The Original Affluent Society

Marshall Sahlins

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

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

For there are two possible courses to affluence. Wants may be "easily satisfied" either by producing much or desiring little. The familiar conception, the Galbraithian way, makes assumptions peculiarly appropriate to market economies: that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improvable; thus, the gap between means and ends can be narrowed by industrial productivity, at least to the point that "urgent goods" become plentiful. But there is also a Zen road to affluence, departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants

are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole ade-
quate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material
plenty—with a low standard of living.
That, I think, describes the hunters. And it helps explain some of their more
serious economic behavior: their "prodigality" for example—the incli-
nation to consume as once all stocks on hand, as if they had it made. Free from
market obsessions of scarcity, hunters' economic propensities may be more
consistently predicated on abundance than ours own. Desult de Tracy, "fish-
blooded bourgeois doctrinaire" though he might have been, has least compelled
Marx's agreement on the observation that "in poor nations the people are com-
fortable," whereas in rich nations "they are generally poor."
This is not to deny that a preagricultural economy operates under serious
constraints, but only to insist, on the evidence from modern hunters and gath-
erers, that a successful accommodation is usually made. After taking up the
pragmatism, I shall return in the end to the real difficulties of hunting-gathering
economy, none of which are correctly specified in current formulas of pale-
olithic poverty.

Sources of the Misconception

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

The aboriginal Australians are a classic example of a people whose
economic resources are of the scantiest. In many places their habitat
is even more severe than that of the Bushmen, although this is per-
haps not quite true in the northern portion. . . . A tabulation of the
foodstuffs which the aborigines of northwest central Queensland ex-
tact from the country they inhabit is instructive. . . . The variety in
this list is impressive, but we must not be deceived to thinking that
variety indicates plenty, for the available quantitite of each element in
it are so slight that only the most intense application makes survival
possible. (Herskovits 1952:66–69)

Or again, in reference to South American hunters:

The nomadic hunters and gatherings barely meet minimum subsistence
needs and often fall short of them. Their population of 1 person

to 10 or 20 square miles reflects this. Constantly on the move in
search of food, they clearly lacked the leisure hours for nonsubsis-
tence activities of any significance, and they could transport little of
what they might manufacture in spare moments. To them, adequacy
of production meant physical survival, and they rarely had surplus of
either products or time. (Steward and Foran 1959:60; cf. Clark
1953:27; Ta Haury 1962:113; Hoebel 1958:188; Redfield 1953:5;
White 1959)

But the traditional disim equilibrium of the hunters' fix is also preanthropological
and extra-archaeological, at once historical and referable to the larger eco-
nomic context in which anthropology operates. It goes back to the time Adam
Smith was writing, and probably to a time before anyone was writing.1
 Probably it was one of the first distinctly neolithic prejudices, an ideological
appreciation of the hunter's capacity to exploit the earth's resources must con-
genial to the historic task of depriving him of the same. We must have inher-
ted it with the seed of Jacob, which "spread abroad to the west, and to the east,
and to the north," so the disadvantage of Easu who was the elder son and can-
ning hunter, but in a famous scene deprived of his birthright.

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

Is it so paradoxical to contend that hunters have affluent economies, their
absolute poverty notwithstanding? Modern capitalist societies, however richly
endowed, dedicate themselves to the proposition of scarcity. Inadequacy of
economic means is the first principle of the world's wealthiest peoples. The
parent material status of the economy seems to be so due to its accomplish-
ments; something has to be said for the mode of economic organisation (cf.

The market-industrial system invests scarcity, in a manner completely
paralleled and to a degree nowhere else approximated. Where production
and distribution are arranged through the behavior of prices, and all liveli-
hoods depend on getting and spending, insufficiency of material means be-
comes the explicit, calculable starting point of all economic activity.2 The en-
trepreneur is confronted with alternative investments of a finite capital, the
worker (hopefully) with alternative choices of remunerative employ, and the
consumer. . . . Consumption is a double tragedy: what begins in inadequacy
will end in deprivation. Bringing together an international division of labor,
the market makes available a dazzling array of products: all these Good Things
within a man’s reach—but never all within his grasp. Worse, in this game of consumer free choice, every acquisition is simultaneously a deprivation, for every purchase of something is a foregoing of something else, in general only marginally less desirable, and in some particulars more desirable, that could have been had instead. (The point is that if you buy one automobile, say a Plymouth, you cannot also have the Ford—and I judge from current television commercials that the deprivations entailed would be more than just material.)

That sentence of “life at hard labor” was passed uniquely upon us. Scarcity is the judgment decreed by our economy—so also the axiom of our Economics: the application of scarce means against alternative ends to derive the most satisfaction possible under the circumstances. And it is primarily from this axiom that we look back upon hunters. But if modern man, with all his technological advantages, still hasn’t got the wherewithal, what chance has this naked savage with his puny bow and arrows? Having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools, we judge his situation hopeless in advance. Yes scarcity is not an intrinsic property of technical means. It is a relation between means and ends. We should entertain the empirical possibility that hunters are in business for their health, a finite objective, and that bow and arrow are adequate to that end.

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

The anthropological disposition to exaggerate the economic inefficiency of hunters appears notably by way of inevitable comparison with neolithic economies. Hunters, as Llewellyn W. Thomas puts it, “must work much harder in order to live than tillers and breeders” (1966:13). This point evolutionary anthropologists in particular found it congenial, even necessary theoretically, to adopt the usual tone of reproach. Anthropologists and archaeologists had become neolithic revolutionaries, and in their enthusiasm for the Revolution spared nothing denouncing the Old (Stone Age) Regime. Including some very old scandal. It was not the first time philosophers would relish the earliest stage of humanism rather than to culture (A man who spends his whole life following animals just to kill them to eat, or moving from one berry patch to another, is really living just like an animal himself” (Braidwood 1957:122]).

The hunters thus downgraded, anthropology was free to extol the Neolithic Great Leap Forward: a main technological advance that brought about a "general availability of leisure through release from purely food-getting pursuits" (Braidwood 1952:5; cf. Boas 1940:285).

In an influential essay on “Energy and the Evolution of Culture,” Leslie White explained that the neolithic generated a "great advance in cultural development... as a consequence of the great increase in the amount of energy
to the domesticated plant and animal resource of neolithic culture."

This determination of the energy sources at once permitted a precise low estimate of the energy and natural resources—energy and materials—that the body need to sustain itself, what is called the human body, which it is obvious that we could not work or produce without human power, and the energy needs of human power, and the energy needs of human power, of human beings, of human beings, as transformed in both cases from plant and animal sources, so that, with negligible exceptions (the occasional direct use of nonhuman power), the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year is the same in paleolithic and neolithic economies—and fairly constant in human history until the advent of the industrial revolution.

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

First, it provides singular opportunities for naïveté. The remote and exotic environments that have become the cultural theater of modern historians have had an effect on Europeans most unfavorable to the latter’s assessment of the former’s plight. Marginal as the Australian or Kalahari desert is to agriculture, or to everyday European experience, it is a source of wonder to the untutored observer “how anybody could live in a place like this.” The inference that the natives manage to eke out a bare existence is apt to be reinforced by their marvelously varied diets (cf. Herskovits 1952, quoted above). Ordinarily including objects deemed repulsive and indecent by Europeans, this local cuisine lends itself to the supposition that the people are starving to death. Such a conclusion, of course, is more likely react in earlier than to later accounts, and in the journals of explorers or missionaries that in the monographs of anthropologists but precisely because the explorers’ reports are older and closer to the aboriginal condition. It is as though one were to remember some certain respect.

Such respect obviously has to be accorded with discretion. Greater attention should be paid a man such as Sir George Grey (1841), whose expeditions in the 1830s included some of the poorer districts of western Australia, but whose unusually close attention to the local people obliged him to debunk his colleagues’ communications on just this point of economic desperation. It is a
mistake very commonly made, Grey wrote, to suppose that the native Australians "have small means of subsistence, or are at times greatly pressed for want of food." Many and "almost ludicrous" are the errors travellers have fallen into in this regard. They hunger in their journals that the unfortunate Aborigines should be reduced by famine to the miserable necessity of subsisting on certain sorts of food, which they have found near their huts; whereas, in many instances, the articles thus quoted by them are those with which the natives most prize, and are really neither deficient in flavour nor nutritious qualities." To render palpable "the ignorance that has prevailed with regard to the habits and customs of this people when in their wild state," Grey provides one remarkable example, a citation from his fellow explorer, Captain Sturt, who, upon encountering a group of Aborigines engaged in gathering large quantities of mimosa gum, deduced that the "unfortunate creatures were reduced to the last extremity; and, being unable to procure any other nourishment, had been obliged to collect this mucilaginous." But, Sir George observes, the gum in question is a favorite article of food in the area, and when in season it affords the opportunity for large numbers of people to assemble and camp together, which otherwise they are unable to do. He concludes:

Generally speaking, the natives live well; in some districts there may be at particular seasons of the year a deficiency of food, but if such is the case, these tracts are, at those times, deserted. It is, however, utterly impossible for a traveller or even for a stranger native to judge whether a district affords an abundance of food, or the contrary ... But in his own district a native is very differently situated; he knows exactly what it produces, the proper time at which the several articles are in season, and the readiest means of procuring them. According to these circumstances he regulates his visits to different portions of his hunting grounds; and I can only say that I have always found the greatest abundance in their huts (Grey 1841, vol. 2:259–62, emphasis mine; cf. Eyre 1845, vol. 2:244ff.).

In making this happy assessment, Sir George took special care to exclude the lauspen-proletariat aborigines living in and about European towns (cf. Eyre 1845, vol. 2:250, 254–255). The exception is instructive. It evokes a second source of ethnographic misconceptions: the anthropology of hunters is largely an anachronistic study of ex-savages—an inquest into the corpse of one society, Grey once said, presided over by members of another.

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

Moreover, the disruption accomplished in the past two centuries of European imperialism has been especially severe, to the extent that many of the ethnographic notices that constitute the anthropologist's store of the trade in adulterated culture goods. Even explorer and missionary accounts, apart from their ethnocentric misconstructions, may be speaking of afflicted economies (cf. Service 1962). The hunters of eastern Canada of whom we read in the Jesuit Relations were committed to the fur trade in the early seventeenth century. The environments of others were selectively stripped by Europeans before reliable report could be made of indigenous production: the Eskimo we know no longer hunt whales, the Bushmen have been deprived of game, the Shoshoni's pintail has been timbered and his hunting grounds grazed out by cattle. If such peoples are now described as poverty-stricken, their resources "meager and unreliable," is this an indication of the aboriginal condition—or of the colonial deserts?

The enormous implications (and problems) for evolutionary interpretation raised by this global retreat have only recently begun to evoke notice (Lee and DeVore 1968). The point of present importance is this: rather than a fair test of hunters' productive capacities, their current circumstances pose something of a supreme test. All the more extraordinary, then, the following reports of their performance.

"A Kind of Material Plenty"

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

As the Xung come into more contact with Europeans—and this is already happening—they will feel sharply the lack of our things and will need and want more. It makes them feel inferior to be without clothes when they stand among strangers who are clothed. But in their own life and with their own artifacts they are comparatively free from material pressures. Except for food and water (important excep-
tions!) of which the Nyae Nyae !Kung have a sufficiency—but barely so, judging from the fact that all are thin though not emaci-
ted—they all had what they needed or could make what they
needed, for every man can and does make the things that men make and every woman the things that women make. . . . They lived in a
kind of material plenty because they adapted the tools of their living
to materials which lay in abundance around them and which were
free for anyone to take (wood, reeds, bone for weapons and imple-
ments, fibers for cordage, grass for shelters), or to materials which
were at least sufficient for the needs of the population. . . . The !Kung
could always use more ostrich egg shells for beads to wear or trade
with, but, as it is, enough are found for every woman to have a dozen
or more shells for water containers—all she can carry—and a goodly
number of bead ornaments. In their nomadic hunting-gathering
life, travelling from one source of food to another through the seasons,
always going back and forth between food and water, they carry their
young children and their belongings. With plenty of most materials
at hand to replace artifacts as required, the !Kung have not developed
means of permanent storage and have not needed or wanted to
cumbersome themselves with surpluses or duplicates. They do not even
want to carry one of everything. They borrow what they do not own.
With this case, they have not hoarded, and the accumulation of ob-
jects has not become associated with status. (Marshall 1961:243–44, emphasis mine)

Analysis of hunter-gatherer production is usefully divided into two spheres, as Mrs. Marshall has done. Food and water are certainly "important excep-
tions," best reserved for separate and extended treatment. For the rest, the non-
subsistence sector which is here said of the Bushmen applies in general and in
detail tohunters from the Kalahari to Labrador—or to Tierra del Fuego, where
Gusinde reports of the Yahgan that their discrimination to own more than one
copy of utensils frequently needed is "an indication of self-confidence." "Our
Fuegians," he writes, "procure and make their implements with little effort"
(1961:213).10

In the nonsubsistence sphere, the people’s wants are generally easily satis-
fied. Such "material plenty" depends partly upon the ease of production, and
that upon the simplicity of technology and democracy of property. Products
are homogenous: of stone, bone, wood—materials such as "lay in abun-
dance around them." As a rule, neither extraction of the raw material nor its
working up take strenuous effort. Access to natural resources is typically di-
rect—"free for anyone to take" even as possession of the necessary tools is gen-
eral and knowledge of the required skills common. The division of labor is
likewise simple, predominately a division of labor by sex. Add in the liberal
customs of sharing, for which hunters are properly famous, and all the people
can usually participate in the going prosperity, such as it is.

But, of course, "such as it is"; this "prosperity" depends as well upon an ob-
jectively low standard of living. It is critical that the customary quota of con-
sumables (as well as the number of consumers) be culturally set at a modest
point. A few people are pleased to consider a few easily-made things their good
fortune; some meager pieces of clothing and rather fugitive housing in most
climates.11 plus a few ornaments, spare flints and sundry other items such as the
"pieces of quartz, which native doctors have extracted from their patients" (Grey
1841, vol. 2:266); and, finally, the skin bags in which the faithful wife
carries all this, "the wealth of the Australian savage." For

Most hunters, such affluence without abundance in the nonsubsistence
sphere need not be long debated. A more interesting question is why they are
content with so few possessions—for it is with them a policy, a "manner of prin-
ciple" as Gusinde says (1961:2), and not a misfortune.

Want not, lack not. But are hunters so undemanding of material goods be-
cause they are themselves enslaved by a food quest "demanding maximum en-
ergy from a maximum number of people," so that no time or effort remains for
the provision of other comforts? Some ethnographers testify to the contrary that
the food quest is so successful that half the time the people seem not to
know what to do with themselves. On the other hand, nussenvent is a condition
of this success, more movement in some cases than others, but always enough to
rapidly deprecate the satisfactions of property. Of the hunter it is truly said that
his wealth is a burden. In his condition of life, goods can become "griev-
ously oppressive," as Gusinde observes, and the more so the longer they are
carried around. Certain food collectors do have canoes and a few have dog
sleds, but most must carry themselves all the comforts they possess, and so
only possess what they can comfortably carry themselves. Or perhaps only
what the women can carry: the men are often left free to react to the sudden
opportunity of the chase or the sudden necessity of defense. As Owen
Lattimore wrote in a not too different context, "the pure nomad is the poor
nomad." Mobility and property are in contradiction.

That wealth quickly becomes more of an encumbrance than a good thing is
apparent even to the outsider. Laurens van der Post was caught in the contra-
diction as he prepared to make farewells to his wild Bushmen friends:

This matter of presents gave us many an anxious moment. We were
humiliated by the realization of how little there was we could give to
the Bushmen. Almost everything seemed likely to make life more
difficult for them by adding to the litter and weight of their daily round. They themselves had practically no possessions: a loin strap, a skin blanket and a leather satchel. There was nothing that they could not assemble in one minute, wrap up in their blankets and carry on their shoulders for a journey of a thousand miles. They had no sense of possession. (1958:276)

A necessity so obvious to the casual visitor must be second nature to the people concerned. This modesty of material requirements is institutionalized: it becomes a positive cultural fact, expressed in a variety of economic arrangements. Lloyd Warner reports of the Mursingin, for example, that their transportability is a decisive value in the local scheme of things. Small goods are in general better than big goods. In the final analysis "the relative ease of transportation of the article" will prevail, so far as determining its price. "For the "ultimate value," Warner observes, "is freedom of movement." And to this "desire to be free from the burdens and responsibilities of objects which would interfere with the society's itinerancy," Warner attributes the Murngin's "undeveloped sense of property," and their "lack of interest in developing their technological equipment" (1966: 136-137).

Here then is another economic peculiarity—"I will not say it is general, and perhaps it is explained as well by faulty toilet training as by a trained disinterest in material accumulation: some hunters, at least, display a notable tenacity in not taking advantage of the opportunities to be shabby about their possessions. They have to the kind of necessity that would be appropriate to a people who have mastered the problems of production, even as it is maddening to a European:

They do not know how to take care of their belongings. No one dreams of putting them in order, folding them, drying or cleaning them, hanging them up, or putting them in a neat pile. If they are looking for something in particular, they rummage carelessly through the lodgepole of trivets in the little baskets. Larger objects that are piled up in a heap in the hut are dragged hither and yon with no regard for the damage that might be done them. The European observer has the impression that these [Yahgan] Indians place no value whatever on their utensils and that they have completely forgotten the effort it took to make them. Actually, no one thing in his few goods and chattels which, as it is, are often and easily lost, but just as easily replaced... The Indian does not even exercise care when he could conveniently do so. A European is likely to shake his head at the boundless indifference of these people who drag brand-new objects, precious clothing, fresh provisions, and valuable items through thick mud, or abandon them to their swift destruction by children and dogs... Expensive things that are given them are treasured for a few hours, out of curiosity; after that they thoughtlessly let everything deteriorate in the mud and wet. The less they own, the more comfortable they can travel, and what is ruined they occasionally replace. Hence, they are completely indifferent to any material possessions. (Gusinde 1961:86-87)

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

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

subsistence.

Subsistence

When Herskovits was writing his Economic Anthropology (1952), it was common anthropological practice to take the Bushmen or the native Australians as "a classic illustration of a people whose economic resources are
of the scantiest," so precariously situated that "only the most intense application makes survival possible." Today the "classic" understanding can be fairly reversed—on evidence largely from these two groups. A good case can be made that hunters and gatherers work less than we do; and, rather than a continuous travel, the food quest is intermittent, leisure abundant, and there is a greater amount of sleep in the daytime per capita per year than in any other condition of society.

Some of the substantiating evidence for Australia appears in early sources, but we are fortunate especially to have now the quantitative materials collected by the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Published in 1960, these startling data must provoke some review of the Australian reportage going back for over a century, and perhaps revisions of an even longer period of anthropological thought. The key research was a temporal study of hunting and gathering by McCarthy and McArthur (1960), coupled to McArthur's analysis of the nutritional outcome. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 summarize the principal production studies. These were short-run observations taken during nontoposoral periods. The record for Fish Creek (14 days) is longer as well as more detailed than that for Hemple Bay (7 days). Only adults' work has been reported, so far as I can tell. The diagrams incorporate information on hunting, plant collecting, preparing foods, and repairing weapons, as tabulated by the ethnographers. The people in both camps were free-ranging native Australians, living outside mission or other settlements during the period of study, although such was not necessarily their permanent or even their ordinary circumstance.¹³

One must have serious reservations about drawing general or historical inferences from the Arnhem Land data alone. Not only was the context less than pristine and the time of study too brief, but certain elements of the modern situation may have raised productivity above aboriginal levels: metal tools, for
Land hunters seem not to have been content with a "bare existence." Like other Australians (cf. Weesley 1961:173), they become dissatisfied with an unvarying diet; some of their time appears to have gone into the provision of diversity over and above mere sufficiency (McCarthy and McArthur 1960:192). In any case, the dietary intake of the Arnhem Land hunters was adequate according to the standards of the National Research Council of America. Mean daily consumption per capita at Hemple Bay was 2,160 calories only a 4 day period of observation), and at Fish Creek 2,130 calories (11 days). Table 1.1 indicates the mean daily consumption of various nutrients, calculated by McArthur in percentages of Recommended allowances.

Finally, what does the Arnhem Land study say about the famous question of leisure? It seems that hunting and gathering can afford extraordinary relief from economic cares. The Fish Creek group maintained a virtually full-time craftsman, a man 35 or 40 years old, whose true specialty however seems to have been hunting:

He did not go out hunting at all with the men, but one day he netted fish most vigorously. He then went to the Pool with his所得 bees' nests. Wilira was an expert craftsman who repaired the spears and spear-throwers, made smoking-pipes and drone-tubes, and hafted a stone axe (on request) in a skillful manner; apart from these occupations he spent most of his time talking, eating and sleeping. (McCarthy and McArthur 1960:148)

Wilira was not altogether exceptional. Much of the time spared by the Arnhem Land hunters was literally spare time, consumed in rest and sleep (see Tables 1.2 and 1.3). The main alternative to work, changing off with it in a complementary way, was sleep:

Apart from the time (mostly between definitive activities and during cooking periods) spent in general social intercourse, chatting, gossiping and so on, some hours of the daylight were also spent resting and sleeping. On the average, if the men were in camp, they usually

<table>
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<th>Table 1.1</th>
<th>Mean Daily Consumption as Percentage of Recommended Allowances (from McArthur 1960)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calories</td>
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<td>Hemple Bay</td>
<td>116</td>
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<td>Fish Creek</td>
<td>104</td>
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The failure of Arnhem Landers to "build culture" is not strictly from want of time. It is from idle hands.

So much for the plight of hunters and gatherers in Arnhem Land. As for the Bushmen, economically likened to Australian hunters by Herzkovits, two excellent recent reports by Richard Lee show their condition to be indeed the same (Lee 1968; 1969). Lee's research merits a special hearing not only because it concerns Bushmen, but specifically the Dobe section of !Kung Bushmen, adjacent to the Nyae Nyae about whose subsistence—in a context otherwise of 'material plenty'—Mrs. Marshall expressed important reservations. The Dobe occupy an area of Botswana where !Kung Bushmen have been living for at least a hundred years, but have only just begun to suffer dislocation pressures. (Metal, however, has been available to the Dobe since 1880–90.) An intensive study was made of the subsistence production of a dry season camp with a population (41 people) near the mean of such settlements. The observations extended over four weeks during July and August 1964, a period of transition from more to less favorable seasons of the year, hence fairly representative, it seems, of average subsistence difficulties.

Despite a low annual rainfall (6 to 10 inches), Lee found in the Dobe area a "surprising abundance of vegetation." Food resources were "both varied and abundant," particularly the energy-rich mangetti nuts—"so abundant that millions of the nuts rotted on the ground each year for want of picking" (all references in Lee 1969:59). His reports on time spent in food-getting are remarkably close to the Arnhem Land observations. Table 1.4 summarizes Lee's data.

The Bushman figures imply that one man's labor in hunting and gathering will support four or five people. Taken at face value, Bushman food collecting is more efficient than French farming in the period up to World War II, when more than 20 percent of the population were engaged in feeding the rest. Confessedly, the comparison is misleading, but not as misleading as it is astonishing. In the total population of free-ranging Bushmen contacted by Lee, 61.3 percent (152 of 248) were effective food producers; the remainder were too young or too old to contribute importantly. In the particular camp under scrutiny, 65 percent were "effective." Thus the ratio of food producers to the general population is actually 3 : 5 or 2 : 3. But these 65 percent of the people "worked 30 percent of the time, and 35 percent of the people did not work at all" (Lee 1969:67).

For each adult worker, this comes to about 2 1/2 days' labor per week. (In other words, each productive individual supported herself or himself and dependents and still had 3 1/2 to 5 1/2 days available for other activities.) A "day's work" was about 6 hours; hence the Dobe work week is approximately 15 hours, or an average of 2 hours 9 minutes per day. Even lower than the

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**Table 1.2**

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<td>2</td>
<td>1' 30&quot;</td>
<td>1' 0&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most of the day</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Intermittent and most of late afternoon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Most of the day</td>
<td>Several hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2' 0&quot;</td>
<td>2' 0&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>50&quot;</td>
<td>50&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Intermittent, afternoon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3' 15&quot;</td>
<td>3' 15&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>45&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Most of the day</td>
<td>2' 45&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1' 0&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1' 30&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
<td>Intermittent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

slept after lunch from an hour to an hour and a half, or sometimes even more. Also after returning from fishing or hunting they usually had a sleep, either immediately after they arrived or whilst game was being cooked. At Hemple Bay the men slept if they returned early in the day but not if they reached camp after 4.00 p.m. When in camp all day they slept at odd times and always after lunch. The women, when out collecting in the forest, appeared to rest more frequently than the men. If in camp all day, they also slept at odd times, sometimes for long periods (McCarthy and McArthur, 1960:193).
Arnhem Land norms, this figure however excludes cooking and the preparation of implements. All things considered, Bushmen subsistence labor are probably very close to those of native Australians.

Also like the Australians, the time Bushmen do not work in subsistence they pass in leisure or leisurely activity. One detects again that characteristic paleolithic rhythm of a day or two on, a day or two off—the latter passed desultorily in camp. Although food collecting is the primary productive activity, Lee writes, "the majority of the people's time (four to five days per week) is spent in other pursuits, such as resting in camp or visiting other camps" (1969:74).

A woman gathers on one day enough food to feed her family for three days, and spends the rest of her time resting in camp, doing embroidery, visiting other camps, or entertaining visitors from other camps. For each day at home, kitchen routines, such as cooking, nut cracking, collecting firewood, and fetching water occupy one to three hours of her time. This rhythm of steady work and steady leisure is maintained throughout the year. The hunters tend to work more frequently than the women, but their schedule is uneven. It is not unusual for a man to hunt avidly for a week and then do no hunting at all for two or three weeks. Since hunting is an unpredictable business and subject to magical control, hunters sometimes experience a run of bad luck and stop hunting for a month or longer. During these periods, visiting, entertaining, and especially dancing are the primary activities of men. (1968:37)

The daily per-capita subsistence yield for the Dobe Bushmen was 2,140 calories. However, taking into account body weight, normal activities, and the age-sex composition of the Dobe population, Lee estimates the people require only 1,975 calories per capita. Some of the surplus food probably went to the dogs, who are what the people left over. “The conclusion can be drawn that the Bushmen do not lead a substandard existence on the edge of starvation as has been commonly supposed” (1969:73).

Taken in isolation, the Arnhem Land and Bushmen reports mount a disconcerting if not decisive attack on the entrenched theoretical position. Artificial in construction, the former study in particular is reasonably considered equivocal. But the testimony of the Arnhem Land expedition is echoed at many points by observations made elsewhere in Australia, as well as elsewhere in the hunting-gathering world. Much of the Australian evidence goes back to the nineteenth century, some of it to quite acute observers careful to make exception of the aboriginal come into relation with Europeans, for “his food
supply is restricted, and... he is in many cases warned off from the waterholes which are the centers of his best hunting grounds" (Spencer and Gillen 1899:50).

The case is altogether clear for the well-watered areas of southeastern Australia. There the Aborigines were favored with a supply of fish so abundant and easy procured that one squatter on the Victorian scene of the 1860s had to wonder “how that sage people managed to pass their time before my party came and taught them to smoke” (Curt 1965:109). Smoking at least solved the economic problem—not anything to do: “That accomplishment fairly acquired... matters went on flowingly, their leisure hours being divided between putting the pipe to its legitimate purpose and begging my tobacco.” Somewhat more seriously, the old squatter did attempt an estimate of the amount of time spent in hunting and gathering by the people of the then Port Phillip's District. The women were away from the camp on gathering expeditions about six hours a day, “half of that time being lostier in the shade by the fire”; the men left for the hunt shortly after the women quit camp and returned around the same time (p. 118). Curt found the food thus acquired of “indifferent quality,” although “readily procured,” the six hours a day “absurdly sufficient” for the purpose; indeed the country “could have supported twice the number of Blacks we found in it” (p. 120). Very similar comments were made by another old-timer, Clement Hodgkinson, writing of an analogous environment in northeastern New South Wales. A few minutes’ fishing would provide enough fish to feed “the whole tribe” (Hodgkinson 1845:223; cf. Haile 1965:183–4). “Indeed, throughout all the country along the eastern coast, the blacks have never suffered so much from scarcity of food as many commissariers writers have supposed” (Hodgkinson 1845:227).

But the people who occupied these more fertile sections of Australia, notably in the southeast, have not been incapacitated in today's stereotype of an Aborigine. They were wiped out early. The European’s relation to such “Blackfellows” was one of conflict over the continent’s richest: little time or inclination was spared from the process of destruction for the luxury of contemplation. In the event, ethnographic consciousness would only inhibit the slim pickings: mainly interior groups, mainly desert people, mainly the Arunta. Not that the Arunta are all that bad off—ordinarily, “his life is by no means a miserable or a very hard one” (Spencer and Gillen 1899:7). But the Central tribes should not be considered, in point of numbers or ecological adaptation, typical of native Australians (cf. Meggitt 1968). The following tableau of the indigenous economy provided by John Edward Eyre, who had traversed the south coast and penetrated the Flinders range as well as joinsumed in the richer Murray district, has the right to be acknowledged at least as representative:

Throughout the greater portion of New Holland, where there do not happen to be European settlers, and invariably when fresh water can be permanently procured upon the surface, the native experiences no difficulty whatever in procuring food in abundance all the year round. It is true that the character of his diet varies with the changing seasons, and the formation of the country he inhabits; but it rarely happens that any season of the year, or any description of country does not yield him both animal and vegetable food. Of these [chief articles of food], many are not only procurable in abundance, but in such vast quantities at the proper seasons, as to afford for a considerable length of time an ample means of subsistence to many hundreds of natives congregated at one place. On many parts of the coast, and in the larger inland rivers, fish are obtained of a very fine description, and in great abundance. At Lake Victoria... I have seen six hundred natives encamped together, all of whom were living at the time upon fish procured from the lake, with the addition, perhaps, of the leaves of the metembeyan-themum. When I went amongst them I never perceived any scarcity in their camps. At Moorund, where the Murray annually inundates the flats, fresh-water cray-fish make their way to the surface of the ground... in such vast numbers that I have seen four hundred natives live upon them for weeks together, whilst the numbers spoiled or thrown away would have sustained four hundred more. An unlimited supply of fish is also procurable at the Murray about the beginning of December... The number of fish procured... in a few hours is incredible.... Another very favourite article of food, and equally abundant at a particular season of the year, in the eastern portion of the continent, is a species of moth which the natives procure from the cavities and hollows of the mountains in certain localities... The tops, leaves, and stalks of a kind of cress, gathered at the proper season of the year... furnish a favourite, and inexhaustible, supply of food for an unlimited number of natives... There are many other articles of food among the natives, equally abundant and valuable as those I have enumerated. (Eyre 1845, vol. 2:250–54.)

Both Eyre and Sir George Grey, whose sanguine view of the indigenous economy we have already noted (“I have always found the greatest abundance in their huts”) left specific assessments, in hours per day, of the Australians' subsistence labors. (This in Grey's case would include inhabitants of quite
they are like the Bushmen, who respond to the neolithic question with another: "Why should we plant, when there are so many mongomongu nuts in the world?" (Lee 1968:33). Woodburn moreover did form the impression, although as yet unsubstantiated, that Hadza actually expend less energy, and probably less time, in obtaining subsistence than do neighboring cultivators of East Africa (1968:54). To change continents but not contents, the fitful economic commitment of the South American hunter, too, could seem to the European outsider an incusable "natural disposition":

... the Yamana are not capable of continuous, daily hard labor, much to the chagrin of European farmers and employers for whom they often work. Their work is more a matter of fits and starts, and in these occasional efforts they can develop considerable energy for a certain period. After that, however, they show a desire for an incalculably long rest period during which they lie about doing nothing, without showing great fatigue. ... It is obvious that repeated irregularities of this kind make the European employer despair, but the Indian cannot help it. It is his natural disposition. (Gusinde 1961:27)11

The hunter's attitude towards farming introduces us, lastly, to a few particulars of the way they relate to the food quest. Once again we venture here into the internal realm of the economy, a realm sometimes subjective and always difficult to understand; where, moreover, hunters seem deliberately inclined to overtaxis our comprehension of customs so odd as to invite the extreme interpretation that either these people are fools or they really have nothing to worry about. The former would be a true logical deduction from the hunter's nonchalance, on the premise that his economic condition is truly exigent. On the other hand, if a livelihood is usually easily procured, if one can usually expect to succeed, then the people's seeming inprudence is no longer appear as such. Speaking to unique developments of the market economy, to its institutionalization of scarcity, Karl Polanyi12 and that our "animal dependence upon food has been barred and the naked fear of starvation permitted to run loose. Our humiliating enslavement to the material, which all human culture is designed to mitigate, was deliberately made more rigorous" (1947:115). But our problems are not theirs, the hunters and gatherers. Rather, a pristine affluence colors their economic arrangements, a trust in the abundance of nature's resources rather than despair at the inadequacy of human means. My point is that otherwise curious heathen devices become understandable by the people's confidence, a confidence which is the reasonable human attribute of a generally successful economy.13

undesirable parts of western Australia.) The testimony of these gentlemen and explorers accords very closely with the Arnhem Land averages obtained by McCarthy and McArthur. "In all ordinary seasons," wrote Grey (that is, when the people are not confined to their huts by bad weather), "they may obtain, in two or three hours, a sufficient supply of food for the day, but their usual custom is to roam indolently from spot to spot, lazily collecting it as they wander along" (1841, vol. 2:263, emphasis mine). Similarly, Eyre states: "In almost every part of the country which I have visited, where the presence of Europeans, or their stock, has not limited, or destroyed their original means of subsistence, I have found that the natives could usually, in three or four hours, procure as much food as would last for the day, and that without fatigue or labour" (1845:254-55, emphasis mine).

The same discontinuity of subsistence of labor reported by McArthur and McCarthy, the pattern of alternating search and deep, is repeated, furthermost, in early and late observations from all over the continent (Eyre 1845, vol. 2:253-54; Bulmer, in Smyth 1878, vol. 1:142; Mathew 1910:84; Spencer and Gillen 1899:32; Hart 1965:103-4). Baselow took it as the general custom of the Aboriginal: "When his affairs are working harmoniously, game secured, and water available, the aboriginal makes his life as easy as possible; and he might to the outsider even appear lazy" (1925:116).18

Meanwhile, back in Africa the Hadza have been long enjoying a comparable ease, with a burden of subsistence occupations no more strenuous in hours per day than the Bushmen or the Australian Aboriginals (Woodburn 1968). Living in an area of "exceptional abundance" of animals and regular supplies of vegetables (the vicinity of Lake Eyasi), Hadza men seem much more concerned with games of chance than with chances of game. During the long dry season especially, they pass the greater part of days on end in gambling, perhaps only to lose the metal-tipped arrows they need for big game hunting at other times. In any case, many men are "quite unprepared or unable to hunt big game even when they possess the necessary arrows." Only a small minority, Woodburn writes, are active hunters of large animals, and if women are generally more asthmous at their vegetable collecting, still it is at a leisurely pace and without prolonged labor (cf. p. 51; Woodburn 1966). Despite this nonchalance, and an only limited ecoonomic cooperation, Hadza "nonetheless obtain sufficient food without undue effort." Woodburn offers this "very rough approximation" of subsistence-labor requirement: "Over the year as a whole probably an average of less than two hours a day is spent obtaining food" (Woodburn 1968:54). Interesing that the Hadza, tutored by life and not by nature, reject the neolithic revolution in order to keep their leisure. Although surrounded by cultivators, they have until recently refused to take up agriculture, themselves, "mainly on the grounds that this would involve too much hard work."19 In this
Consider the hunter's chronic movements from camp to camp. This nomadism, often taken by us as a sign of a certain harshness, is undertaken by them with a certain abandon. The Aboriginals of Victoria, Smyth recounts, are as a rule "lazy-travellers. They have no motive to induce them to hasten their movements. It is generally late in the morning before they start on their journey, and there are many interruptions by the way" (1876, vol. 1:125; emphasis mine). The good Ptec Biard in his Relation of 1616, after a glowing description of the foods available in their season to the Micmac ("Never had Solomon his mansion better regulated and provided with food") goes on in the same tone:

In order to thoroughly enjoy this, their lot, our foresters start off on their different places with as much pleasure as if they were going on a stroll or an excursion; they do this easily through the skilful use and great convenience of canoes... so rapidly scull they that, without any effort, in good weather you can make thirty or forty leagues a day; nevertheless we scarcely see these Savages posting along at this rate, for their days are all nothing but pastime. They are never in a hurry. Quite different from us, who can never do anything without hurry and worry. . . . (Biard 1897:81–85)

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

A more serious issue is presented by the frequent and exasperated observation of a certain "lack of foresight" among hunters and gatherers. Oriented to the immediate, the hunter is forever in the present, without "the slightest thought of, or care for, what may be in the morrow." (Spencer and Gillen 1899:53), the hunter seems unwilling to reserve anything for the morrow; he must have some objective for his actions. For many hunters and gatherers, it appears, food storage cannot be proved technically impossible, nor is it certain that the people are unaware of the possibility (cf. Woodburn 1968:53). One must investigate instead what in the situation precludes the attempt. Gusinde asked this question, and for the Yahgan found the answer in the selshism justifiable optimism. Storage would be "superfluous," because throughout the entire year and with almost limitless generosily the sea puts all kinds of animals to the disposal of the man who hunts and the woman who gathers. Storm or accident will deprive a family of these things for no more than a few days. Generally no one need reckon with the danger of hunger, and everyone almost anywhere finds an abundance of what he needs. Why then should anyone worry about food for the future? . . .
Rethinking Hunters and Gatherers

Constantly under pressure of want, and yet, by travelling, easily able to supply their wants, their lives lack neither excitement or pleasure. (Smyth 1878, vol. 1:123)

Clearly, the hunting-gathering economy has to be revalued, both as to its true accomplishments and its true limitations. The procedural fault of the received wisdom was to read from the material circumstances to the economic structure, deducing the absolute difficulty of such a life from its absolute poverty. But always the cultural design improves dialectics on its relationship to nature. Without escaping the ecological constraints, culture would negate them, so that at once the system shows the impress of natural conditions and the originality of a social response—in their poverty, abundance.

What are the real handicaps of the hunting-gathering praxis? Not "low productivity of labor," if existing examples mean anything. But the economy is seriously afflicted by the insufficiency of diminishing returns. Beginning in subsistence and spreading from there to every sector, an initial success seems only to develop the probability that further efforts will yield smaller benefits. This describes the typical curve of food-getting within a particular locale. A modest number of people usually sooner or later reduce the food resources within convenient range of camp. Thereafter, they may stay on by only absorbing an increase in real costs or a decline in real returns: rise in costs if the people choose to search farther and farther afield, decline in returns if they are satisfied to live on the shuttered supplies or inferno huts in easier reach. The solution, of course, is to go somewhere else. Thus the first and decisive contingency of hunting-gathering: it requires movement to maintain production on advantageous terms.

But this movement, more or less frequent in different circumstances, more or less distant, merely transposes to other spheres of production the same diminishing returns of which it is born. The manufacture of tools, clothing, utensils, or ornaments, however easily done, becomes senseless when these begin to be more of a burden than a comfort. Utility falls quickly at the margin of portability. The construction of substantial houses likewise becomes absurd if they must soon be abandoned. Hence the hunter's very ascetic conceptions of material welfare: an interest only in minimal equipment, if that; a valuation of smaller things over bigger: a disinclination in acquiring two or more of most goods; and the like. Ecological pressure assumes a rare form of concreteness when it has to be shouldered. If the gross product is trimmed down in comparison with other economies, it is not the hunter's productivity that is at fault, but his mobility.

Almost the same thing can be said of the demographic constraints of
Comparable data are beginning to appear in reports on other primitive agri-culturalists from many parts of the world. The conclusion is put conservatively when put negatively: hunters and gatherers need not work longer getting food than do primitive cultivators. Extrapolating from ethnography to prehistory, one may say as much for the neolithic as John Stuart Mill said of all labor-saving devices, that never was one invented that saved anyone a minute's labor. The neolithic saw no particular improvement over the paleolithic in the amount of time required per capita for the production of subsistence; probably, with the advent of agriculture, people had to work harder.

There is nothing either to the contention that hunters and gatherers can enjoy little leisure from tasks of sheer survival. By this, the evolutionary inadequacies of the paleolithic are customarily explained, while for the provision of leisure the neolithic is roundly congratulated. But the traditional formulas might be truer if reversed: the amount of work (per capita) increases with the evolution of culture, and the amount of leisure decreases. Hunters' subsistence labors are characteristic interminently, a day on and a day off, and modern hunters at least tend to employ their time off in such activities as daytime sleep. In the tropical habitats occupied by many of these existing hunters, plant collecting is more reliable than hunting itself. Therefore, the women, who do the collecting, work rather more regularly than the men, and provide the greater part of the food supply. Man's work is often done. On the other hand, it is likely to be highly erratic, unpredictably required; if men lack leisure, it is then in the Enlightenment sense rather than the literal. When Coverdell attributed the hunter's unprogressive condition to want of "the leisure in which he can indulge in thought and enrich his understanding with new combinations of ideas," he also recognized that the economy was a "necessary cycle of extreme activity and total idleness." Apparently what the hunter needed was the assured leisure of an aristocratic philo-sophic.

Hunters and gatherers maintain a sanguine view of their economic state despite the hardships they sometimes know. It may be that they sometimes know hardships because of the sanguine views they maintain of their economic state. Perhaps their confidence only encourages productivity to the extent the camp falls casualty to the first untoward circumstance. In alleging this is an affluent economy, therefore, I do not deny that certain hunters have moments of diffi-culty. Some do find it "almost inconceivable" for a man to die of hunger, or even to fail to satisfy his hunger for more than a day or two (Woodburn 1968:52). But others, especially certain very peripheral hunters spread out in small groups across an environment of extremes, are exposed periodically to the kind of inclemency that interdicts travel or access to game. They suffer—although perhaps only fractionally, the shortage affecting particular immobi-lized families rather than the society as a whole (cf. Gusinde 1961:306–7).
Still, granting this vulnerability, and allowing the most poorly situated modern hunters into competition, it would be difficult to prove that privatization is distinctly characteristic of the hunter-gatherer. Food shortage is not the in-
dicative property of this mode of production as opposed to others; it does not in-
clude hunters and gatherers as a class or a general evolutionary stage. Louch
asks:

But what of the herdsmen on a simple plane whose maintenance is
periodically jeopardized by plagues—who, like some Lappon bands of
the nineteenth century, were obliged to fall back on fishing? What of
the primitive peasants who clear and till without compensation of the
soil, exhaust one plot and pass on to the next, and are threatened with
famine at every drought? Are they any more in control of misfortune
caused by natural conditions than the hunter-gatherer? (1938:286)

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

This paradox is my whole point. Hunters and gatherers have by force of cir-
cumstances an objectively low standard of living. But taken as their objective
and given their adequate means of production, all the people's material wants
usually can be Easily satisfied. The evolution of economy has known, then, two
contradictory movements: conserving but at the same time impoverishing, ap-
propriating in relation to nature but expropriating in relation to man. The pro-
gressive aspect, of course, technological. It has been celebrated in many ways:
as an increase in the amount of need-serving goods and services, an increase in
the amount of energy harnessed to the service of culture, an increase in produc-
tivity, an increase in division of labor, and increased freedom from environ-
mental control. Taken in a certain sense, the last is especially useful for under-
standing the earliest stages of technical advance. Agriculture not only raised
society above the distribution of natural food resources, it allowed neolithic
communities to maintain high degrees of social order where the requirements
of the natural order. Enough food could be harvested in some seasons to sustain the people while no food would grow at
all; the consequent stability of social life was critical for its material enlarge-
ment. Culture went on then from triumph to triumph, in a kind of progressive
support human life in outer space—where even gravity and oxygen were natu-
really lacking.

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

All the preceding discussion takes the liberty of reading modern hunters
historically, as an evolutionary base line. This liberty should not be lightly
granted. Are marginal hunters such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari any more
representative of the paleolithic condition than the Indians of California or the
Northwest Coast? Perhaps not. Perhaps also Bushmen of the Kalahari are not
even representative of marginal hunters. The great majority of surviving
hunter-gatherers lead a life curiously decapitated and extremely lazy by com-
parison with the other few. The other few are very different. The Murngin, for
example: "The first impression that any stranger must receive in a fully func-
tioning group in Eastern Arnhem Land is of industry...." And "he must be impressed with the fact that with the exception of very young children . . . there is no idleness" (Thomson 1949a:33–34). There is nothing to indicate that the problems of livelihood are more difficult for these
people than for other hunters (cf. Thomson 1949b). The incentives of their
unemployment industry lie elsewhere: in "an elaborate and exacting ceremonial life,
specifically in an elaborate ceremonial exchange cycle that bestows prestige on
craftmanship and trade (Thomson 1949a:26, 20, 34ff, 87 passim). Most
other hunters have no such concerns. Their existence is comparatively casual-
less, fixed singularly on eating with gusto and digesting at leisure. The cultural
orientation is not Dionysian or Apollonian, but "gastric," as Julian Steward
said of the Shoshoni. Then again it may be Dionysian, that is, Bachmahanian:
"Eating among the Savages is like drinking among the drunkards of Europe.
Those dry and ever-thirsty souls would willingly end their lives in a tub of
malmsay, and the Savages in a pot full of meat; those over there talk only of
drinking, and these here only of eating." (Lejeune 1897:249)

It is as if the structures of these societies had been crooked, leaving only
the bare subsistence rock, and since production itself is readily accomplished, the people have plenty of time to fish, hunt and talk about it. I must raise the possibility that the ethnography of hunters and gatherers is largely a record of incomplete cultures. Fragile cycles of ritual and exchange may have disappeared without trace, lost in the earliest stages of sedentarism, when the intense group relations they mediated were attacked and confounded. If so, the "original" affluent society will have to be rethought again for its originality, and the evolutionary schemes once more revised. Still this much history can always be rescued from existing hunters: the "economic problem" is easily solvable by pa- lodidic techniques. But then, it was not until culture neared the height of its cultural achievements that it erected a shrine to the Unattainable: Infini- tive Needs.

NOTES

1. At least to the time Luciusius was writing (Harriss 1968:26–27).
2. On the historically particular requisites of such calculation, see Codere 1968, (es- pecially pp. 767–76).
3. For the complementary institutionalization of "security" in the conditions of capita- list production, see Gortz 1967:37–38.
5. Elman Service for a very long time almost alone among ethnologists stood out against that view of the penury of hunters. The present paper owes great inspiration to his remarks on the leisure of the Auvata (1963:9), as well as to personal conversations with him.
6. The evident fruit of White's evolutionary law is the use of "per capita" measures. Neolithic societies in the main harness a greater total amount of energy than pre- agricultural communities because of the greater number of energy-delivering hu- mans sustained by domestication. This overall rise in the social product, however, is not necessarily increased by an increased productivity of labor—which in White's view also accompanied the neolithification revolution. Ethnological data now in hand (see text infra) raise the possibility that simple agricultural regimes are not more efficient thermodynamically than hunting and gathering—that is, in energy yield per unit of human labor. In the same vein, some anthropologists in recent years have tended to privilege stability of settlements over productivity of labor in explanation of the neolithic advance (cf. Bradfield and Wely 1962).
7. For a similar comment, referring to missionary misinterpretation of curing by blood consumption: in eastern Australia, see Hodgkinson 1845:227.
8. Conditions of primitive hunting peoples must not be judged, as Carl Sauer notes, "from their modern survivals, now restricted to the more rugged regions of the west, such as the interior of Australia, the American Great Basin, and the Arctic

andra and raiga. The areas of early occupation were abounding in food" (cited in Clark and Haswell 1964:25).
9. Through the prism of accretionary examples, what hunting and gathering might have been like in a recent environment from Alexander Henry's account of his bountiful "country as a Chippewa in northern Michigan: see Quimby 1962.
10. Tabooed similarly among the Congo Pygmies: "The materials for the making of shelter, clothing, and all other necessary items of savanna culture are all at hand at a moment's notice." And he has no reservations either about subsistence: "Throughout the year, without fail, there is an abundant supply of game and vege- table foods" (1965:18).
11. Certain food collectors not lately known for their architectural achievements seem to have built more substantial dwellings before being put on the run by Europeans. See Noyes 1871, vol. 1:225–8.
13. Fish Creek was an inland camp in western Arnhem Land consisting of six adult males and three adult females. Henepal Bay was a coastal occupation on Groote Eylandt; there were four adult males, four adult females, and five juveniles and infants in the "camp. Fish Creek was investigated at the end of the dry season, when the supply of vegetable foods was low; kangaroo hunting was rewarding, although the animals became increasingly wary under steady stalking. At Henepal Bay, veg- etable foods were plentiful; the fishing was variable but the whole good by comparison with other coastal "camps visited by the expedition. The resource base at Henepal Bay was richer than at Fish Creek. The greater time put into food-getting at Henepal Bay may reflect, then, the support of five children. On the other hand, the Fish Creek group did maintain a virtually full-time specialist, and part of the difference in hours worked may represent a normal coastal-inland variation. In inland hunting, good things often come in large packages hence, one day's work may yield two days' sustenance. A fishing/gathering regime perhaps produces smaller if steadier return, enjoining somewhat longer "mae more regular efforts."
14. At least some Australians, the Yir-Yirr, make no linguistic distinction between work and play (Sharp 1958:6).
15. This appreciation of local resources is all the more remarkable considering that Lee's ethnographic work was done in the second and third years of "one of the most severe droughts in South African history" (1968:39; 1968:73 n.).
16. As were the Tasmanians of whom Bunwell wrote: "The Aborigines were never in want of food; though Mrs. Somervell has ventured to say of them in her physical Geography that they were 'truly miserable in a country where the means of exist- ence were so scanty'; Dr. Jeannin, once Protector, writes: 'They must have been superabundantly supplied, and have required little exertion or industry to support themselves'" (Bunwell, 1870:14).
17. This by way of contrast to other tribes-deeper in the Central Australian Desert, and specifically under "ordinary circumstances", not the times of long-continued drought when "he has to suffer privation" (Spencer and Gillen 1899:7).
18. Basdeo goes on to excuse the people’s idleness on the grounds of overeating, then to excuse the overeating on the grounds of the periods of hunger natives suffer, which he further explains by the droughts Australia is heir to, the effects of which have been exacerbated by the white man’s exploitation of the country.

19. This phrase appears in a paper by Woodburn distributed to the Wespres-Cren parsonym on “Man the Hunter,” although it is only elliptically repeated in the published account (1908:55). I hope I do not commit an indiscretion or an inaccuracy citing it here.

20. “Agriculture is in fact the first example of servile labor in the history of man. According to biblical tradition, the first criminal, Cain, is a farmer’ (Lafragne 1911 [1883]:11.)

It is notable too that the agricultural neighbors of both Bushmen and Hadza are quick to resort to the more dependable hunting-gathering life—come drought and threat of famine (Woodburn 1968:54; Lee 1968:39–40).

21. This common disease for prolonged labor mañanaed by recently primitive peoples under European empire, a disease not restricted to ex-hunters, might have alerted anthropologists to the fact that the traditional economy had enjoyed only modest objectives to reach within reach to allow an extraordinary disengagement—considerable relief from the mere problem of getting a living.

The hunting economy may also be commonly undermined for its presumed inability to support specialists production. Cf. Sharp 1934–35:37; Radcliffe-Brown 1948:41; Spencer 1959:155, 196; 251; Luftnug 1928:71; Stewart 1938:44. If there is not specialization, at any rate it is clearly for lack of a “market,” not for lack of time.

22. At the same time that the bourgeois ideology of scarcity was lost loose, with the inevitable effect of downsizing an earlier culture, it was searched and found in nature the ideal model to follow if man (at least the workingman) was ever to better his unheathy lot: the rat, the industrious ant. In this ideology may have been as mistaken as in view of hunters. The following appeared in the Aus Arum News, January 27, 1971, under the head, “Two Scientists Claim Ants a Little Lazy”; Palm Springs, Calif. (AP)—(AP) —“Ants aren’t all they are reported (reported?) to be,” say Drs. George and Jeanette Wheeler.

“The husband-wife researchers have devoted years to studying the creatures, heroes of fables on industriousness.

“Whenever we view an ant hill we get the impression of a tremendous amount of activity, but that it merely because there are so many ants and they all look alike,” the Wheelers concluded.

“If the industrious ants spend a great deal of time just loafing, and worse than that, the worker ants, who are all females, spend a lot of time primiparing.”

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