Yet, through their talent for persuasion, wives had great power over their husbands: "It might seem . . . that the native woman lived altogether in a state of abject inferiority to the male Eskimo, but this is not the case. What she loses in authority, as compared to the white woman, she makes up, by superior cunning, in many other ways. Native women are very shrewd, and they almost never fail to get what they want"; "It was a perpetual joy to watch this comedy, this almost wordless struggle in which the wife . . . inevitably got the better of the husband. There does not exist an Eskimo woman untrained in the art of wheedling, not one unable to repeat

⁷² Numerous examples are scattered through *Wayward Servants* and *Forest People*.

⁷³ Holmberg, page 125.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, page 129.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, page 147.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, page 163.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, page 202.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, page 148.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, page 128.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, page 147.

⁸¹ Bonvillain, page 295.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pages 38–45.

⁸³ Poncins, pages 113–14, 126.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pages 198. See also page 117.

with tireless and yet insinuating insistence the mention of what she wants, until the husband, worn down by her persistence, gives way"; "Women were behind everything in this Eskimo world";⁸⁵ "It is not necessary to be a feminist to ask: 'but what of the status of Eskimo women?' Their status suits them well enough; and I have indicated here and there in these pages that they are not only the mistresses of their households but also, in most Eskimo families, the shrewd prompters of their husbands' decisions."⁸⁶ However, Poncins may have overstated the extent of Eskimo women's power, since it was not sufficient to enable them to avoid unwanted sex: Wife-lending among these Eskimos was determined by the men, and the wives had to accept being lent whether they liked it or not.⁸⁷ At least in some cases, apparently, the women resented this rather strongly.⁸⁸ The Australian Aborigines' treatment of their women was nothing short of abominable. Women had almost no power to choose their own husbands.⁸⁹ They are described as having been "owned" by the men, who chose their husbands for them.⁹⁰ Young women were often forced to marry old men, and then they had to work to provide their aged husbands with the necessities of life.⁹¹ Not surprisingly, a young woman frequently resisted a forced marriage by running away. She was then beaten severely with a club and returned to her husband. If she persisted in running away, she might even have a spear driven into her thigh.⁹² A woman trapped in a distasteful marriage might enjoy the consolation of having a lover on the side, but, while this was "semitolerated", it could lead to violence.⁹³ A woman might even go to the length of eloping with her lover. However: "They would be followed, and if caught, as a punishment the girl became, for the time being, the common property of her pursuers. The couple were then brought back to the camp where, if they were of the right totem division to marry, the man would have to stand up to a trial by having spears thrown at him by the husband and his relations . . . and the girl was given beating by her relatives. If [the couple] were not of the right totem division to marry, they would both be speared when found, as their sin was unforgivable."⁹⁴

Although there was "real harmony and mutual understanding in most Aboriginal families", wife-beating was practiced.⁹⁵ According to A. P. Elkin, under

⁸⁵ Ibid., pages 114–15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., page 126.

⁸⁷ Ibid., page 113.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pages 112–13. See also Coon, page 223 ("often the wives lent say that they do not enjoy this").

⁸⁹ Elkin, pages 132–33). Massola, page 73.

⁹⁰ Massola, pages 74, 76.

⁹¹ Ibid., page 75. Elkin, pages 133–34.

⁹² Massola, page 76.

⁹³ Elkin, page 136. Massola, pages 73, 75. Coon, pages 260–61.

⁹⁴ Massola, pages 75–76.

some circumstances—for example, on certain ceremonial occasions—women had to submit to compulsory sex, which “implies that woman is but an object to be used in certain socially established ways.”⁹⁶ The women, says Elkin, “may often not object,”⁹⁷ but: “They sometimes live in terror of the use which is made of them at some ceremonial times.”⁹⁸ Of course, no claim is made here that all of the foregoing conditions prevailed in all parts of aboriginal Australia. Culture was not uniform across the continent. Coon says that the Australians were nomadic, but he also states that in parts of southeastern Australia, namely “The better-watered parts, particularly Victoria and the Murray River country”, the aborigines were “relatively sedentary.”⁹⁹ According to Massola, in the drier parts of southeastern Australia the aborigines had to cover long distances between fast-drying wells in times of drought.¹⁰⁰ This corresponds with the high degree of nomadism described for other arid parts of Australia, where “Aborigines moved from waterhole to waterhole along well-defined tracks in small family groups. The whole camp moved and rarely established bases.”¹⁰¹ In stating that in “the better-watered parts” the aborigines were “relatively sedentary”, Coon doubtless means that “in fertile regions there were well-established camping areas, close to water, where people always camped at certain times of year. Camps were bases from which people made forays into the surrounding bush for food, returning in the late afternoon or spending a few days away.”¹⁰² Coon says that in part of the well-watered Murray River country each territorial clan had a headman and a council consisting mainly of men, though in a few cases women were also elected to the council; whereas, farther to the north and west, there was little formal leadership and “control over the women and younger males was shared between” the men aged from thirty to fifty.¹⁰³ Thus Australian women had very little overt political power. Yet, as among Poncins’s Eskimos, certainly in our society, and probably in every society, the women often exercised great influence their menfolk¹⁰⁴.

The Tasmanians also were nomadic hunter-gatherers (though some were “relatively sedentary”),¹⁰⁵ and it’s not clear that they treated women any better than the Australians did. “In one account we are told that a band living near Hobart

⁹⁵ Ibid., pages 76–77.

⁹⁶ Elkin, pages 135, 137–38.

⁹⁷ Ibid. .page 138.

⁹⁸ Ibid., page 138 (footnote 12).

⁹⁹ Coon. pages 105, 217, 253.

¹⁰⁰ Massola, page 78. ,

¹⁰¹ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article “Australia”, page 437.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Coon, pages 253, 255.

¹⁰⁴ Massola, page 77.

¹⁰⁵ Coon, pages 105,217.

Town before the colonists' arrival was raided by neighbors who killed the men who tried to stop them and took away their women. And there are other accounts of individual cases of marriage by capture. Sometimes when a man from a neighboring band had the right to marry a girl, but neither she nor her parents liked him, it is said that they killed the girl rather than give her up";¹⁰⁶ "The other tribes considered [a certain tribe] cowards, and raided them to steal their women";¹⁰⁷ "Woorradly raped and killed a sister-in-law."¹⁰⁸

Here I should make clear that it is not my intention to argue against gender equality. I myself am enough a product of modern industrial society to feel that women and men should have equal status. My purpose at this point is simply to exhibit the facts concerning the relations between the sexes in hunting-and-gathering societies.

4. There is a problem involved in any attempt to draw conclusions about original, "pure" hunter-gatherer cultures from reported observations of living hunter-gatherer societies. If we have a description of a primitive culture, it ordinarily will have been written by some civilized person. If the description is detailed, then, by the time it was written, the primitive people described very likely will have had significant contact, direct or indirect, with civilization, and such contact can bring about dramatic changes in a primitive culture. Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, in the epilogue to the 1989 edition of her book *The Harmless People*,¹⁰⁹ describes the catastrophically destructive effect of civilization on the Bushmen she knew. Harold B. Barclay has pointed out that (for example) modern Eskimos "are quite pleased with their high powered rifles, motorboats and so forth."¹¹⁰ "So forth" would include snowmobiles. Hence, Barclay says, "hunter gatherers today are in no sense identical to hunter gatherers of a thousand or ten thousand year ago."¹¹¹ According to Cashdan, writing in 1989, "all hunter-gatherers in the world today are in contact, directly or indirectly, with the world economy. This fact should caution us against viewing today's hunter-gatherers as 'snapshots' of the past."¹¹² Of course, in seeking evidence of the way human beings lived prior to the advent

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., page 215.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., page 336.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., page 252.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, pages 262–303.

¹¹⁰ Harold B. Barclay, letter to editor, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, Spring/Summer 2002, pages 70–71.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Cashdan, page 21.

of civilization, no one in his right mind would turn to peoples who used motor-boats, snowmobiles, and high-powered rifles,¹¹³ or to peoples whose cultures had obviously been grossly disrupted by the intrusion of civilized societies. We look for accounts of hunter-gatherers written (at least) several decades ago and at a time when — as far as we can tell — their cultures had not been seriously altered by contact with civilization. But it's not always easy to tell whether contact with civilization has altered a primitive culture. Coon is clearly aware of this problem, and in his excellent survey of hunter-gatherer cultures he gives the following example of how seemingly slight interference from civilization can have a dramatic effect on a primitive culture: When “well-meaning missionaries handed out steel axes” to the Yir Yoront aborigines of Australia, the “Yir Yoront world almost came to an end. The men lost their authority over their wives, a generation gap appeared,” and a system of trade stretching over hundreds of miles was disrupted.¹¹⁴ Richard Lee's Bushmen are perhaps the favorite example for anarchoprimitivists and leftist anthropologists who want to present a politically-correct image of hunter-gatherers, and Lee's Bushmen were among the least “pure” of the hunter-gatherers we've mentioned here. They may not even have always been hunter-gatherers.¹¹⁵ In any case they had probably been trading with agricultural and pastoral peoples for a couple of thousand years.¹¹⁶ The Kung Bushmen whom Mrs. Thomas knew had metal acquired through trade,¹¹⁷ and the same apparently was true of Lee's Bushmen.¹¹⁸ Mrs. Thomas writes: “In the ten to twenty years after we started our work, many academics [this presumably includes Richard Lee] developed an enormous interest in the Bushmen. Many of them went to Botswana to visit groups of Kung Bushmen, and for a time in Botswana, the anthropologists/Bushmen ratio seemed almost one to one.”¹¹⁹ Obviously, the presence of so many anthropologists may itself have affected the behavior of the Bushmen. In the 1950's,¹²⁰ when Turnbull studied them, still more in the 1920's and 1930's¹²¹ when Schebesta studied them, the Mbuti apparently had not had much direct contact with civilization, so that Schebesta went so far as to claim that “the Mbuti not only

¹¹³ The Eskimos described by Poncins used rifles to some extent, but these apparently were not their main means of procuring food; and they had no motorboats or snowmobiles.

¹¹⁴ Coon, page 276.

¹¹⁵ Haviland, page 168 (“some of the Bushmen of Southern Africa, have at times been farmers and at others pastoral nomads”).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, page 167. Cashdan, pages 43–44.

¹¹⁷ Thomas, page 94.

¹¹⁸ Pfeiffer. *Emergence of Man*. pages 345–46. Pfeiffer is not a reliable source of information, but anyone with access to good library facilities will be able to consult Richard Lee's own writings.

¹¹⁹ Thomas. page 284.

¹²⁰ Turnbull. *Forest People*. pages 20, 21, 27 & unnumbered page of information at end of book.

¹²¹ Schebesta, I. Band. pages 37, 46, 48.

racially, but also psychologically and in terms of cultural history, are a primeval phenomenon (Urphanomen) among the races and peoples of the Earth.”¹²² Yet the Mbuti had already begun to be somewhat affected by civilization a few years before Schebesta’s first visit to them.¹²³ And for centuries before that, the Mbuti had lived in close contact (which included extensive trade relations) with non-civilized, village-dwelling cultivators of crops.¹²⁴ As Schebesta wrote, “The belief that the Mbuti have been hermetically sealed off from the outer world has been laid to rest once and for all.”¹²⁵ Turnbull goes farther: “This is in no way to say that the [social] structure to be found among the Mbuti is representative of an original pygmy hunting and gathering structure; in fact probably far from it, for the repercussions of the invasion of the forest by the village cultivators have been enormous.”¹²⁶

Though some of Gontran de Poncins’s Eskimos were “purer” than others,¹²⁷ it appears that all of them had at least some trade goods from the whites. If any reader cares to take the trouble to track down the earliest primary sources — perhaps some of Vilhjalmur Stefansson’s work — so as to approach as closely as possible to an original and “pure” Eskimo culture, I would be interested to hear of his or her findings. But it is possible that even long before European contact the Eskimos’ culture may have been affected by something that they received from a non-hunting society; for their sled dogs may not have originated with hunter-gatherers.¹²⁸

With the Siriono we come closer to purity than we do with the Bushmen, the Mbuti, or Poncins’s Eskimos. The Siriono did not even have dogs,¹²⁹ and even though they cultivated crops to a limited extent anthropologists regarded their culture as Paleolithic (Old Stone Age).¹³⁰ Some of the Siriono studied by Holmberg had had little or no contact with whites prior to Holmberg’s arrival¹³¹ and, among those Siriono, European tools were rarely encountered¹³² until Holmberg himself introduced them.¹³³ Instead, the Siriono made their tools of naturally-occurring

¹²² Ibid., page 404.

¹²³ Ibid., pages 141–42.

¹²⁴ Ibid., passim. E.g., I. Band. page 87; II. Band, I. Teil. page 11.

¹²⁵ Ibid., I. Band, page 92.

¹²⁶ Turnbull. *Wayward Servants*. page 16. See also pages 88–89.

¹²⁷ Poncins. pages 161–62.

¹²⁸ Coon, pages 58–59.

¹²⁹ Holmberg, page 69. Richard Lee’s Bushmen did have dogs. Sahlins “The Original Affluent Society”. So did the Mbuti. Turnbull. *Forest People*, page 101. Schebesta, II. Band. I. Teil. pages 89–93.

¹³⁰ Lauriston Sharp, in Holmberg. page xii.

¹³¹ Holmberg, pages xx-xxii, 1–3.

¹³² Ibid., page 26.

¹³³ Ibid., page xxxiii.

local materials.¹³⁴ The Siriono moreover were so primitive that they could not count beyond three.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, Siriono culture might have been affected by contact with more “advanced” societies, since Holmberg thought the Siriono were “probably a remnant of an ancient population that was exterminated, absorbed, or engulfed by more civilized invaders.”¹³⁶ Lauriston Sharp even suggested that the Siriono might have “degenerated” [sic] “from a more advanced technical condition,” though Holmberg rejected this view and Sharp himself considered it “irrelevant.”¹³⁷ In addition, the Siriono might have been affected indirectly by European civilization, since probably at least some of the diseases from which they suffered, e.g., malaria, had been brought to the Americas by Europeans.¹³⁸ It’s not surprising that most of the hunter-gatherers I’ve mentioned here — like those cited by the anarchoprimitivists and the politically-correct anthropologists — were affected by direct or indirect contact with agricultural or pastoral peoples even long before their first contact with Europeans, because outside of Australia, Tasmania, and the far west and north of North America “populations which remained faithful to the old hunter-gatherer way of live were small and scattered.”¹³⁹ Consequently, with the possible exception of some who lived on small islands, they necessarily had some form of contact with surrounding non-hunter-gatherer populations.

Probably the Australian Aborigines and the Tasmanians were the hunter-gatherers who were purest when Europeans first found them. Australia was the only continent that was inhabited exclusively by hunter-gatherers until the white man’s arrival, and Tasmania, an island just to the south of Australia, was even more isolated. But Tasmania may have been visited by Polynesians, and in the north of Australia there was some limited contact with people from Indonesia and New Guinea prior to the arrival of Europeans.¹⁴⁰ Still earlier contact with outsiders, who mayor may not have been hunter-gatherers, is probable.¹⁴¹ Thus we have no conclusive proof that hunter-gatherer cultures that survived into recent times had not been seriously affected by contact with non-hunter-gatherers by the time the first descriptions of them were written. Consequently, more or less uncertainty is involved in using reports on recent hunter-gatherer societies to draw conclusions

¹³⁴ Ibid., pages 25–26.

¹³⁵ Ibid., page 121.

¹³⁶ Ibid., page 10.

¹³⁷ Ibid., page xii.

¹³⁸ See Ibid., pages 207, 225–26, “The principal ailments of which the Siriono are victims are malaria, dysentery, hookworm, and skin diseases”, page 226. Malaria, at least, was probably introduced to the Americas by Europeans. *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 7, article “malaria”, page 725.

¹³⁹ Leakey, page 201 (map caption).

¹⁴⁰ Coon, pages 25 (footnote), 67.

¹⁴¹ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article “Australia”, page 434.

about gender relations among prehistoric hunter-gatherers. And any conclusions drawn from archaeological remains about the social relationships between men and women can only be highly speculative. So, if you like, you can reject all evidence from descriptions of recent hunter-gatherer cultures, and in that case we know almost nothing about the gender relations of prehistoric hunter-gatherers. Or (with the necessary reservations) you can accept the evidence from recent hunter-gatherer societies, and in that case the evidence clearly points to a significant degree of male dominance. In either case, there is no evidence to support the anarchoprimitivists' belief that all or most human societies had full gender equality prior to the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry some ten thousand years ago.

5. Our review of the facts concerning gender relations in recent hunter-gatherers societies helps to reveal something of the psychology of the anarchoprimitivists and that of their cousins, the politically-correct anthropologists.

The anarchoprimitivists, and many politically-correct anthropologists, cite any evidence they can find that hunter-gatherers had gender equality, while systematically ignoring the abundant evidence of gender inequality found in eyewitness reports of hunter-gatherer cultures. For example, the anthropologist Haviland, in his textbook *Cultural Anthropology*, states that an "important characteristic of the food-foraging [hunter-gatherer] society is its egalitarianism."¹⁴² He acknowledges that the two sexes may have had different status in such societies, but claims that "status differences by themselves do not imply any necessary inequality", and that in "traditional food-foraging societies, nothing necessitated special deference of women to men."¹⁴³ If you check the pages listed in Haviland's index for the entries "Bushmen", "Ju/'hoansi" (another name for the Dobe Bushmen), "Eskimo", "Inuit" (another name for Eskimos), "Mbuti", "Tasmanian", "Australian", and "Aborigine" (the Siriono are not listed in the index), you will find no mention of wife-beating, forced marriage, forced sexual intercourse, or any of the other indications of male dominance that I've cited above. Haviland does not deny that these things occurred. He does not claim, for example, that Turnbull merely invented his stories of wife-beating among the Mbuti, or that such-and-such evidence shows that Australian Aboriginal women were not subjected to involuntary sex before the arrival of Europeans. He simply ignores these issues, as if they didn't exist. And it's not that Haviland isn't aware of the issues. For example, he quotes from A. P. Elkin's book, *The Australian Aborigines*,¹⁴⁴ an indication that he not only is familiar with the book but considers it a reliable source of information.

¹⁴² Haviland, page 173.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., page 395.

Yet Elkin's book, which I cited earlier, provides ample evidence of Australian Aboriginal men's tyranny over their women¹⁴⁵ — evidence that Haviland fails to mention. It's pretty clear what is going on: Equality of the sexes is a fundamental tenet of the mainstream ideology of modern society. As highly-socialized members of that society, politically-correct anthropologists believe in the principle of gender equality with something akin to religious conviction, and they feel a need to give us little moral lessons by holding up for our admiration examples of the gender equality that supposedly prevailed when the human race was in a pristine and unspoiled state. This portrayal of primitive cultures is driven by the anthropologists' own need to reaffirm their faith, and has nothing to do with an honest search for truth.

To take another example, I've written to John Zerzan four times inviting him to back up his claims about gender equality among hunter-gatherers.¹⁴⁶ The answers he gave me were vague and evasive.¹⁴⁷ I would gladly publish here Zerzan's letters to me on this subject so that the reader could judge them for himself. However, I wrote to Zerzan requesting permission to publish his letters, and he denied me that permission.¹⁴⁸ With his letters he sent me photocopies of pages from a few books that contained vague, general statements ostensibly supporting his claims about gender equality; for instance, this statement by John E Pfeiffer, who is neither a specialist nor an eyewitness of primitive behavior, but a popularizer: "For reasons unknown sexism arrived with settling and farming, with the emergence of complex society."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Elkin, pages 130–38.

¹⁴⁶ Letters from the author to John Zerzan: 2/13/03, page 2; 3/16/03; 5/2/3, pages 5–6; 4/18/04, page 1.

¹⁴⁷ Letters from John Zerzan to the author: 3/2/03; 3/18/03; 3/26/03; 5/12/03; 4/28/04; 5/22/04. The only thing Zerzan said in his letters that I considered worth answering at this point is his claim that the sources I had cited to him were "out of date" (Letter to the author, 5/22/04, page 2). He offered no explanation of this statement. As a former student of history, Zerzan should be aware of the importance of going back to primary sources whenever possible. In the present context, that means going back to eyewitness accounts based on observation of hunter-gatherer societies at a time when these were still relatively unspoiled. But for at least thirty years there have been no more unspoiled primitive peoples. Hence, any primary sources that are useful for present purposes must date back at least thirty years (i.e., to before 1975) and usually longer than that. It's true that here and in my letters to Zerzan I've relied not only on primary but also on secondary sources, due to the fact that my incarceration limits my access to primary sources. But Zerzan offered no evidence whatever to discredit the information that I cited to him from secondary sources (or from primary ones, either). Nor have any of the more "up to date" sources that I've seen offered anything to disprove the information in question. They mostly just ignore that information, as if it didn't exist. The whole issue gets shoved under the carpet.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from the author to John Zerzan, 5/11/04. Letter from John Zerzan to the author, 5/20/04.

¹⁴⁹ Pfeiffer, *Emergence of Society*, page 464? I can't give the page number with certainty, because it is "cut off" on the photocopy that Zerzan sent me.

Zerzan also sent me a photocopy of a page from Bonvillain's book containing the following statement: "In foraging band [hunter-gatherer] societies, the potential for gender equality is perhaps the greatest. . ." ¹⁵⁰ But Zerzan did not include copies of the pages on which Bonvillain said that male dominance was evident in some hunter-gatherer societies such as that of the Eskimos, or the pages on which she gave information that cast gave doubt on her own claim of gender equality among the Dobe Bushmen, as I discussed above.

Zerzan himself acknowledged that the material he sent me was "obviously not definitive", though he asserted that it was "completely representative in general."¹⁵¹ When I pressed him for further backing for his claims,¹⁵² he sent me a copy of his essay *Future Primitive*, from the book of the same name.¹⁵³ In this essay he cites most of his sources by giving only the authors' last names and their publications' dates; the reader presumably is expected to look up further information in a table of references provided elsewhere in the book. Since Zerzan did not send me a copy of the table of references, I had no way of checking his sources. I pointed this out to him,¹⁵⁴ but he still failed to send me a copy of his table of references. In any case, there is good reason to suspect that Zerzan was uncritical in selecting his sources. For example, he quotes the late Laurens van der Post;¹⁵⁵ but in his book *Teller of Many Tales*, J. D. F. Jones, a former admirer of Laurens van der Post, has exposed the latter as a liar and a fraud.

Even if taken at face value, the information in *Future Primitive* gives us nothing solid on the subject of gender relations. Vague, general statements are of little use. As I pointed out earlier; Bonvillain and Turnbull made general assertions about gender equality among the Bushmen and the Mbuti respectively, and those assertions were contradicted by concrete facts that Bonvillain and Turnbull themselves reported in the same books. On subjects other than gender equality, some of the statements in *Future Primitive* are demonstrably false. To take a couple of examples:

- i. Zerzan, relying on one "De Vries", claims that among hunter-gatherers child-birth is 'without difficulty of pain.'¹⁵⁶ Oh, really? Here's Mrs. Thomas, writing from her personal experience among the Bushmen: "Bushmen women give

¹⁵⁰ Bonvillain. page 294. The photocopy that Zerzan sent me was actually from the 1995 edition of the same book, in which the identical sentence appears on page 271.

¹⁵¹ Letter from John Zerzan to the author, 3/2/03 (footnote).

¹⁵² Letter from the author to John Zerzan, 5/2/03. pages 5-6.

¹⁵³ Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Others Essays*.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from the author to John Zerzan. 4/18/04, page 1.

¹⁵⁵ Zerzan, "Future primitive", page 32.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, page 33.

birth alone . . . unless a girl is bearing her first child, in which case her mother may help her, or unless the birth is extremely difficult, in which case a woman may ask the help of her mother or another woman. A woman in labor may clench her teeth, may let her tears come or bite her hands until blood flows, but she may never cry out to show her agony.”¹⁵⁷

Since natural selection eliminates the weak and the defective among hunter-gatherers and since primitive women’s work keeps them in good physical condition, it is probably true that childbirth, on average, was not as difficult among hunter-gatherers as it is for modern women. For Mbuti women, according to Schebesta, delivery was usually easy (though this does not imply that it was free of pain). On the other hand, breech deliveries were much feared and usually ended fatally both for the mother and the for child.¹⁵⁸

- ii. Relying on one “Duffy”, Zerzan claims that the Mbuti “look on any form of violence between one person and another with great abhorrence and distaste, and never represent it in their dancing or their playacting.”¹⁵⁹ But Hutereau and Turnbull independently have provided eyewitness accounts according to which the Mbuti did indeed playact violence between human beings.¹⁶⁰ More important, there was plenty of real-life violence among the Mbuti. Accounts of physical fights and beatings are scattered throughout Turnbull’s books, *The Forest People* and *Wayward Servants*. To cite just one of the numerous examples, Turnbull mentions a woman who lost three teeth in fighting with another woman over a man.¹⁶¹ I’ve already mentioned Turnbull’s statements about wife-beating among the Mbuti.

It’s worth noting that Zerzan apparently believes that our ancestors were capable of mental telepathy.¹⁶² But particularly revealing is Zerzan’s quotation of “Shanks and Tilley”: “The point of archaeology is not merely to interpret the past but to change the manner in which the past is interpreted in the service of social reconstruction in the present.”¹⁶³ This is virtually open advocacy of the proposition that archaeologists should slant their findings for political purposes. What better evidence could there be of the massive politicization that has taken place in

¹⁵⁷ Thomas. pages 156–57.

¹⁵⁸ Schebesta. I. Band, page 203.

¹⁵⁹ Zerzan. “Future Primitive”. page 36.

¹⁶⁰ Turnbull. *Wayward Servants*. page 138 & footnote 2.

¹⁶¹ Turnbull. *Wayward Servants*, page 206.

¹⁶² Zerzan. “Future Primitive”, page 26. In an interview with Julien Nitzberg, *Mean* magazine. April 2001, page 69, Zerzan said. “Freud . . . believed that before language, it’s likely that people were pretty telepathic “. In my letter to him of 5/2/03. page 6. I asked Zerzan to refer me to the place in Freud’s works where Freud had made such a statement, but Zerzan never answered that question.

¹⁶³ Zerzan. “Future Primitive”. page 15.

American anthropology over the last 35 or 40 years? In view of this politicization, anything in recent anthropological literature that portrays primitive peoples' behavior as politically correct must be viewed with the utmost skepticism.

After citing to Zerzan some of the examples of gender inequality that I've discussed above, I questioned his honesty on the ground that he had "systematically excluded nearly all of the evidence that undercuts the idealized picture of hunter-gatherer societies" that he wanted to present.¹⁶⁴ Zerzan answered that he "did not find many credible sources that contradicted his outlook."¹⁶⁵ This statement strains credulity. Some of the examples that I cited to Zerzan (and have discussed above) were from books on which he himself had relied—those of Bonvillain and Turnbull.¹⁶⁶ Yet he somehow managed to overlook all of the evidence in those books that contradicted his claims. Since Zerzan has read widely about hunter-gatherer societies, and the Australian Aborigines are among the best-known hunter-gatherers, I find it very difficult to believe that he has never come across any accounts of the Australians' mistreatment of women. Yet he never mentions such accounts—not even for the purpose of refuting them.

One does not necessarily have to assume any conscious dishonesty on Zerzan's part. As Nietzsche said, "The most common lie is the lie one tells to oneself; lying to others is relatively the exception."¹⁶⁷ In other words, self-deception often precedes deception of others. An important factor here may be one that is well known to professional propagandists: people tend to block out — to fail to perceive or to remember — information that they find uncongenial¹⁶⁸. Since information that discredits one's ideology is highly uncongenial, it follows that people will tend to block out such information. A young anarchoprimitivist with whom I've corresponded has provided me with an amazing example of this phenomenon. He wrote to me: "there is no question about the persistence [sic] of patriarchy in all other oceanic societies, but none seems apparent in the [Australian] Aborigines — According to A. P. Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines* wives were not held in a restrictive marriage at all."¹⁶⁹ It was apparent that my anarchoprimitivist friend had read Elkin's discussion of women's position in Australian Aboriginal society.

¹⁶⁴ Letter from the author to John Zerzan. 4/18/04. page 6.

¹⁶⁵ Letter from John Zerzan to the author. 4/28/04.

¹⁶⁶ Zerzan sent me a photocopy of a page from Bonvillain's book with his letter of 3/2/03. In "Future Primitive". pages 34. 36. Zerzan cites "Turnbull (1962)" and "Turnbull (1965)". This presumably refers to *Forest People* and *Wayward Servants*. In "Future Primitive", page 33. Zerzan also cites Mrs. Thomas's book, yet he conveniently forgets Mrs. Thomas's statements about childbirth when he claims (on the same page of "Future Primitive") that childbirth is "without difficulty or pain" among hunter-gatherers.

¹⁶⁷ Nietzsche. page 186.

¹⁶⁸ Encycl. Brit. Vol. 26, article "Propaganda" page 176.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from the publisher of *Species Traitor* to the author, 4/17 /03. page 6.

I've cited above some of the relevant pages of Elkin's book, such as those on which he states that Australian Aboriginal women sometimes lived in terror of the compulsory sex to which they were subjected at some ceremonial times. Any reasonably rational person who will take the trouble to read those pages¹⁷⁰ will find himself hard-pressed to explain how my anarchoprimitivist friend could have read that material and then claimed in all seriousness that no patriarchy seemed apparent in Australian Aboriginal society – unless my friend simply blocked out of his mind the information that he found ideologically unacceptable. My friend did not question the accuracy of Elkin's information; in fact, he was relying on Elkin as an authority. He simply remained oblivious to the information that indicated patriarchy among the Australian Aborigines. But this time it should be sufficiently clear to the reader that what the anarchoprimitivists (and many anthropologists) are up to has nothing to do with a rational search for the truth about primitive cultures. Instead, they have been developing a myth.

6. I've already had occasion at several points to mention violence among nomadic hunter-gatherers. Examples of violence, including deadly violence, among hunter-gatherers are abundant. To mention only a few such examples: "One account has been published of a mortal battle between an inland band of Tasmanians having access to ochre, and a coastal band who had agreed to exchange seashells for the other's product. The inland people brought their ochre, but the coastal people arrived empty handed. Men were killed because of a breach of faith over the two materials, neither of which was edible or of any other practical use. In other words, the Tasmanians were just as 'human' as the rest of US."¹⁷¹ The Tasmanians made their spears "in two lengths. . . the shorter ones were for hunting, the longer ones for fighting."¹⁷² Among the hunter-gatherers of the Andaman Islands, "grievances were remembered, and revenge might be taken later. The raiders either crept through the jungle or approached in canoes. They leaped on their victims by surprise, quickly shot [with arrows] all the men and women unable to escape, and took away any uninjured children, to adopt them. . ."; "If enough members of the group survived to reconstitute the band, they might eventually grow numerous enough to seek revenge, and a lengthy feud might arise. [Peace efforts were] initiated by the women because it was they who had kept the hostilities alive, egging on their men."¹⁷³

Among at least some groups of Australian Aborigines, women at times would provoke their menfolk to deadly violence against other men.¹⁷⁴ Among the Es-

¹⁷⁰ Elkin. pages 130–38.

¹⁷¹ Coon. page 172.

¹⁷² Ibid.. page 75.

¹⁷³ Ibid.. pages 243–44.

¹⁷⁴ Massola, page 77.

kimos with whom Gontran de Poncins lived, there was “a good deal of killing”, and it was sometimes a woman who persuaded a man to kill another man.¹⁷⁵ Paintings made in rock shelters by prehistoric hunter-gatherers of eastern Spain show groups of men fighting each other with bows and arrows.¹⁷⁶

One could go on and on. But I don’t want to give the impression that all hunter-gatherer were violent. Turnbull refers to numerous nonlethal fights and beatings among the Mbuti, but in those of his books that I’ve read he mentions not a single case of homicide.¹⁷⁷ This suggests that deadly violence was rare among the Mbuti at the time when Turnbull knew them. Siriono women sometimes fought physically, striking each other with sticks, and there was a good deal of aggression among the children, even with sticks or burning brands used as weapons.¹⁷⁸ But men rarely fought each other with weapons,¹⁷⁹ and the Siriono were not warlike.¹⁸⁰ Under extreme provocation they did kill certain whites and missionized Indians,¹⁸¹ but among the Siriono themselves intentional homicide was almost unknown.¹⁸² Among the Bushmen whom Mrs. Thomas knew aggression of any kind was minimal, though she makes clear that this was not necessarily true of all Bushman groups.¹⁸³

It is important, too, to realize that deadly violence among primitives is not even remotely comparable to modern warfare. When primitives fight, two little bands of men shoot arrows or swing war-clubs at one another because they want to fight; or because they are defending themselves, their families, or their territory. In the modern world soldiers fight because they are forced to do so, or, at best, because they have been brainwashed into believing in some kook ideology such as that of Nazism, socialism, or what American politicians choose to call “freedom”. In any case the modern soldier is merely a pawn, a dupe who dies not for his family or his tribe but for the politicians who exploit him. If he’s unlucky, maybe he does not die but comes home horribly crippled in a way that

¹⁷⁵ Poncins, pages 115–120, 125.162–65.237–38.244.

¹⁷⁶ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 28, article “Spain”, page 18.

¹⁷⁷ Apart from infanticide. Schebesta and Turnbull agree that when twins were born only one member of the pair was allowed to live. Schebesta, I. Band, page 138. Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 130. Schebesta further states (same page) that babies born crippled were done away with. Turnbull, however, mentions a girl who was born with a “diseased” hip but was allowed to live. Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 265. Schebesta, II. Band I. Teil, pages 274, 277, indicates that trespassing and theft could lead to deadly violence, but Turnbull mentions no such thing.

¹⁷⁸ Holmberg, pages 126–27, 157, 209–210.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, page 157.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pages 11, 158–59.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pages 114, 159.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, page 152.

¹⁸³ Thomas, pages 284–87.

would never result from an arrow- or a spear-wound. Meanwhile, thousands of non-combatants are killed or mutilated. The environment is ravaged, not only in the war zone, but also back home, due to the accelerated consumption of natural resources needed to feed the war machine. In comparison, the violence of primitive man is relatively innocuous. That, however, it isn't good enough for the anarchoprimitivists or for today's politically correct anthropologists. They can't deny altogether the existence of violence among hunter-gatherers, since the evidence for it is incontrovertible. But they will stretch the truth as far as they think they can get away with in order to minimize the amount of violence in the human past. It's worthwhile to give an example that illustrates the silliness of some of the reasoning that they use. In reference to *Homo habilis*, a physically primitive ancestor of modern man, the anthropologist Haviland writes: "They obtained their meat not by killing live animals but by scavenging *Homo habilis* got meat by scavenging from carcasses of dead animals, rather than hunting live ones. We know this because the marks of stone tools on the bones of butchered animals commonly overlies the teeth of carnivores made. Clearly, *Homo habilis* did not get to the prey first."¹⁸⁴

But, as Haviland certainly ought to know, many or most predatory animals engage both in hunting and in scavenging. For example, bears, African lions, martens, wolverines, wolves, coyotes, foxes, jackals, hyenas, the raccoon dog of Asia, the Komodo dragon, and some vultures both hunt and scavenge.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the fact that *Homo habilis* engaged in scavenging provides no evidence whatsoever that he did not also hunt. I emphasize that I do not know or care whether *Homo habilis* hunted. I see no reason why it should be important for us to know whether our half-human ancestors two million years ago were bloodthirsty killers, peaceful vegetarians, or something in between. The point here is simply to show what kind of reasoning some anthropologists will resort to in their effort to make the human past look as politically correct as possible. Since political correctness has warped the portrayal not only of the human past but of wild nature generally, it should be pointed out that deadly violence among wild animals is not confined to predation of one species upon another. Killing of one member of a species by another member of the same species does occur. For example, it is well known that wild chimpanzees often kill other chimpanzees.¹⁸⁶ Elephants sometimes kill one

¹⁸⁴ Haviland, pages 77, 78.

¹⁸⁵ It's common knowledge that coyotes and at least some species of bears both hunt and scavenge. For lions, martens, foxes, jackals, hyenas, raccoon dogs, Komodo dragons, and vultures, see *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 4, page 910; Vol. 6, pages 196, 454, 945; Vol. 7, pages 383, 884; Vol. 9, page 876; Vol. 12, page 439; Vol. 17, page 449; Vol. 23, page 421. For wolves and wolverines, see *Encyclopedia Americana*, International Edition, 1998, Vol. 29, pages 94-95, 102.

¹⁸⁶ See, e.g., *Time* magazine, 8/19/02, page 56.

another in fights, and the same is true of wild pigs.¹⁸⁷ Among the sea birds called brown boobies, two eggs are laid in each nest. After the eggs are hatched, one of the chicks attacks the other and forces it out of the nest, so that it dies.¹⁸⁸ Komodo dragons sometimes eat one another,¹⁸⁹ and there is evidence that cannibalism occurred among some dinosaurs.¹⁹⁰ (Evidence of cannibalism among prehistoric humans is controversial.)¹⁹¹

I do want to make clear that it is by no means my intention to exalt violence. I prefer to see people (and animals) get along smoothly with one another. My purpose is only to expose the irrationality of the politically-correct image of primitive peoples and of wild nature.

7. An important element of the anarchoprimitivist myth is the belief that hunter-gatherer societies were free of competition and were characterized instead by sharing and cooperation. Collin Turnbull's early writings on the Mbuti pygmies seem to be quite frank, but his work leaned increasingly toward political correctness as time went by.¹⁹² Writing in 1983 (18 and 21 years, respectively, after he had published *Wayward Servants* and *The Forest People*), Turnbull noted that Mbuti children had no competitive games,¹⁹³ and after referring to the high value that he claimed modern society placed on "competition" and "economic independence,"¹⁹⁴ he contrasted these with "the well-tried primitive values of family-writ-

¹⁸⁷ Encycl. Brit., Vol. 23, article "Mammals", pages 436, 449–450.

¹⁸⁸ "Sibling Desperado", *Science News*, Vol. 163, February 15, 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Encycl. Brit., Vol. 6, article "Komodo dragon", page 945.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 17, article "Dinosaurs", page 319.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., Vol. 6, article "Krapina remains", pages 981–82; Vol. 26, article "Prehistoric Peoples and Cultures", page 66.

¹⁹² Here are a couple of examples that illustrate the politically-correct tendency of Turnbull's later work: In 1983, Turnbull wrote that he objected to the word "pygmy" because "it invites the assumption that height is a significant factor, whereas, in the Ituri it is of remarkable insignificance to both the Mbuti and their neighbors, the taller Africans who live around them." *Change and Adaptation*, first page of the Introduction. But 21 years earlier Turnbull had written: "The fact that they [the Mbuti] average less than four and a half feet in height is of no concern to them; their taller neighbors. Who jeer at them for being So puny, are as clumsy as elephants. . .", *Forest People*, page 14. "They [a certain group of pygmies] pitied me for my height, which made me So clumsy", Ibid., page 239. Turnbull also claimed in 1983 that the Mbuti had never fought in resistance to the taller Africans' invasion of their forest, *Change and Adaptation*, page 20. But Schebesta, I. Band. pages 81–84, reported oral traditions according to which many of the Mbuti had indeed fought the villagers, and so effectively that they had driven them (for a time) entirely out of the eastern part of the forest at some point during the first half of the 19th century. Oral traditions are unreliable, but these stories were so widespread as to indicate a certain probability that some such fighting had occurred. Turnbull did not explain how he knew that these traditions were wrong and that the Mbuti had not fought. Turnbull was familiar with Schebesta's work. See, e.g., *Forest People*, page 20.

¹⁹³ Turnbull, *Change and Adaptation*, page 44.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., page 154.

large: interdependence, cooperation, and reliance on community . . . rather than on self. . . ”¹⁹⁵

But according to Turnbull’s own earlier work, physical fighting was commonplace among the Mbuti.¹⁹⁶ If a physical fight isn’t a form of competition, then what is? It’s clear in fact that the Mbuti were a very quarrelsome people, and, in addition to physical fights, there were many verbal disputes among them.¹⁹⁷ Generally speaking, any dispute, whether it is settled physically or verbally; is a form of competition: the interests of one person conflict with those of another, and their quarreling is an effort by each to promote his own interests at the other’s expense. The Mbuti’s jealousies also were evidence of competitive impulses.¹⁹⁸

Two things for which the Mbuti competed were mates and food. I’ve already mentioned a case of two women who fought over a man,¹⁹⁹ and quarreling over food apparently was common.²⁰⁰ It’s worth noting that Turnbull, in his early work, described the Mbuti as “individualists.”²⁰¹ There is abundant evidence of competitiveness and/or individualism among other primitive peoples. The Nuer (African pastoralists), the pagan Germanic tribes, the Carib Indians, the Siriono (who lived mainly by hunting and gathering), the Navajo, the Apaches, the Plains Indians, and North American Indians generally have all been described explicitly as “individualistic.”²⁰² But “individualism” is a vague word that may mean different things to different people, so it’s more helpful to look at definite facts that have been reported. Some of the works that I cite in Note 202 do back up with facts their application of the term “individualistic” to the peoples mentioned. Holmberg writes:

“When an Indian [Siriono] has reached adulthood he displays an individualism and apathy toward his fellows that is remarkable. The apparent unconcern of one individual for another—even within the family—never ceased to amaze me while I was living with the Siriono. Frequently men would depart for the hunt alone—without so much as a goodbye—and remain away from the band for weeks at a time without any concern on the part of their fellow tribesmen or even their wives. . . .”
“Unconcern with one’s fellows is manifested on every hand. On one occasion

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., page 158.

¹⁹⁶ Turnbull mentions physical fighting in *Forest People*, pages 110, 122–23, and in *Wayward Servants*, pages 188, 191, 201, 205, 206, 212.

¹⁹⁷ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 33, 107, 110; *Wayward Servants*, pages 105,106,113, 157,212,216.

¹⁹⁸ Turnbull mentions jealousies in *Wayward Servants*, pages 103, 118,157.

¹⁹⁹ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 206.

²⁰⁰ Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 107; *Wayward Servants*, pages 157, 191,198, 201.

²⁰¹ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 183.

²⁰² Evans-Pritchard, page 90. Davidson, pages 10, 205. Reichard, pages xviii, xxi, xxxvii. Debo, page 71. Wissler, page 287. Holmberg, pages 151, 259, 270 (footnote 5)). *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 2, article “Carib”, page 866; Vol. 13, article “American Peoples, Native”, page 380.

Ekwataia went hunting. On his return darkness overcame him about five hundred yards from camp. The night was black as ink, and Ekwataia lost his way. He began to call for help—for someone to bring him fire or to guide him into camp by calls. No one paid heed to his request. After about half an hour, his cries ceased, and his sister Seaci, said: ‘A jaguar probably got him’. When Ekwataia returned the following morning, he told me that he had spent the night sitting on the branch of a tree to avoid being eaten by jaguars.”²⁰³ Holmberg repeatedly remarks on the uncooperative character of the Siriono, and says that those of them who became disabled by age or sickness were simply abandoned by the others.²⁰⁴ Among other primitive peoples, individualism takes other forms. For example, among most of the North American Indians, warfare was a decidedly individualistic enterprise. “The Indians, being highly individualistic and often fighting more for personal glory than group advantage, never developed a science of warfare.”²⁰⁵ According to the Cheyenne Indian Wooden Leg: “When any battle actually began it was a case of every man for himself. There were no ordered groupings, no systematic movements in concert, no compulsory goings and comings. Warriors mingled indiscriminately, every one looked out for himself only, or each helped a friend if such help were needed and if the able one’s personal inclination just then was toward friendly helpfulness. The Sioux tribes fought their battles as a band of individuals, the same as we fought ours, and the same as was the way of all Indians I ever knew.”²⁰⁶

During the first half of the 20th century, Stanley Vestal interviewed many Plains Indians who still remembered the old days. According to him:

“It cannot be too often repeated that—except when defending his camp—the Indian was totally indifferent to the general result of a fight: all he cared about was his own coups. Time and again old men have said to me, in discussing a given battle, ‘Nothing happened that day’, meaning simply that the speaker had been unable to count a coups”;²⁰⁷ “Plains Indians could not wage war by plan. They had no discipline. On the rare occasions when they did have a plan, some ambitious young man was sure to launch a premature attack.”²⁰⁸

Compare this with modern man’s way of waging war: Troops move in obedience to carefully elaborated plans; every man has a specific task to perform in cooperation with other men, and he performs it not for personal glory but for

²⁰³ Holmberg, pages 259–260.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pages 93, 102, 224–26, 228, .256–57, 259, 270 (footnote 5)).

²⁰⁵ Leach, page 130.

²⁰⁶ Marquis, pages 119–122.

²⁰⁷ Vestal, page 60.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, page 179.

the advantage of the army as a whole. Thus, in warfare, it is modern man who is cooperative and primitive man who is, generally speaking, an individualist.

Primitive individualism is not confined to warfare. Among the Indians of subarctic North America, who were hunter-gatherers, there was an “individualistic relationship to the supernatural,” “self-reliance,” and a “high value placed on personal autonomy.”²⁰⁹ Australian Aboriginal children were “taught to be self-reliant.”²¹⁰ Among the Woodland Indians of the eastern United States, “great emphasis was placed on self-reliance and individual competence,”²¹¹ and the Navajo “insisted upon self-reliance.”²¹² The Nuer of Africa extolled the virtues of “stubbornness” and “independence”; “Their only test of character is whether one can stand up for oneself.”²¹³ Evidence of competition among primitives is ample. In addition to the Mbuti, at least some other hunter-gatherers competed for mates or for food. “One cannot remain long with the Siriono without noting that quarreling and wrangling are ubiquitous.”²¹⁴ The majority of quarrels “arose directly over questions of food”, but sexual jealousy also led to fights and quarrels among the Siriono.²¹⁵ The Australian Aborigines fought for the possession of women.²¹⁶ Poncins reports the case of one Eskimo who killed another in order to take his wife, and he states that any Eskimo would kill in order to prevent his wife from being taken from him.²¹⁷

Notwithstanding Turnbull’s remark that Mbuti children had no competitive games, some Mbuti adults did play tug-of-war, which clearly is a competitive game,²¹⁸ and certain other primitive peoples too had competitive games. Massola mentions war games among the Australian Aborigines, and a ball game in which “the boy who caught the ball the greatest number of times was considered to be the winner.”²¹⁹ The game of lacrosse originated among the Algonkin Indians.²²⁰ Navaho children of both sexes had foot-races,²²¹ and among the Plains Indians almost all of the boys’ games were competitive.²²² The Cheyenne Indian Wooden Leg described

²⁰⁹ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 13, article “American Peoples, Native”, pages 351–52,360.

²¹⁰ Massola, page 72.

²¹¹ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 13, article “American Peoples, Native”, pages 384,386.

²¹² Reichard, page xxxix.

²¹³ Evans-Pritchard, pages 90, 181–83.

²¹⁴ Holmberg, page 153.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pages 126–27, 141, 154.

²¹⁶ Coon, pages 260–61.

²¹⁷ Poncins, pages 125, 244.

²¹⁸ Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, page 241.

²¹⁹ Massola, pages 78–80.

²²⁰ Wissler, pages 223, 304.

²²¹ Reichard, page 265.

²²² *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 13, article “American Peoples, Native”, page 381.

some of the competitive sports in which his people had engaged: “Horse races, foot races, wrestling matches, target shooting with guns or with arrows, tossing the arrows by hand, swimming, jumping and other like contests.”²²³ The Cheyenne also competed in war, in hunting, and “in all worthy activities.”²²⁴

Richard E. Leakey quotes Richard Lee thusly: “Sharing deeply pervades the behavior and values of !Kung [Bushmen] foragers. Sharing is central to the conduct of life in foraging societies.” Leakey adds: “This ethnic is not confined to the !Kung: it is a feature of hunter-gatherers in general.”²²⁵ Of course, we share too. We pay taxes. Our tax money is used to help poor or disabled people through public-assistance programs, and to carry on other public activities that are supposed to promote the general welfare. Employers share with their employees by paying them wages. But aha! you answer, we share only because we are forced to do so. If we tried to evade payment of taxes we would go to prison; if an employer offered insufficient wages and benefits, no one would work for him, or perhaps he would have trouble with the union or with the minimum-wage laws. The difference is that hunter-gatherers shared voluntarily, out of loving, open-hearted generosity . . . right?

Well, not exactly. Just as our sharing is governed by tax laws, union contracts, and the like, sharing in hunter-gatherer societies was commonly governed by “rigid procedural rules” that “must be followed in order to keep the peace.”²²⁶ Many hunter-gatherers were just as grudging about sharing their food as we are about paying our taxes, and just as anxious to make sure that they got not a bit less than what the rules entitled them to. Among Richard Lee’s Bushmen: “Distribution [of meat] is done with great care, according to a set of rules. Improper meat distributions can be the cause of bitter wrangling among close relatives.”²²⁷ Among the Tikerarmiut Eskimos, even though the rules for distribution of whale meat “were scrupulously followed, there still might be vociferous arguments.”²²⁸ The Siriono had food taboos that might have served as rules for the distribution of meat, but the taboos were very often disregarded.²²⁹ Though the Siriono did share food, they did so with extreme reluctance:²³⁰ “People constantly complain and quarrel about the distribution of food. Enia said to me one night: “When someone

²²³ Marquis, page 39.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pages 64,66,120,277.

²²⁵ Leakey, page 107.

²²⁶ Coon, pages 176- 77. Cashdan, pages 37–38. refers to “precise” or “formal” rules of meat-sharing among Australian Aborigines. Mbuti pygmies, and Kung Bushmen.

²²⁷ Richard B. Lee, quoted by Bonvillain, page 20.

²²⁸ Coon, page 125.

²²⁹ Holmberg, pages 79–81.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pages 87–89, 154–56.

comes near the house, women hide the meat. Women even push meat up their vaginas to hide it.”²³¹ “If, for instance, a person does share food with a kinsman, he has the right to expect some in return. Reciprocity, however, is almost always forced, and is sometimes even hostile. Indeed, sharing rarely occurs without a certain amount of mutual distrust and misunderstanding.”²³² The Mbuti had rules for sharing meat,²³³ but there was, “often as not, a great deal of squabbling over the division of the game.”²³⁴ “Once an animal is killed, it is taken to be shared out on return to the camp. This is not to say that sharing takes place without any dispute or acrimony. On the contrary, the arguments that ensue when the hunt returns to camp are frequently long and loud;”²³⁵ “When the hunt returns to camp, men and women alike, but particularly women, may be seen furtively concealing some of their spoils under the leaves on their roofs, or in empty pots nearby;”²³⁶ “It would be a rare Mbuti woman who did not conceal a portion of the catch in case she was forced to share with others.”²³⁷ The fact that some hunter-gatherers often quarreled over the distribution conflicts with the anarchoprimitivists’ claims about “primitive affluence.” If food was so easy to get, then why would people quarrel over it? It should also be noted that the general rule of sharing among hunter-gatherers applied mainly to meat. There was relatively little sharing of vegetable foods,²³⁸ even though vegetable foods often constituted the greater part of the diet.²³⁹

But I don’t want to give the impression that all primitive peoples or all hunter-gatherers were radical individualists who never cooperated and never shared except under compulsion. The Siriono, in terms of their selfishness, callousness, and unco-operativeness, were an extreme case. Among most of the primitive peoples about whom I’ve read there seems to have been a reasonable balance

²³¹ Ibid., pages 154–55.

²³² Ibid., page 151.

²³³ Cashdan, page 37. Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 96–97. Schbesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 96,97.

²³⁴ Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 107.

²³⁵ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, pages 157–58. Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, page 97, mentions a fierce quarrel over the distribution of meat that “almost led to bloodshed”.

²³⁶ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 120.

²³⁷ Ibid., page 198.

²³⁸ Coon, page 176. Cashdan, page 38. Bonvillain, page 20. Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 167. *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article “Australia”, page 438.

²³⁹ Cashdan, page 28. Coon, pages 72–73. Bonvillain, page 20. *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article “Australia”, page 438. Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 178, possibly underestimated the importance of vegetable foods in the Mbuti’s diet (“hunting and gathering being equally important to the economy”). According to Schebesta, I. Band, pages 70–71, 198; II. Band, I. Teil, pages 11, 13–14, the Mbuti nourished themselves principally on vegetable products. At most 30% of their diet consisted of animal products, and of that 30% a considerable part consisted not of meat but of foods such as snails and caterpillars that were gathered like vegetables, not hunted.

between cooperation and competition, sharing and selfishness, individualism and community spirit. In stating that hunter-gatherers did not usually share vegetable foods, shellfish, or the like outside of the household, Coon also indicates that such foods might indeed be shared with other families if the latter were hungry.²⁴⁰ Notwithstanding their individualistic traits, the Cheyenne (and probably other Plains Indians) placed a high value on generosity (i.e., voluntary sharing),²⁴¹ and the same was true of the Nuer.²⁴² The Eskimos with whom Gontran de Poncins lived were so generous in sharing their belongings that Poncins described their community as “quasi-communist” and stated that “all labored in common with no hint of selfishness.”²⁴³ (Poncins did note, however, that an Eskimo expected every gift to be repaid eventually with a return gift.)²⁴⁴ The importance to the Mbuti of cooperation in hunting and in some other activities is described by Turnbull,²⁴⁵ who also states that failure to share in time of need was a “crime,”²⁴⁶ and that the Mbuti shared to some extent even when there was no necessity for sharing.²⁴⁷

In contrast to the callousness shown by the Siriono, the old or crippled among the Mbuti were treated with a care and respect that derived mainly from affection and a sense of responsibility.²⁴⁸ Poncins’s Eskimos would abandon helpless old people to die when it became too difficult to take care of them any longer, but they must have done this reluctantly, because as long as they had the old people with them, “they look after the aged on the trail, running back so often to the sled to see if the old people are warm enough, if they are comfortable, if they are not perhaps hungry and want a bit of fish.”²⁴⁹

Just as one could go on and on citing examples of selfishness, competition, and aggression among hunter-gatherers, so one could go on and on citing examples of generosity, cooperation, and love among them. I’ve emphasized primarily examples showing selfishness, competition, and aggression only because of the need to debunk the anarchoprimitivist myth that portrays the life of hunter-gatherers as a kind of politically-correct Garden of Eden.

In any case, when Colin Turnbull contrasts modern “competition,” “independence,” and reliance on “self” with “the well-trying primitive values of interdependence, cooperation, and reliance on community,” he simply makes a fool of

²⁴⁰ Coon, page 176.

²⁴¹ Marquis, page 159.

²⁴² Evans-Pritchard, page 90.

²⁴³ Poncins, pages 78–79.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, page 121.

²⁴⁵ Turnbull, *Wayward and Servants*, e.g., page 105.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pages 199–200 (footnote 5).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, page 113.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, page 153.

²⁴⁹ Poncins, page 237.

himself. As we've already seen, the latter values are not particularly characteristic of primitive societies. And a moment's thought shows that in modern society self-reliance has become practically impossible, while cooperation and interdependence are developed to an infinitely greater degree than could ever be the case in a primitive society.

A modern nation is a vast, highly-organized system in which every part is dependent on every other part. The factories and oil refineries could not function without the electricity provided by power plants, the power plants need replacement parts produced in the factories, the factories require materials that could not be transported without the fuel provided by oil refineries. The factories, refineries, and power plants could not function without the workers. The workers need food produced on farms, the farms require fuel and spare parts for tractors and machinery, hence cannot do without the refineries and factories and so forth. And even a modern nation is no longer a self-sufficient unit. Increasingly, every country is dependent on the global economy. Since the modern individual could not survive without the goods and services provided by the worldwide technological machine, it is absurd today to speak of self-reliance. To keep the whole machine running, a vast, elaborately-choreographed system of cooperation is necessary. People have to arrive at their places of employment at precisely designated times, and do their work in accord with detailed rules and procedures in order to ensure that every individual's performance meshes with everyone else's. In order for traffic to flow smoothly and without accidents or congestion, people must cooperate by complying, with numerous traffic regulations. Appointments must be kept, taxes paid, licenses procured, laws obeyed, etc., etc., etc. There has never existed a primitive society that has had such a far-reaching and elaborate system of cooperation, or one that has regulated the behavior of the individual in such detail. Under these circumstances, the claim that modern society is characterized by "independence" and "self-reliance," in opposition to primitive "interdependence" and "cooperation," appears bizarre.

It might be answered that modern people cooperate with the system only because they are forced to do so, whereas at least part of primitive man's cooperation is more or less voluntary. This of course is true, and the reason for it is clear. Precisely because our system of cooperation is so highly developed, it is exceedingly demanding and therefore so burdensome to the individual that few people would comply with it if they didn't fear losing their jobs, paying a fine, or going to jail. Primitive man's cooperation can be partly voluntary for the very reason that far less cooperation is required of primitive man than of modern man. What gives modern society a superficial appearance of individualism, independence, and self-reliance is the vanishing of the ties that formerly linked individuals into small-scale communities. Today, nuclear families commonly have little connection to

their next-door neighbors or even to their cousins. Most people have friends, but friends nowadays tend to use each other only for entertainment. They do not usually cooperate in economic or other serious, practical activities, nor do they offer each other much physical or economic security. If you become disabled, you don't expect your friends to support you. You depend on insurance or on the welfare department. But the ties of cooperation and mutual assistance that once bound the hunter-gatherer to his band have not simply vanished into thin air. They have been replaced by ties that bind us to the technoindustrial system as a whole, and bind us much more tightly than the hunter-gatherer was bound to his band. It is absurd to say that a person is independent, self-reliant, or an individualist because he belongs to a collectivity of hundreds of millions of people rather than to one of thirty or fifty people. As for competition, it is more firmly leashed in our society than it was in most primitive societies. As we've seen, two Mbuti women might compete for a man with their fists; they might compete for food by filching some or by having a shouting match over the division of meat. Australian Aboriginal men fought over women with deadly weapons.²⁵⁰ But such direct and unrestrained competition cannot be tolerated in modern society because it would disrupt the elaborate and finely-tuned system of cooperation. So our society has developed outlets for the competitive impulse that are harmless, or even useful, to the system. Men today do not compete for women, or vice versa, by fighting. Men compete for women by earning money and driving prestigious cars; women compete for men by cultivating charm and appearance. Corporation executives compete by striving for promotions. In this context, competition among the executives is a device that encourages them to cooperate with the corporation, for the person who wins the promotion is the one who best serves the corporation. It could plausibly be argued that competitive sports in modern society function as an outlet for aggressive and competitive impulses that would have serious disruptive consequences if they were expressed in the way that many primitive peoples express such impulses. Clearly, the system needs people who are cooperative, obedient, and willing to accept dependence. As the historian Von Laue puts it: "Industrial society, after all, requires an incredible docility at the base of its freedoms [sic]."²⁵¹ For this reason, community, cooperation, and helping others have become deeply-ingrained, fundamental values of modern society. But what about the value supposedly placed on independence, individualism, and competition? Whereas the words "community", "cooperation", and "helping" in our society are unequivocally accepted as "good", the words "individualism" and "competition" are tense, two-edged words that must be used with some care if one

²⁵⁰ Coon, page 260.

²⁵¹ Van Laue, page 202.

wishes to avoid risk of a negative reaction. To illustrate with an anecdote, when I was in the seventh or eighth grade our teacher, who was apt to be somewhat rough with the kids, asked a girl to name the country that she lived in. The girl was not very bright and apparently did not know the full name of the United States of America, so she answered simply: “The States”. “The United States of what?” asked the teacher. The girl just sat there with a blank expression. The teacher kept badgering her for an answer until she ventured a guess: “The States of Community?”.

Why “community”? Because of course “community” was a goody-goody word, the kind of word that a kid would use to get brownie points with a teacher. Would any kid in a similar situation have answered “United States of Competition” or “United States of Individualism”? Not likely!

It is routinely taken for granted that words like “community,” “cooperation,” “helping,” and “sharing” represent something positive, but “individualism” is seldom used in the mainstream media or in the educational system in an unequivocally positive sense. “Competition” is more often used in a positive sense, but typically it is used that way only in specific contexts in which competition is useful (or at least harmless) to the system. For example, competition is considered desirable in the business world because it weeds out inefficient companies, spurs other companies to become more efficient, and promotes economic and technological progress. But only leashed competition — that is, competition that abides by rules designed to make it harmless or useful — is commonly spoken of favorably. And, when treated in a positive sense, competition is always justified in terms of communitarian values. Thus, business competition is considered good because it promotes efficiency and progress, which supposedly are good for the community as a whole. “Independence,” too, is a “good” word only when used in certain ways. For example, when one speaks of making disabled people “independent” one never thinks of making them independent of the system. One means only that they are to be provided with gainful employment so that the community will not be burdened with the cost of supporting them. Once they have found a job they are every bit as dependent on the system as they were when they lived on welfare, and they have a great deal less freedom to decide how to spend their time. So why do politically-correct anthropologists and others like them contrast the supposedly primitive values of “community,” “cooperation,” “sharing,” and “interdependence” with what they claim are the modern values of “competition,” “individualism” and “independence”? Certainly an important part of the answer is that politically-correct people have absorbed too well the values that the system’s propaganda has taught them, including the values of “cooperation,” “community,” “helping,” and so forth. Another value they have absorbed from propaganda is that of “tolerance,” which in cross-cultural contexts tends to

translate into condescending approval of non-Western cultures. A well-socialized modern anthropologist is therefore faced with a conflict: Since he is supposed to be tolerant, he finds it difficult to say anything bad about primitive cultures. But primitive cultures provide abundant examples of behavior that is decidedly bad from the point of view of modern Western values. So the anthropologist has to censor much of the “bad” behavior out of his descriptions of primitive cultures in order to avoid showing them in a negative light. In addition, due to his own excessively thorough socialization, the politically-correct anthropologist has a need to rebel.²⁵² He is too well socialized to discard the fundamental values of modern society, so he expresses his hostility toward that society by distorting facts to make it seem that modern society deviates from its own stated values to a much greater extent than it actually does. Thus the anthropologist ends by magnifying the competitive and individualistic aspects of modern society while grossly understating these aspects of primitive societies.

There’s more to it than that, of course, and I can’t claim to understand fully the psychology of these people. It seems obvious, for example, that the politically-correct portrayal of hunter-gatherers is motivated in part by an impulse to construct an image of a pure and innocent world existing at the dawn of time, analogous to the Garden of Eden, but the basis of this impulse is not clear to me.

8. What about hunter-gatherers’ relations with animals? Some anarchoprimitivists seem to think that animals and humans once “coexisted” and that although animals nowadays sometimes eat humans, “such attacks by animals are comparatively rare,” and “these animals are short of food due to the encroachment of civilization and are acting more out of extreme hunger and desperation. It is also due to our ignorance of the animal’s gestures and scents, despoiled foliage or other signals our ancestor’s [sic] knew but our domestication has now denied us.”²⁵³ It is certainly true that the hunter-gatherer’s knowledge of animals’ habits made him safer in the wilderness than a modern man would be. It is also true that attacks on humans by wild animals are and have been relatively infrequent, probably because animals have learned the hard way that it is risky to prey on humans. But to hunter-gatherers in many environments wild animals did represent a significant danger. The Siriono hunter was “occasionally exposed to attacks from jaguars, crocodiles, and poisonous snakes.”²⁵⁴ Leopards, forest buffalo, and

²⁵² For discussion of this and some of the other psychological points made in this paragraph, see the Unabomber Manifesto, “Industrial Society and Its Future”, paragraphs 6–32, 213–230.

²⁵³ “The Forgotten Language Among Humans and Nature”, *Species Traitor*, Issue 2, Winter 2002. Pages in this publication are not numbered.

²⁵⁴ Holmberg. page 249. See also pages 61. 117. 260.

crocodiles were a real threat to the Mbuti.²⁵⁵ On the other hand, remarkably, the Kadar (hunter-gatherers of India) were said to have “a truce with tigers, which in the old days left them strictly alone.”²⁵⁶ This is the only case of the kind that I know of. Hunter-gatherers represented a much greater danger to animals than vice versa, since of course they hunted animals for food. Even the Kadar, who had no hunting weapons and lived mainly on wild yams, occasionally used their digging sticks to kill small animals for food.²⁵⁷ Hunting methods could be cruel. Mbuti pygmies would stab an elephant in the belly with a poisoned spear; the animal would then die of peritonitis (inflammation of the abdominal lining) during the next 24 hours.²⁵⁸ The Bushmen shot game with poisoned arrows, and the animals died slowly over a period that could be as long as three days.²⁵⁹ Prehistoric hunter-gatherers slaughtered animals on a mass basis by driving herds over cliffs or bluffs.²⁶⁰ The process was fairly gruesome and presumably was painful to the animals, since some of them were not killed outright by their fall but only disabled. The Indian Wooden Leg said: “I have helped in the chasing of antelope bands over a cliff. Many of them were killed or got broken legs. We clubbed to death the injured ones.”²⁶¹ This is not exactly the kind of thing that appeals to animal-rights activists. Anarchoprimitivists may want to claim that hunter-gatherers inflicted suffering on animals only to the extent that they had to do so in order to get meat. But this is not true. A good deal of hunter-gatherers’ cruelty was gratuitous. In *The Forest People*, Turnbull reported:

“The youngster had speared [the sindula] with his first thrust, pinning the animal to the ground through the fleshy part of the stomach. But the animal was still very much alive, fighting for freedom. Maipe put another spear into its neck, but it still writhed and fought. Not until a third spear pierced its heart did it give up the struggle . . .

“The pygmies stood around in an excited group, pointing at the dying animal and laughing. One boy, about nine years old, threw himself on the ground and curled up in a grotesque heap and imitated the sindula’s last convulsions . . .

²⁵⁵ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 35. 58. 79. 179; *Wayward Servants*, pages 165, 168. Schebesta. I. Band. page 68. Coon, page 71.

²⁵⁶ Coon, page 156.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pages 156, 158, 196.

²⁵⁸ Turnbull, *Change and Adaptation*, page 20; *Wayward Servants*, page 164. Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 107–111. describes other cruel methods of killing elephants.

²⁵⁹ Thomas, pages 94. 190.

²⁶⁰ Wissler, pages 14. 270. Coon, page 88.

²⁶¹ Marquis, page 88.

“At other times I have seen Pygmies singeing feathers off birds that were still alive, explaining that the meat is more tender if death comes slowly. And the hunting dogs, valuable as they are, get kicked around mercilessly from the day they are born to the day they die.”²⁶²

A few years later, in *Wayward Servants*, Turnbull wrote: “The moment of killing is best described as a moment of intense compassion and reverence. The fun that is sometimes subsequently made of the dead animal, particularly by the youths, appears to be almost a nervous reaction, and there is an element of fear in their behavior. On the other hand, a bird caught alive may deliberately be toyed with, its feathers singed off over the fire while it is still fluttering and squawking until it is finally burned or suffocated to death. This again is usually done by the youths who take the same nervous pleasure in the act; very rarely a young hunter may absent-mindedly [!?] do the same thing. Older hunters and elders generally disapprove, but do not interfere.”; “The respect seems to be not for animal life but for the game as a gift of the forest . . .”²⁶³ This does not seem entirely consistent with what Turnbull reported earlier in *The Forest People*. Maybe Turnbull was already beginning to swing toward political correctness when he wrote *Wayward Servants*. But even if we take the statements of *Wayward Servants* at face value, the fact remains that the Mbuti did treat animals with unnecessary cruelty, whether or not they felt “compassion and reverence” for them. If the Mbuti did have compassion for animals, they were probably exceptional in that regard. Hunter-gatherers seem typically to be callous toward animals. The Eskimos with whom Gontran de Poncins lived kicked and beat their dogs brutally.²⁶⁴ The Siriono sometimes captured young animals alive and brought them back to camp, but they gave them nothing to eat, and the animals were treated so roughly by the children that they soon died.²⁶⁵ It should be noted that many hunting-and-gathering peoples did have a sense of reverence for or closeness to wild animals. I’ve already quoted Colin Turnbull’s statement to that effect in the case of the Mbuti. Coon states that “it is virtually a standard rule among hunters that they should never mock or otherwise insult any wild creature whose life they have brought to an end.”²⁶⁶ (As the passages I’ve quoted from Turnbull show, there were exceptions to this “standard rule”.) Venturing into speculation, Coon adds that “hunters sense the unity of nature and the combination of humility and responsibility of

²⁶² Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 101. Schebesta. II. Band, I. Teil, page 90, also states that the Mbuti kicked their hunting dogs.

²⁶³ Turnbull. *Wayward Servants*, page 161.

²⁶⁴ Poncins, pages 29, 30, 49, 189, 196, 198–99, 212, 216.

²⁶⁵ Holmberg, pages 69–70, 208.

²⁶⁶ Coon, page 119.

their role in it.”²⁶⁷ Wissler describes the closeness to and reverence toward nature (including wild animals) of the North American Indians.²⁶⁸ Holmberg mentions the Siriono’s “bonds” and “kinship” with the animal world.²⁶⁹ But, as we’ve already seen, these “bonds” and this “kinship” did not prevent physical cruelty to animals. Clearly, animal-rights activists would be horrified at the way hunter-gatherers often treated animals. For people who look to hunting and gathering cultures as their social ideal, it therefore makes no sense to maintain alliances with the animal-rights movement.

9. To mop up as it were, I’ll mention briefly a few other elements of the anarchoprimitivist myth. According to the myth, racism is an artifact of civilization. But it’s not clear that this is actually true. Of course, most primitive peoples couldn’t be racists, because they never came in contact with any member of a race different from their own. But where contacts between different races did occur, I’m not aware of any reason to believe that hunter-gatherers were less prone to racism than modern man is. The Mbuti pygmies were distinguishable from their village-dwelling neighbors not only by their shorter stature but also by their facial features and by the lighter color of their skin.²⁷⁰ The Mbuti referred to the villagers as “black savages” and “animals”, and did not consider them to be real people.²⁷¹ The villagers similarly referred to the Mbuti as “savages” and “animals”, nor did they consider the Mbuti to be real people.²⁷² It’s true that the villagers often took Mbuti wives, but this seems to have been only because their own women, in the forest environment, had very low fertility, whereas Mbuti women bore plenty of children.²⁷³ First-generation offspring of mixed marriages were considered inferior.²⁷⁴ (Worth noting is that while Mbuti women often married villagers and lived in the villages, villager women hardly ever married Mbuti men, because the women “shunned the hard Gypsy life of the forest nomads and preferred the settled village life.”²⁷⁵ Moreover, the mixed-blood offspring of Mbuti-villager unions usually remained in the villages and “only rarely found their way back to the forest, because they preferred the more comfortable village life to the tough life of the forest.”²⁷⁶ This is hardly consistent with the anarchoprimitivists’

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Wissler, pages 124, 304–06.

²⁶⁹ Holmberg, pages 111, 195.

²⁷⁰ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 14, 33. Schebesta, I. Band, passim, e.g., pages 107, 181–84, 355.

²⁷¹ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 47, 120, 167; *Wayward Servants*, pages 61, 82; *Change and Adaptation*, page 92.

²⁷² Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 47, 234.

²⁷³ Schebesta, I. Band, pages 106–07, 137.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., page 107.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., page 108.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., page 110.

image of the hunter-gatherer's life as one of ease and plenty.) In the foregoing case of mutual racial antagonism only one side – the Mbuti – consisted of hunter-gatherers, the villagers being cultivators of crops. For a possible example of racism in which both sides were hunter-gatherers, the Indians of the North American subarctic and the Eskimos hated and feared one another; they seldom met except to fight.²⁷⁷ How about homophobia? That wasn't unknown among hunter-gatherers either. According to Mrs. Thomas, homosexuality was not permitted among the Bushmen whom she knew²⁷⁸ (though it does not necessarily follow that this was true of all Bushman groups). Among the Mbuti, according to Turnbull, "homosexuality is never alluded to except as a great insult, under the most dire provocation."²⁷⁹

The publisher of the anarchoprimitivist "zine" *Species Traitor* stated in a letter to me that in hunter-gatherer cultures "people had no property."²⁸⁰ This is not true. Various forms of private property did exist among hunter-gatherers – and not only among sedentary ones like the Northwest Coast Indians. It is well known that most hunting-and-gathering peoples had collective property in land. That is, each band of 30 to 130 people owned the territory in which it lived. Coon provides an extended discussion of this.²⁸¹ It is less well known that hunter-gatherers, even nomadic ones, could also hold rights to natural resources as individual property, and in some cases such rights could even be inherited.²⁸² For example, among Mrs. Thomas's Bushmen: "Each group has a very specific territory which that group alone may use, and they respect their boundaries rigidly. If a person is born in a certain area he or she has a right to eat the melons that grow there and all the veld food. A man may eat the melons wherever his wife can and wherever his father and mother could, so that every Bushman has in this way some kind of rights in many places. Gai, for example, ate melons at Ai a ha'o because his wife's mother was born there, as well as at his own birthplace, the Okwa Omaramba."²⁸³

Among the Veddas (hunter-gatherers of Ceylon), "the band territory was subdivided for individual band members, who could pass their property on to their children."²⁸⁴ Among certain Australian Aborigines there existed a system of inherited rights to goods obtained in trade for stones extracted from a quarry.²⁸⁵ Among

²⁷⁷ Wissler, page 221. See also Poncins, page 165 (Eskimo kills two Indians), and *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 13, article "American Peoples, Native", page 360 (subarctic Indians fight Eskimos).

²⁷⁸ Thomas, page 87.

²⁷⁹ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 122.

²⁸⁰ Letter to the author from publisher of *Species Traitor*, 4/7 /03, page 7.

²⁸¹ Coon, pages 191–95.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, page 194.

²⁸³ Thomas, pages 10, 82–83. See also Cashdan, page 41.

²⁸⁴ Cashdan, page 41. See also Coon, page 198.

some other Australian Aborigines, certain fruit trees were privately owned.²⁸⁶ The Mbuti used termites as food, and among them termite hills could be owned by individuals.²⁸⁷ Portable items such as tools, clothing, and ornaments usually were owned by individual hunter-gatherers.²⁸⁸

Turnbull mentions the argument of one W. Nippold to the effect that hunter-gatherers, including the Mbuti, had a highly developed sense of private property. Turnbull counters that this is “debatable point, and largely a semantic problem.”²⁸⁹ Here there is no need for us to split hairs about what does and what does not constitute private property, or what would be a “highly developed sense” of it. Suffice it to say that the unqualified belief that hunter-gatherers did not have private property is only another element of the anarchoprimitivist myth. It’s important to note, however, that nomadic hunter-gatherers did not accumulate property to the extent of being able to use their wealth to dominate other people.²⁹⁰ The hunter-gatherer ordinarily had to carry all of his property on his own back whenever he shifted camp, or at best he had to carry it in a canoe or on a dog-sled or travois.²⁹¹ By any of these means only a limited amount of property can be transported, hence an upper bound is imposed on the amount of property that a nomad can usefully accumulate.

Property in rights to natural resources does not need to be transported so in theory even a nomadic hunter-gatherer could accumulate an unlimited amount of that kind of property. But in practice I am not aware of any instance in which anyone belonging to a nomadic hunting-and-gathering band accumulated enough property in rights to natural resources to enable him to dominate other people by means of it. Under the conditions of the nomadic hunting-and-gathering life, it would obviously be very difficult for any individual to enforce an exclusive right to more natural resources than he could utilize personally. Given the absence of accumulated wealth among nomadic hunter-gatherers, it might be supposed that there would be no social hierarchies among the latter, but this is not quite true. Clearly there is not much room for social hierarchy in a nomadic band that contains at most 130 people (including children), and typically well under half that number. Moreover, some hunting-and-gathering peoples made a conscious, consistent, and apparently quite successful effort to prevent anyone from setting

²⁸⁵ Coon, page 275.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., page 168.

²⁸⁷ Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 14,21–22,275–76.

²⁸⁸ Cashdan, page 40. See also *ibid.*, page 37, and Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 276–78.

²⁸⁹ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 199 (footnote 5).

²⁹⁰ See Coon, page 268. Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, pages 8, 18, remarks on the Mbuti’s lack of interest in accumulating wealth.

²⁹¹ See Coon, pages 57–67.

himself or herself up above the level of the others. For example, among the Mbuti, there were “no chiefs or councils of elders,”²⁹² “Individual authority is unthinkable,”²⁹³ and “any attempt at the assumption of individual authority, or even of excessive influence, is sharply countered by ridicule or ostracism.”²⁹⁴ In fact, Turnbull emphasizes throughout his books the Mbuti’s zeal in opposing the assumption by anyone of an elevated status.²⁹⁵

The Indians of sub-arctic North America had no chiefs.²⁹⁶ The Siriono did have chiefs, but: “The prerogatives of chieftainship are few. A chief 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”; “In general, however, chiefs fare better than other members of the band. Their requests more frequently bear fruit than those of others.”²⁹⁷

The Bushmen whom Mrs. Thomas knew “have no chiefs or kings, only headmen who in function are virtually indistinguishable from the people they lead, and sometimes a band will not even have a headman.”²⁹⁸ Richard Lee’s Kung Bushmen had no chiefs,²⁹⁹ and like the Mbuti they made a conscious effort to prevent anyone from setting himself up above the others.³⁰⁰ However, some other Kung Bushmen did have chiefs or headmen, the headmanship was hereditary, and the headmen had real authority, for the “headman or chief decides who shall go where and when on collecting expeditions, because the timing of the yearly round is critical to ensure the food supply.”³⁰¹ This is what Coon says about the Bushmen in the area of the Gautscha water hole, and since Mrs. Thomas knew these Bushmen,³⁰² it’s not clear how one would reconcile Coon’s statement with her remark that “headmen in function are virtually indistinguishable from the people the lead.” I don’t have access to proper library facilities; I don’t even have a complete copy

²⁹² Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 14.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, page 181.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 228.

²⁹⁵ Turnbull, *Forest People*, pages 110, 125; *Wayward Servants*, pages 27, 28, 42, 178–181, 183, 187, 256, 274, 294, 300. Schebesta, II. Band, I. Teil, page 8, says that the Mbuti lacked any inclination to be domineering (Herrschaft).

²⁹⁶ *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 13, article “American Peoples, Native”, page 360.

²⁹⁷ Holmberg, pages 148–49.

²⁹⁸ Thomas, page 10.

²⁹⁹ Coon, page 238.

³⁰⁰ Bonvillain, pages 20–21.

³⁰¹ Coon, page 210.

³⁰² Thomas, e.g., pages 146–47, 199.

of Mrs. Thomas's book, only photocopies of some pages, so I'll have to leave this problem to any reader who may be sufficiently interested to take it up.

Be that as it may, in some parts of Australia there were "powerful chiefs, whom the settlers called kings. The king wore a very elaborate turban crown and was always carried on the shoulders of the men."³⁰³ In Tasmania too there were "territorial chiefs of considerable power, and in some cases at least their office was hereditary."³⁰⁴

Thus, while social stratification was absent or slight in many or most nomadic hunting-and-gathering societies, the sweeping assumption that all hierarchy was absent in all such societies is not true.

It is commonly assumed, and not only by anarchoprimitivists, that hunter-gatherer were good conservationists. On this subject I don't have much information, but from what I do know it seems that hunter-gatherers had a mixed record as conservationists. The Mbuti look very good. Schebesta believed that they had voluntarily limited their population in order to avoid overburdening their natural resources³⁰⁵ (though, at least in the part of his work that I have read, he does not explain his grounds for this belief). According to Turnbull, "there is very definitely a strongly felt and stated urge to use every part of the animal, and never to kill more than is necessary for the band's needs for the day. This is in fact may be one reason why the Mbuti are so reluctant to kill an excess of game and preserve it for exchange with the villagers."³⁰⁶

Turnbull also states that "in the view of mammalogists such as Van Gelder the [Mbuti] hunters are indeed the finest conservationists any conservation-minded government could wish for."³⁰⁷ On the other hand, when Turnbull took an Mbuti named Kenge to visit a game preserve out on the plains, Kenge was told "that he would see more game than he had ever seen in the forest, but he was not to try and hunt any. Kenge could not understand this, because to his mind game is meant to be hunted."³⁰⁸ According to Coon, the ethic of the Tikerarmiut Eskimos forbade them to trap more than four wolves, wolverines, foxes, or marmots on any one day. However, this ethic quickly broke down when white traders arrived and tempted the Tikerarmiut with trade goods that they could obtain in exchange for the pelts of the animals named.³⁰⁹

³⁰³ Coon. page 253.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., page 251.

³⁰⁵ Schebesta. I. Band, page 106.

³⁰⁶ Turnbull, *Wayward Servants*, page 161.

³⁰⁷ Turnbull. *Change and Adaptation*. page 18.

³⁰⁸ Turnbull, *Forest People*, page 250.

³⁰⁹ Coon, page 104.

As soon as they acquired steel axes, the Siriono began destroying the wild fruit trees of their region because it was easier to harvest the fruit by cutting the tree down than by climbing it.³¹⁰

It is well known that some hunter-gatherers intentionally set wildfires because they knew that burned-over land would produce more of the edible plants that they favored.³¹¹ I consider this practice recklessly destructive. It is believed that prehistoric hunter-gatherers, through over-hunting, caused or at least contributed to the extinction of some species of large mammals,³¹² though as far as I know this has never been definitely proved. The foregoing doesn't even scratch the surface of the question of conservation versus environmental recklessness on the part of hunter-gatherers. It's a question that deserves thorough investigation.

10. I can't generalize broadly since I've communicated personally with only a few anarchoprimitivists, but it's clear that the beliefs of at least some anarchoprimitivists are impervious to any facts that conflict with them. One can point out to these people any number of facts of the kind I've presented here and quote the words of writers who actually visited hunter-gatherers at a time when the latter were still relatively unspoiled, yet the true-believing anarchoprimitivist will always find rationalizations, no matter how strained, to discount all inconvenient facts and maintain his belief in the myth.

One is reminded of the response of fundamentalist Christians to any rational attack on their beliefs. Whatever facts one may point out, the fundamentalist will always find some argument, however far-fetched, to explain them away and justify his belief in the literal, word-for-word truth of the Bible. Actually, there is about anarchoprimitivism a distinct flavor of early Christianity. The anarchoprimitivists' hunting-and-gathering utopia corresponds to the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived in ease and without sin (Genesis 2). The invention of agriculture and civilization corresponds to the Fall: Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of knowledge (Genesis 3:6), were cast out of the Garden (Genesis 3:24), and thereafter had to earn their bread with the sweat of their brow by tilling the soil (Genesis 3: 19,23). They moreover lost gender equality, since Eve became subordinate to her husband (Genesis 3:16). The revolution that anarchoprimitivists hope will overthrow civilization corresponds to the Day of Judgment, the day of destruction on which Babylon will fall (Revelation 18:2). The return to primitive utopia corresponds to the arrival of the Kingdom of God,

³¹⁰ Hotmberg, pages 63–64. 268.

³¹¹ E.g., *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article "Biosphere", pages 1191,1197; Mercader, pages 2, 235, 238, 241. 282. 306. 309. On other reckless use of fire, see Coon. page 6.

³¹² Mercader, page 233. *Encycl. Brit.*, Vol. 14, article "Biosphere", pages 1159, 1196; Vol. 23, article "Mammals", pages 435,448.

wherein “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Revelation 21:4).

Today’s activists who risk their bodies by engaging in masochistic resistance tactics, such as chaining themselves across roads to prevent the passage of logging trucks, correspond to the Christian martyrs—the true believers who “were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God” (Revelation 20:4). Veganism corresponds to the dietary restrictions of many religions, such as the Christian fast during Lent. Like anarchoprimitivists, the early Christians emphasized egalitarianism (“whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased”, Matthew 23:12) and sharing (“distribution was made unto every man according as he had need”, Acts 4:35). The psychological affinity between anarchoprimitivism and early Christianity does not augur well. As soon as the emperor Constantine gave the Christians an opportunity to become powerful they sold out, and ever since then Christianity, more often than not, has served as a prop for the established powers.

11. In the present article I’ve been mainly concerned to debunk the anarchoprimitivist myth, and for that reason I’ve emphasized certain aspects of primitive societies that will be seen as negative from the standpoint of modern values. But there is another side to this coin: Nomadic hunting-and-gathering societies showed many traits that were highly attractive. Among other things, there is reason to believe that such societies were relatively free of the psychological problems that bedevil modern man, such as chronic stress, anxiety or frustration, depression, eating and sleep disorders, and so forth; that people in such societies, in certain critically important respects (though not in all respects) had far more personal autonomy than modern man does; and that hunter-gatherers were better satisfied with their way of life than modern man is with his.

Why does this matter? Because it shows that chronic stress, anxiety and frustration, depression, and so forth, are not inevitable parts of the human condition, but are disorders brought on by modern civilization. Nor is servitude an inevitable part of the human condition: The example of at least some nomadic hunter-gatherer shows that true freedom is possible. Even more important: Regardless of whether they were good conservationists or poor ones, primitive peoples were incapable of damaging their environment to anything remotely approaching the extent to which modern man is damaging his. Primitives simply didn’t have the power to do that much damage. They may have used fire recklessly and they may have exterminated some species through overhunting, but they had no way to dam large rivers, to cover thousands of square miles of the Earth’s surface with cities and pavement, or to produce the vast quantities of toxic chemicals and radioactive waste with which modern civilization threatens to ruin the world for good and all. Nor did primitives have any means of releasing the deadly-

dangerous forces represented by genetic engineering and by the super-intelligent computers that may soon be developed. These are dangers that scare even the technophiles themselves.³¹³ So I agree with the anarchoprimitivists that the advent of civilization was a great disaster and that the Industrial Revolution was an even greater one. I further agree that a revolution against modernity, and against civilization in general, is necessary. But you can't build an effective revolutionary movement out of soft-headed dreamers, lazies, and charlatans. You have to have tough-minded, realistic, practical people, and people of that kind don't need the anarchoprimitivists' mushy utopian myth.

Concluding Note

When I wrote this article I had only begun to read *II. Band, I. Teil* [vol. 2, part 1] of Schebesta's *Die Bambuti-Pygmien vom Ituri*. Since reading the latter, and owing to the nature of the discrepancies that I found between Turnbull's account and that of Schebesta, I've been forced to entertain serious doubts about the reliability of Turnbull's work on the Mbuti pygmies. I now suspect that Turnbull consciously or unconsciously slanted his description of the Mbuti to make them appear more attractive to modern leftish intellectuals like himself. However, I do not consider it necessary now to rewrite this article in such a way as to eliminate the reliance on Turnbull, because I've cited Turnbull mainly for information that makes the Mbuti appear unattractive, e.g., for their wife-beating, fighting, and quarreling over food. Given the nature of Turnbull's bias, it seems safe to assume that, if anything, he would have understated the amount of wife-beating, fighting, and quarreling that he observed. But I think it is only fair to warn the reader that where Turnbull ascribes attractive or politically correct traits to the Mbuti, a certain degree of skepticism may be in order. I would like to thank a number of people who sent me books, articles, or other information pertaining to primitive societies, and without whose help the present article could not have been written: Facundo Bermudez, Chris J., Maijorie Kennedy, Alex Obledo, Patrick Scardo, Kevin Tucker, John Zerzan, and six other people who perhaps would not want their names to be mentioned publicly. But most of all I want to thank the woman I love, who provided me with more useful information than anyone else did, including two volumes of Paul Schebesta's wonderful work on the Mbuti pygmies.

³¹³ see Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us", *Wired* magazine. April 2000; and *Our Final Century*, by the British Astronomer Royal, Sir Martin Rees.

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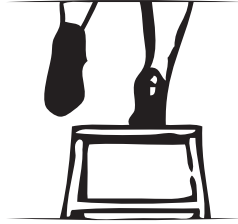
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