

Chapter IV. Primitive society, civilization and the ancient master drama

Section 1. Goods procurement in primitive society

Nutrition procurement, storage and rhythms in primitive life

Zoological systems, animals and humans, need oxygen to survive; this was normally no problem. They also need, as we stated, nutrition; this was a sizable problem and animals and humans were almost permanently preoccupied with procuring the next in-soak of nutrition. Humans also have certain narrative needs and desires, e.g., for symbolic and positional representation, included already in “that early and rude state of society”,¹ which Adam Smith used as a theoretical oppositional starting point to the modern economy (in much the same way as social philosophers, e.g., Hobbes, Locke, and Kant, used the *status naturalis* as opposed to the civilized state). In the “natural” state, there was still a direct relationship between each man, or rather between original groups of men – families and tribes – and nature. Survival depended upon a favorable habitat, in terms of geography and climate. Edible goods (or goods usable for clothing or shelter) were offered by nature, but they first had to be found, gathered, or hunted. Supply was often unreliable, sometimes through catastrophes, weather, and competing animal or human nutrition seekers. Putrefaction occurred. The greatest danger came from *humans* or from neighboring tribes robbing stored food and animals, or even taking over the territory.

If habitats were rich and generous, primitive hunters and gatherers could, like animals, hunt or gather depending on whether their bellies were full or empty. Habitats in which such permanent richness existed were, though, few. Mostly food procurement rhythms followed necessities dictated by the hunted prey and the gathered plants. As in this case food did not come in just-in-time to be consumed, preservation and storing technologies – keeping it from spoilage, protecting it against unwelcome guests like insects and animals – became a great issue. The nature of the prey and plants (and, sometimes, predator-prey-dynamics) and the combined skills

1 *Smith, Wealth of Nations, book I chapter VI first line.*

of hunting, gathering, and storage would at this evolutionary stage determine the rhythms of expeditions of nutrition procurement and of idleness or leisure, as well as the capacity of a horde, tribe, or settlement to survive.

Impact of the neolithic

People have been drawn together in small settlements since the Neolithic revolution; gatherers became farmers, and hunters became cattle breeders etc. As food was now being grown or pastured, its arrival could be more reliably planned for. More importantly, compared to itinerant hordes, nutrition production grew in quantity and quality thanks to technical improvements and to the division of labor. Craftsmanship developed and discoveries, innovations, and inventions were made, if terribly slowly compared to the speed they acquired since the 18th century. Nutrition production also became less dependent on individual success when making a kill or finding plants. As prey were domesticated, bred, raised, and slaughtered and plants were seeded, cultivated and harvested, nutrition production became, yet, more dependent on the rhythms resulting from the inclination of the earth axis, i.e., seasons, and from the different stages of animal life. Farmers must normally work on their fields and with their domesticated animals throughout the whole year, but what they are doing – preparing and fertilizing the soil, building and repairing irrigation systems, seeding, fighting against pests and vermin, harvesting, and further processing grains or vegetables – is seasonal or determined by stages of animal growth, accidental weather or natural catastrophes.

Section 2. Primitive society and civilization

The small step from exchange to capitalism

Societies did not remain consigned to small villages of families and tribes after the Neolithic Age. Larger towns and cities evolved at many places, e.g., the bronze-age Egyptian Civilization around the Nile River, the Harappa Civilization (or IVC, Indus Valley Civilization), and the Mesopotamia civilization in the Tigris-Euphrates-river-system, each around the third and second millennium BC. The Greek, Roman, or Chinese civilizations were born somewhat thereafter. Roughly in parallel, private ownership of the means of production, and of land in particular, was established, and exchange, money, profit economies, the state, law, philosophy, and monotheistic religions surfaced.

In particular, the economic system took off and quickly transmuted into ancient capitalism. We have defined the economic system not by a purpose or a physical result – goods procurement – but by a certain *mode of operation*, negatively in terms of