

Book Review: *The dawn of everything: A new history of humanity*¹

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This is a monument rather than a book but I enjoyed reading every page of it. It is full of elaborations and diversions, everyone a little gem conveying understanding of some wonderful or stunningly unexpected fact about our past societies. It winds its way round every contour of our past like a lazy river so confident that it will reach the sea, it doesn't have to hurry and can even slow down occasionally to admire the scenery. Little asides pop up at various times and some of these are no less than fascinating elaborations of the huge diversity of social arrangements uncovered. They put meat on the bones of the descriptions of social structures and explain for example, why my Mohawk friends were so delighted with the book, more on that later.

The book takes its name from "the *illo tempore*, the dawn of everything, when animals could talk or turn into humans, sky and earth were not yet separated and it was possible to create genuinely new things (marriage, or cooking, or war)" (p497). It was the mythic time, the basic for traditional societies as held by theorists such as Eliade. Eliade was one of those who believed a linear sense of time was a recent innovation, one aspect of the modern appreciation of ancient history which this book specifically debunks.

The purpose of the book was not immediately obvious to me and is still somewhat fuzzy in my mind as the authors at several different points discuss its purpose and also its non purposes which are equally compelling as subject matters. I find on reflection that it really doesn't matter very much. That is because the whole tome is in one sense, a collection of powerful subject matters or themes, a key one of which is a devastating condemnation of contemporary social science, certainly the anthropological and archeological divisions of it but also including those fields more centrally concerned with recent and contemporary human affairs. That non purpose in itself enlivens many of the asides and clarifies the conceits and other inadequacies of those pursuing the basic disciplines in this field.

Today's theories alternate or involve in some way the alternatives springing from Rousseau or Hobbes, what most would know from the 'noble savage' or a selfish, war like creature whose life was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. The book tells another story altogether, one based on a dizzying amount of evidence. Far from humans being innately hierarchical or egalitarian, doomed to be Hobbes' hawks or Rousseau's doves, we have the ability to determine how we want to behave (p86). However, we should note that there are limits on this ability as the social structures in which we find ourselves have a powerful effect on our behaviour, and when people have no knowledge of the design principles, they have no way of negating that effect.

There are many themes and subthemes, purposes, running through it so we will examine some of these in more detail, as in other contexts, they can form whole subject areas. In this massive book, they are no more than fascinating subthemes.

¹ David Graeber & David Wengrow, 2021, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY.

One of the themes which emerge is the whole complicated question of our current woeful circumstances - "If something did go terribly wrong in human history – and given the current state of the world, it's hard to deny something did – then perhaps it went wrong precisely when people started losing that freedom to imagine and enact other forms of social existence" (p504).²

Freedom, practical forms of social liberty, as a concept is researched in detail with the final distillation of:

1. The freedom to move away from one's surroundings
2. The freedom to ignore disobey commands issued by others
3. The freedom to shape entirely new social realities, or shift back and forth between different ones (p503)

One of the big themes which emerges from the huge range and diversity of material is that these freedoms have diminished to the point where many cannot even comprehend how humans could live so freely so the questions become how did that happen? How did we get stuck without basic freedoms, and just how stuck are we really? (p503) Is there a way out?

I don't think they really answer any of these questions in any convincing matter. They review various theories and analyse how the loss of one freedom leads to the loss of others. However, none of it explains the ease with which societies in the past have thrown off dominant hierarchies and the difficulties we are experiencing doing the same thing.

Similarly, Graeber &Wengrow theorize about three forms of domination, namely:

- Control of violence
- Control of knowledge
- Charismatic power

but their development of these types is fuzzy with poor delineation. In these classifications, they came nowhere close to the design principles as the bedrock of the diversity they discover. Even their use of the term bureaucracy is vague as in places they seem to equate it with the power of an established strata of administrators in what OST would refer to as a top down or DP1 structure while in others such as at Tell Sabi Abyad, it refers only to record keeping and not to any sign of personal status (p421). In others again, bureaucratized meant when promises became impersonal, transferable (p427).

Not much material comes from Australia but I constantly noted similarities as I read through it. While the Aboriginal or Torres Strait/Papua New Guinea extended systems, as the people in this region are one ethnographic subsystem of Melanesian origin, often use different structures and practices, there were commonalities with others from far flung points on the globe.

The overwhelming impression I got from the book was the huge, seemingly never ending *diversity of the human experiences in the past*, the ways in which the genotypical social structures and essential functions were mixed and matched with just about every possible variation on their phenotypes. And that brings us to the critical point I need to make about this book.

² OST (Emery F, 1977) suggests that the breakpoint may have come at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution when the great mass of the population was forced into hierarchies (DP1) as the governing principle of the new factory system. Prior to this, people had been largely left to their own devices to organize themselves and they almost without exception chose the second design principle (DP2) – see below. G & W agree as they hypothesize that it was the model of the discipline on ancient Egyptian boats turned the crews into clock like machines that was picked up for the factory floor (p407).

The genotypical design principles

As much as I loved reading the book, a lot of it is an attempt to discover that which has already been discovered, the genotypical design principles. These two principles called redundancy of parts, DP1 for short, and redundancy of functions, DP2, where responsibility for coordination and control is located at least one step about the actors and with them respectively, give the structures of dominant hierarchy and equality. The third possibility, that there is no responsibility for coordination and control is called laissez-faire and completes the set (Figure 1). (See Note 1 for more detail).

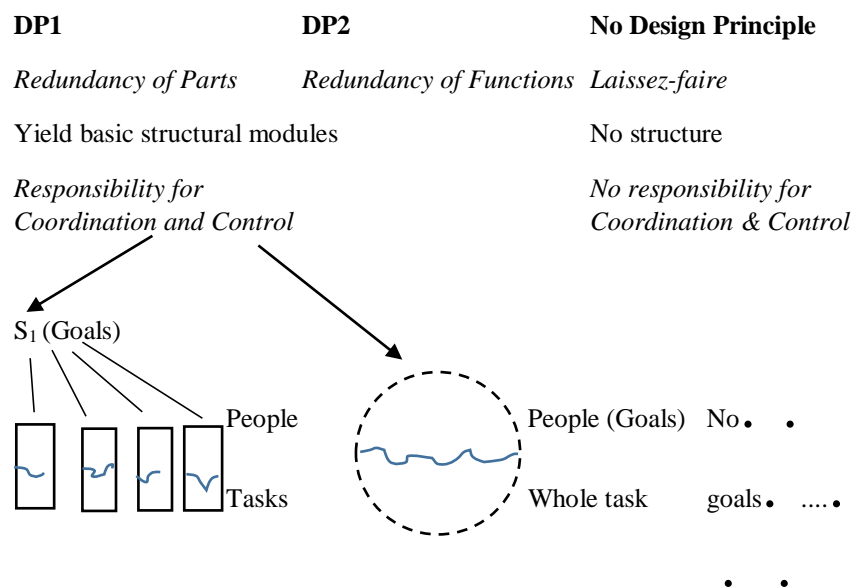


Figure 1. The genotypical design principles

In dominant hierarchies those above have the right and the responsibility to tell those below what to do and how to do it. This structure is in total contradiction to our nature as purposeful creatures who want, and need to make their own decisions, both individual and collective. The structure sets off a sequence of dynamics which begins with competition, progresses through the need for self interest to survive or win and ends up with physical conflict and warfare. In cultures or societies where dominant hierarchies are the predominant form and/or lie behind the governance system, that culture or society gradually succumbs to various forms of destructiveness such as class warfare and/or mental illness. There may be a debilitating sense of hopelessness and depression as people unaware of these principles affecting their lives cannot see their way out the mess.

In cultures or societies governed by the second principle, both ancient and contemporaneous, we find greater stability and peace as people go about their lives, cooperating to further the welfare of the group by looking after the land, building technologies such as fish traps, trading with others and finding ample time for creative crafts and artistic pursuits. There are generally no bosses in the sense of people making decisions on behalf of others, as people naturally arrange themselves into variously sized self managing groups or communities. These group or communities are self determining and devise rules

and conventions for larger groups to come together in peace and harmony. Wealth in its various forms is more equally distributed and the overwhelming affects are those of energy and joy with widespread participation in music, dancing and ceremonies performed for the common good. The sexes are much more likely to enjoy equal status and power in these cultures as well and some have clearly become predominantly female oriented (Emery M, 2021).

As we would expect from our knowledge of the effects of the design principles and the way people perceive them, it should not be surprising that the authors find that DP2 societies "represent the vast majority of human social experience (p523). Throughout, they show that they know in their bones, the reality and meaning of these principles: for example, they say the ultimate question about human history is not about our equal access to material resources but "our equal capacity to contribute to decisions about how to live together" (p8).

Had Graeber &Wengrow known of these principles, the organizational structures they produce and their powerful effects, they would have been able to make more sense of the huge historical diversity they discovered. As it is, they really struggled to classify it into brief but comprehensive sets of categories. Their final classifications are not particularly convincing nor really clearly delineated. They are certainly more useful than the totally inaccurate orthodox theories with their sequences built on false assumptions and modern arrogance and vanities they critique. However, they still lack the crystal clear explanatory power the design principles provide.

Such an example is their effort to define and come to grips with various types of state. For today's 'state', they identify sovereignty, bureaucracy and a competitive political field. They showed "how those elements map directly onto basic forms of social power which can operate at any scale of human interaction, from family or household all the way up the Roman Empire or the super-kingdom of Tawantinsuya" (p507).

Some societies appear to have been built on one, or two of these three elements but these elements alone cannot account for the wild diversity found in the past, nor can they explain our current dilemmas or degree of lack of freedom.

Graeber &Wengrow ask for example, what is equalized in egalitarian societies and hypothesize that it may refer to some sort of homogeneity as an ideal. Similarly, some confuse status with wealth. However, there is little to no evidence to support these hypotheses while the book is stacked with evidence that egalitarian refers to equality of social status. That is what the many discussions of e.g. chiefs with no power, the right not to be commanded and the right to easily move, amount to – there were no social strata.

People around the world from Greece to old Mexico had tumbled to the fact that elections have a nasty habit of throwing up leaders with tyrannical ambitions. Elections were therefore, considered an aristocratic mode of appointment, at odds with democracy, so the truly democratic way was by lottery, sortition (p356).

Graeber &Wengrow see democracy today, i.e. representative democracy (rep dem) as "a game of winners and losers, played out among larger-than-life individuals, with the rest of us reduced largely to onlookers" (p367), a far cry from the collective deliberations on common problems employed by the egalitarian societies. This is an accurate perception as we know now that rep dem is DP1 with elections, autocracy at the governance level, nothing to do with the DP2 form of participative democracy (Emery F, 1974, 1976, 1982).

Not only did the old egalitarian societies share their material wealth, they also enjoyed wealth of another sort in that they spent much less time working, working hours have increased over time, and much more time creating, celebrating with ceremonies to both

maintain the culture and enjoy social relationships. Significant amounts of time were consumed with playing games, gossiping, arguing and travelling for pleasure. Arts of various sorts flourished throughout the old societies.

But the design principles are not the only component of Open Systems Thinking (OST) to pop up in this review of the past. Some societies employed the basic formulation of the open system itself as the basis for their arrangements. These two 'coincidences' vindicates the OST view that it is an age old approach that has been with us since the mists of antiquity.

The Open System

In the Osage, a nation from the Great Plains in the USA, the elders after lengthy investigations determined that life and motion was produced by the interaction of two principles – sky and earth – and therefore, they divided their own society in the same way, arranging it so men from one division could only take wives from the other. Here we see two related features from OST, indeed its theoretical foundation. Firstly, sky and Earth are the direct equivalents of the L_{22} , external social field, and L_{11} , system, dimensions of the formulation of the open system with their interrelations given as the L_{21} and L_{12} . (See Note 2). Elaborations of the dimensions in this model account for an infinite variety of conditions and situations. Secondly, it provides further confirmation that the premise of the Type II, the clustered placid environment inhabited by the ancient peoples, was indeed isomorphically designed to mirror the structure of the natural world they saw around them. It was this that gave this environmental type its great stability and longevity until they were invaded by the warlike hierarchical people after the Industrial Revolution.

The Osage elaborated the basic model to arrive at a desirable structure for their typical summer village. It is an extremely intricate pattern (diagram on p477) based on a circle divided into two exogamous moieties, sky and earth with 24 clans in all, each of which had to be represented in any settlement or camp, and in every ritual. This was regarded as something not given from on high but the result of a series of legal and intellectual discoveries or breakthroughs. Again we see that this was a people self consciously creating their own institutional arrangements, "well before European settlers appeared on the scene" (p481). It turns out that this sort of thinking was commonplace in North America.

Ostensible purpose – asking the right questions

On p25 Graeber & Wengrow say the book is simply trying to lay down foundations for a new world history and as such it is uneven and incomplete. Concomitantly, it is a quest to discover the right questions given that they believe it should not be about the origins of inequality. The book began as a conversation between an anthropologist and an archaeologist about those questions and finished as an expression of the evolution of their ideas, rejecting the 'European perspective', instead considering "perspectives that derive from those indigenous thinkers who ultimately inspired them" (p26).

Ironically, it was wars of conquest and plunder that opened the eyes of the Europeans to the vast diversity of social arrangements found in the New World; predominantly egalitarian. This flood of new ideas became known as the Enlightenment (p29). But then in another twist, it was later seen that the Enlightenment was failing as rather than ushering in new forms of free society, it brought for example, the Terror, the French Revolution. This was because they did not know what was causing it – DP1.

A significant part of the book covers the cultures of the original people of the Americas, particularly those inhabiting the North of the continent. The early missionary and travel accounts from New France, around the Great Lakes, brought home to Europe knowledge of societies very different from their own. Many Enlightenment thinkers insisted their ideals of individual liberty and political equality were inspired by Native Americans, because it was true (p37).

Some of the indigenous intellectuals from these cultures such as Kandiaronk who features significantly in the book may not have isolated the design principles but he knew that the European lack of freedom and punitive laws sprang from "a form of *social organization* that encourages selfish and acquisitive behaviour" (p53). These intellectuals exercised significant influence not only on the Europeans but also the Founding Fathers of the American constitution although those advocating for an egalitarian system lost out in the end.

It is probably not recognized today that the indigenous peoples in the various new worlds were harshly critical of the invaders' society, particularly their lack of freedom, indeed their hostility to freedom. They criticized the inequality of women, their lack of generosity and cooperation with each other, a critique which was taken seriously by Europeans. It came to be regarded as a danger to the fabric of European society which necessitated a whole new body of theory being created to refute it. It is that evolutionary theory which forms today's orthodoxy, which is clearly at odds with the evidence. Today, the idea that American indigenous intellectuals played a leading role in this conceptual revolution is almost heresy (p35).

It is this theme running through the book, the accuracy of it and the huge effect their cultures had on their eventual conquerors that so delights my Mohawk friends – after years of fighting to recover their cultures, it certainly vindicates their belief in their superiority of their cultures and the fight itself.

There were pockets of DP1 structure in the past amongst all the great mass of egalitarian cultures but these seem quite limited. Graeber & Wengrow cite the peoples on the Northwest coast of today's America with cultures built on rank and featuring the famous *potlatch*, festivals featuring displays of excessive wealth, gluttony and sometimes destructiveness. These displays signified "contempt for the ordinary world possessions by performing magnificent feats of generosity, overwhelming their rivals" (p182).

The structures consisted of hereditary ranks of nobles, commoners and slaves. Intergroup raiding for slaves was endemic. This form of structure (DP1) is not at all what is expected of foragers by today's social science so again we see the misleading nature of that 'science'.

Not purpose – origins of inequality

The authors state that the book began with an appeal to ask better questions than the origins of inequality. This inadequate starting point necessitates the creation of a myth, a fall from grace, the old patriarchal Garden of Eden story. Theories based on this are limited to variations on how to cope with or improve in some minor ways our condition. An alternative theory claims that inequality has no origins but is innate in the human condition which requires competition and selfish behaviour in order to achieve any measure of progress or civilization, a view they claim is popular only amongst billionaires (p495).

Neither of these theories accords with the facts.

The origins of equality/inequality may not be the purpose of the book but discussion of the dichotomy itself accounts for a sizable proportion of the book. It is in fact one of the major

themes as the astounding diversity of cultural variants they discover revolve around basic governance principles of status equality or inequality as given by the two design principles as above.

While the view that the progress of Western civilization inevitably makes everyone happier, wealthier and more secure is optimistic and appealing, it cannot account for the fact that this civilization was rejected by the people on whom it was imposed, that it could be forced upon them and maintained only by the power of the gun. Similarly, it fails to account for the fact that many Westerners defected to the culture so conquered – that the conquered were miserable and unfree was simply another myth.

The social sciences began with trying to explain why the Enlightenment was failing and why so many of the attempts to fix things simply made them worse – how could "the passion for liberty, equality and fraternity end up producing the Terror?" (p494). *It was here for example that understanding the design principles really could have provided a short cut to their musings.*

But this was the era of Rousseau whose theory is still alive and well in some quarters. But today, inequality is seen just as the "inevitable result of living in any large, complex, urban, technologically sophisticated society" (p7) – and so nothing can be done! Suits the rich and famous!

Instead of the origins of social inequality, the question they propose is "*How did we get stuck?*" – *in such an unfree state?* (p112). How did we come to treat eminence and subservience as inescapable components of the human condition? Today, we appear to be less able to imagine, let alone design and implement an alternative social system to what we have. The irony of course is that today's dominant evolutionary theory postulates that the people of the past were subject to the forces of progress which robbed them of their ability to self determine their social arrangements in a self conscious way while the evidence documents the opposite: it is us who have been so robbed. Social science has been creating myths.

Theme that emerges: current orthodoxy is wrong

Therefore, the book presents a major challenge to today's conventional wisdom that there was a linear sequence of development or progress, an evolution from an "imaginary collection of tiny hunter-gatherer bands" which ends with the "current collection of capitalist nation states" (p442). These powerful European theorists insisted on classifying societies in terms of subsistence so agriculture could be seen as a breakpoint. This was accompanied by an assumption that as societies became more larger, they became more complex and that complexity means not only greater differentiation of functions but also the reorganization of societies into hierarchical ranks governed from the top down. This theory of course has the effect of putting us and our hierarchically dominated societies at the top of the heap.

What the book discovers, over and over again, in often minute detail, is just how wrong that theory is as to maintain it, it is necessary to ignore most of the world's history. That is because that history flat out contradicts the theory. When we rip away that bandaid of a theory, we have to face the reality of our cultures.

Just how wrong is illustrated by the Nambikwara (p99-100) for example. During the rainy season they practiced horticulture while for the rest of the year they dispersed into small foraging bands. During the dry, chiefs behaved like absolute dictators (DP1) but in the rainy season, they worked with others to build houses and tend gardens (DP2). Other versions of this alternation between structure are documented throughout the book. This is in fact an

example of how in a basic DP2 structure, there can be periods of DP1 for good reason but the overall structure remains DP2 as the decision to deviate into DP1 temporarily is under the control of the people themselves (Emery M, 2013).

Not only did the Nambikwara share wealth during the winter, the wet, they also shared their spouses "under the aegis of Sedna, the Goddess of the Sea" (p107). Another theme running throughout the book is the alignment of gender equality, if not female rule, with liberal social and sexual rules, and DP2.

Other examples of such oscillations include the people who built Stonehenge as they had been cereal farmers but had returned to gathering hazelnuts as their staple around 3300BC. Incidentally, there are many points in the book which roughly coincide with the various critical points in time which Velikovsky hypothesised to indicate planetary disruptions due to cataclysmic movements in the solar system. Not only does Stonehenge appear as an astronomical instrument, there was also a highly coordinated social and communications structure across large parts of the British Isles as there was in the Americas. This enabled people to travel safely for whatever purposes and again indicate a highly sophisticated and cooperative series of social units (DP2). There were similar trade routes across Australia.

A close significant date is given as 3500BC when the first cities started emerging in Eurasia: it was also where the hunters and fishers of now Louisiana constructed Poverty Point, a huge piece of ceremonial infrastructure, public architecture featuring the shapes of huge birds. This tradition of public architecture going back to around 1600BC appears to have been a place for exchange of knowledge of esoteric types probably featuring astronomy amongst other specialities such as mathematics, medicine, ethics and social structure (p144).

But Poverty Point is only one among many around the world demonstrating how the hunting gathering people raised huge monuments and other buildings: after the Ice Age. These non agricultural peoples celebrated, played games, created art, buried their dead and led exciting complex lives in social structures of diverse shapes and sizes, but in cooperative cultures at peace. The orthodoxy would have it that hunters and gatherers did no such thing. We saw the controversy, if not outrage when Pascoe documented the agriculture and structure of villages in *Black Emu* in Australia (Pascoe, 2014).

All the many objections raised about this new more accurate appraisal are deftly dealt with by the authors who clearly have little patience with the purveyors of this evolutionary theory. They simply say after hundreds of pages of proof that it, and all its variations, "didn't really work" (p446). New versions created continue to be as successful and many adherents have now fallen back on the old original version where the basic sequence is:

- *Band societies* – small, no political roles, egalitarian by default
- *Tribes* – larger, horticulturalists but technologically unsophisticated, arranged into complex lineage or totemic clan structures, featuring 'big men' but with no coercive power, egalitarian
- *Chiefdoms* – kinship system is basis of hierarchy of ranks, production leading to surplus with distribution with enforcement
- *States* – large, intensive cereal agriculture, legal monopoly on use of force, professional administration and complex division of labour.

As the sequence shows, the progression consists of roughly correlated size and complexity. This form of the theory didn't work either but seems to have become the convention. Despite this being wrong and 'deceptive' (p449), the authors point out that we find it so difficult to imagine history that does not imply that current arrangements were somehow inevitable. When we look at it from the standpoint of the design principles we see

that DP1 has become so entrenched that people simply cannot imagine anything fundamentally different.

Of course, when people discover that systems based on DP2 not only exist but provide a high quality of life, they find them extremely attractive. We can assume that this is exactly the same reason the book documents that time after time, people through the ages have not followed the sequence but decided to stay with their own organizational arrangements. Having looked at or experienced forms of DP1 structure, they have found their home grown DP2 system more attractive.

"What we can say with some confidence is that the societies encountered by European invaders from the sixteenth century onwards were the product of centuries of political conflict and self conscious debate. They were, in many cases, societies in which the ability to engage in self conscious political debate was itself considered one of the highest human values" (p452). In some places, immense effort was made and elaborate systems were devised to ensure that nobody could rise above anybody else.

Similarly, when huge earthworks were required, often employing ingenious construction technique and materials, and often for scientific astronomical observations and calculation, simple devices such as rotation systems were used instead of command structures. None of these cultural features could have occurred by chance, their coherence was obviously the product of a carefully thought through preference for egalitarianism and an aversion to dominant hierarchy.

There is also accumulated evidence that these egalitarian societies were organized into nested systems of larger and larger size, coordinated without hierarchies over areas as large as continental America. Totemic systems operated over huge areas where many different languages were spoken. Similarly rituals were organized in which the smaller units came together. Rules were devised for meetings of strangers to ensure harmony and constructive relations. These appear to have been common all over the planet as their form in Australia was the 'Welcome to Country'.

Cities first started emerging all around the world in about 4000BC but their diversity defies classification. Not just do some lack class divisions, wealth monopolies or hierarchies of administration, all the features found in today's cities, they exhibit such extreme variability as to imply "a conscious experimentation in urban form" (p285). The early cities showed harmonious beautiful patterns in built spaces, statements of self conscious civic unity as a result of municipal planning. Such spaces were used for festivals and other ceremonies cementing the cohesive unity or identity of the people of the city.

Almost overlooked are what are undeniably large cities in ancient Ukraine, dating back to the early and middle centuries of the fourth millennium, before the better known, and smaller ones in Mesopotamia. Disparagingly dismissed as "overgrown villages" (p289), or simple rather than complex, they show no sign of any centralized government, no form of ruling class. They all showed the prominent role of women, and they all featured circles rather than linear arrangements for layouts and structures. Far from simple, they organized huge structures over large distances while maintaining peaceful and cooperative relations with all they met.

It was not only in what is today Europe that huge cities flourished – Teotihuacan in Mexico, 100BC to 600AD was estimated at about 100,000 and again had found a way to govern itself without overlords but with totally different technologies and ecology.

Surprisingly few of the early cities anywhere showed any evidence of authoritarian rule and there was no uniformity of ecological surroundings – farming or legions of slaves to

maintain the population were not required. This data chops off another leg of the evolutionary theory.

Graeber & Wengrow uncover a particular form of conceit amongst today's social scientists, a habit of assuming that people who have worked out to live "without overt displays of arrogance, self-abasement and cruelty – are somehow less complex than those who have not?" (p290)

One of the most stubborn misconceptions of the current orthodox view is that structures of domination are the inevitable result of increasing population. The assumption is that the larger and more densely populated groups become the more 'complex' they need to be. Here, 'complex' is a synonym for hierarchy. Graeber & Wengrow found that history does not bear this assumption out at all, as above. It is no more inevitable in the social world that it is in the natural world.

What we also see with these societies of equals is that rather than personal dominance based on position on a hierarchy of rank, social influence flowed from esoteric forms of knowledge. Australian Indigenous cultures do not feature prominently in this book but similarities abound. Elders in Aboriginal Australia are so called not because they have reached a certain age but because of what they can do and what they know (personal communication). It is the same system of esoteric knowledge employed by many Indigenous peoples around the world documented here from the Americas. This knowledge was used to advance not the individual holder but the unit in everyday productive pursuits as well as instances of religious and other ceremonies.

For the Osage people, initiation through the levels of understanding required for Elder status necessitated a substantial investment of time and wealth and the few who reached the top level were known collectively as *Nohozhinga*, 'Little old Men' although some were women (p478). They functioned as the intelligentsia and kept records of important discussions. They met daily to discuss affairs of state and were effectively the government although much larger assemblies were required to ratify decisions.

It should be noted here that while Elders among the Osage were effectively a governing body, this was not common amongst the majority of egalitarian cultures. More usually they just had some specialized roles. Decision making was a collective activity.

Similarly, the authors note many times throughout when examining different sites or cultures, that although there may have been practice sessions or playful wars, or even people identified as war chiefs, there is an almost total lack of evidence for actual warfare. In some places, conflict was played out through aggressive games. This accords with data from Australia and Papua New Guinea such as *Gardens of War* (Heider & Gardner, 1968). War games were regularly played between tribes and if somebody was injured, it was a tragedy for both sides.

The case of North America with its many different nations is dealt with in detail throughout the book and alone, convincingly illustrates that the evolutionary theory of progress plus the inevitability of statehood as the final destination is nonsense. There are examples of authoritarian or DP1 structures such as Cahokia where the backlash was so severe it reverberates till this day (p482). It leaves little doubt that the indigenous people critiquing European cultures were well aware of alternative political possibilities and that they saw their own social orders as self-conscious creations, designed in part at least as a bulwark against authoritarianism and its forms as they observed it in the invaders.

Just one example demonstrates the strength of the objection to authoritarianism: "For the Haudenosaunee, the giving of orders is represented as being almost as serious an outrage as

the eating human flesh" (p485). Any member of an Iroquoian society given an order would have fiercely resisted it as a threat to their personal autonomy. However, when it came to dreams which were treated as if they were commands, people had to comply. They acknowledged the subconscious mind with its desires, including the desire to dominate. By employing these rules and practices they acknowledged, realized and controlled the desire to dominate thus preserving the egalitarian structure and functions. This is but one example of the complexity and diversity of the ways in which all these different people in their various setting operationalized and maintained their DP2 structures.

Nor does farming, agriculture, automatically presage the death of egalitarianism and the rise of hierarchy as the modern theorists would have us believe. The Iroquoians began cultivating maize around 1100AD and then added beans and squash, the 3 sisters of their diet, but were careful to balance the new crops with the traditional pursuits of hunting, fishing and foraging. New, often quite substantial settlements were set up but the old patterns were retained. Children were deliberately spaced so as to not exceed the fish and game carrying capacities, not the potential agricultural productivity. Again we see the commonality with the Australian Aborigines who similarly constrained their population growth to the health of the land.

But in other places, there was a wholesale rejection of domesticated foodstuffs although its cultivation could have been advantageous. This is even more striking when we note that many Californians and N. Coast people did cultivate tobacco and other crops for ritual purposes. As all these people travelled extensively they would have been aware of the other possibilities but simply rejected them.

Examples of this rejection of alternatives, particularly autocracy, include Cahokia, a large settlement in what is now East St Louis, with a population of around 15,000, 40,000 counting its satellite towns, one of the largest cities north of Mexico, looked like an early 'grain state' with the rise of social hierarchies. It was a centralized design built around a huge pyramid standing before an enormous plaza. It gives the impression it was planned to dismantle any of the self governing communities outside the city. "For those that fell within its orbit, there was nothing much left between domestic life – lived under constant surveillance from above – and the awesome spectacle of the city itself" (p466), which could be terrifying with mass killings, mainly young women.

Within a century of the initial urban explosion at Cahokia, a giant palisaded wall was built around parts of the city which was the beginning of the process of war, destruction and depopulation. For whatever reason, and there was probably more than one, people walked away from the city for freer lives elsewhere, leaving extremely unpleasant memories as much of its bird-man mythology was erased from oral memory along with the place itself.

This pattern was repeated elsewhere which Graeber &Wengrow describe as ideological conflict and in the place of the great authoritarian cities, communities resumed their egalitarian forms of communal life (p471). It shows unequivocally that far from being unthinking recipients of the forces of nature or inevitable social dynamics, these people were acutely aware of what they wanted and didn't want, and organized their societies to produce those desired results.

Cahokia ended up being "a place of ruins and bitter memories" (p452). The America the European invaders found was the product of centuries of political conflict and self conscious debate.

So much for these 'primitive' people or childlike natives being swept along on an inevitable tide of 'progress'.

War

There is so much bumph written about war today that it necessitates a correction from this book. As Graeber & Wengrow note frequently throughout, they find there is no actual reason to believe that war has always existed. By war they mean not just organized violence but a kind of contest between two clearly demarcated sides. War involves two teams who employ the principles of 'social substitutability' whereby any member of one team treats all members of the other team as equal targets. For most of human history people obviously didn't see much reason to kill others or even engage in destructive conflict at all. There are some rare scattered instances of warfare and as the examples unfold, we can see that they take place in societies governed by DP1. They struggle to explain the correlation between the patriarchal household and military might but students of OST could help them here.

There is a wealth of evidence scattered throughout the book that societies built on DP2 were generally gender equal with women governing without recourse to violence, adversarial politics or rule by command. This was sometimes limited to the more domestic area but not always. A safe rule of thumb is that where the governing principle is DP1, there is gender inequality. Inevitably there, women are treated as inferiors. And there is conflict.

Nor is there evidence that war followed the adoption of farming as there were long periods of peace in farming communities. There is no reason to believe war is "in any sense hardwired into the human psyche. On the contrary, it's almost invariably necessary to employ some combination of ritual, drugs and psychological techniques to convince people, even adolescent males, to kill and injure each other in such systematic yet indiscriminate ways" (p506).

Even in the matter of punishment, the cultures based on the two principles were found to be poles apart. For example the Wendat, from the Mississippi delta, when visiting France were appalled by the whipping, hanging and killing of their own kind. Their own ritual punishments were designed to absorb the strength of the enemy making themselves more powerful; the ritual of the Europeans revealed *a dissymmetry, an imbalance of power within the culture itself*.

This of course makes the current fad of referring to instances of aggressive behaviours which destroy or divide as 'tribal', just so much nonsense. It is yet another example of just how ignorant and conceited we have become in our beliefs that the old cultures arranged into 'tribes' were an inferior bunch compared to ourselves. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Social science

We have note above some of the almost unbelievable failures of social science as it operates today and it is indeed a sad story about social science that Graeber & Wengrow tell here. "Scholarship does not always advance. Sometimes it slips backwards" (p110). They explain that about a hundred years ago, most social scientists knew that hunters and gatherers were not confined to small bands or groups. That now orthodox evolutionary view emerged from the 1960s.

That an underlying or emerging purpose or theme in this book is the almost total failure of the social sciences to acknowledge the facts of history whereby theorists have promoted absolutely absurd perspectives of people and their societies raises questions about the origins

of the social sciences. Why does it seem so odd to many to imagine or believe that people in the past made their own history in a deliberate self conscious way just like we do?

The authors explain that our modern social science has been largely a study of the ways in which human beings are not free, the ways in which our behaviours are determined by forces outside our control. In other words, they had already assumed our unfree situation was inherent, could not be changed,. Accounts showing people collectively determining their own affairs, their own futures and working towards their freedoms in free societies was therefore, always likely to have been judged as suspect, awaiting real scientific explanation.

This is also why so much of our history is categorized in terms of technologies and the basic materials involved in creating technologies, e.g. the stone and iron ages. These technologies are then seen as the primary determinants of culture and society. Not us.

However, once again we see just how far out of kilter this categorization has been as a driving force as the technologies over history made little difference to the internal organization of various cities or even their size.

What is clear from the facts is that "innovation in Neolithic societies was based on a collective body of knowledge accumulated over centuries, largely by women, in an endless series of apparently humble but in fact enormously significant discoveries" (p499). Take for example, the discovery of the role of yeast in making bread.

Wherever you look in history you see women harvesting plants and turning them into food, medicine, baskets and clothes and along with this developing knowledge you also see the development of geometry and mathematics – but most of this has been slid over by male scientists (p238). Not just plants but also animals were subjected to women's ingenuity, not a science of domination and classification but one of "bending and coaxing, nurturing and cajoling, or even tricking the forces of nature to increase the likelihood of securing a favourable outcome" (p239). Based on close observation and experimentation, this science was highly successful.

One of the better questions social scientists could ask involves precisely this: is there a correlation between gender equality or women's freedom and the degree of innovation in a society? Their answer is in the affirmative and holds even more true for social creativity than technological creativity. They state that one of the most striking patterns they discovered was that the zone of ritual play acted as the site for social experimentation and possibilities. Moreover, people did not merely imagine these possibilities, they "actually lived in them for extended periods of time" (p502). Which as they say could not be more different from today.

More directly, some archaeologists such as Gimbutas explored 'Old Europe' from about 7000 to 3500BC (that date again), societies existing under the "tutelage of a supreme goddess" (p216). Her images in the form of figurines were found everywhere from the Middle East to the Balkans and those times were peaceful. They were overrun by cattle keeping, 'kurgan' peoples. They were the opposite of the communitarian Old Europeans as they featured social stratification with aristocrats and warriors and as we would expect, were patriarchal with the radical subordination of women.

Although Gimbutas was ridiculed and vilified during her life, recent DNA analyses have vindicated her research.

Not only Old Europe but throughout the world, the equality of the sexes is found with much the same characteristics, lack of hierarchy and general political equality. In some cases such as the Iroquois and other original American people, women, and sometimes the

grandmothers specifically formed the councils and made the critical societal decisions. This system is still in place to this day amongst the Mohawk (personal experience).

With examples like Minoan Crete which today's social scientists avoid like the plague, it becomes clear that not only were the great civilizations of the past based on gender equality, they were also societies in which creativity and thus innovation flowered with women taking their fair share if not more of the kudos for successful, long lasting discoveries and inventions.

Minoan Crete and its city Knossos is simply an extreme example which frustrates many modern scholars as it presents absolutely no evidence of monarchy while providing ubiquitous evidence of women's political superiority, women holding symbols of command, performing fertility rites and meeting together in assemblies with no male presiding (p435). The so called 'throne room' in Knossos was an open space surrounded by stone benches symmetrically arranged in rows so people could sit in comfort with all visible to each other, more a council setting for female councillors or a theocracy governed by priestesses rather than a throne room. Cretan palaces were unfortified and rather than war and conflict, there was an emphasis on celebrating life, of all species, play and creature comforts.

Graeber &Wengrow uncover in monumental detail the "mythical substructure of our social science" (p525), the erroneous axioms which have underlain it. This new knowledge they contend should enable us to rediscover the meaning of their third freedom, to create new and different forms of social reality.

Criticism

Graeber &Wengrow maintain that the Middle Ages for example were socially unequal with instances of "folk egalitarianism" (p34) played out during festivals or carnivals such as May Day or Christmas where the authorities or 'carnival King' or 'May Queen' were dethroned or mocked. However, while this may hold true at the so called state level where there were monarchies and hierarchical court structures, had they understood the design principles, they would have realized that the great mass of people were free to organize themselves and did so on the basis of DP2 as is obvious in the cottage industries and field world. There was no hierarchy in the many cottage industries and certainly not out in the fields where small groups worked the land and it was all hands on deck from the village at times e.g. to get the harvest in.

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Notes

1. For more details about the design principles and their method of implementation, the Participative Design Workshop, consult Emery & Emery, 1974, and many other papers on www.socialsciencethatactuallyworks.com.
- 2.

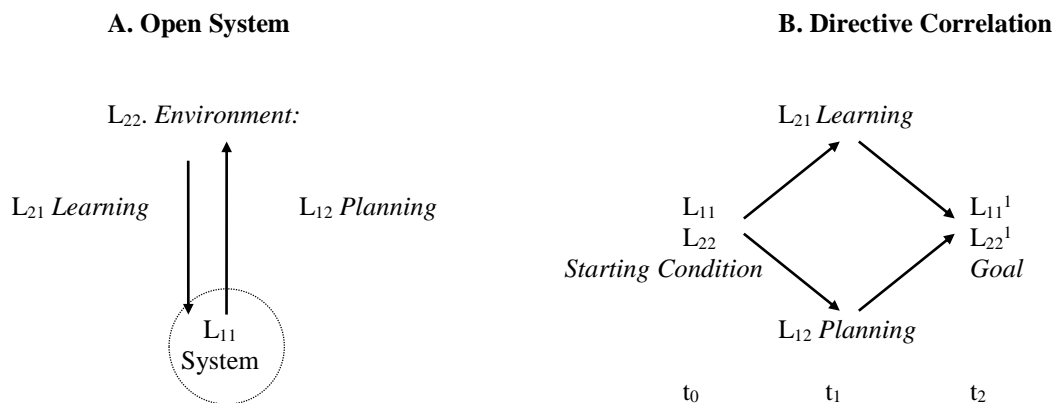


Figure 1. The Basic Models of Open System and Directive Correlation

The basic open system (Figure 1A) expresses the view that system, environment and their interrelations are governed by laws (L). A system (1) acts upon the environment (2), the planning function (L_{12}). Environment acts upon the system and is known to us through learning (L_{21}). L_{11} and L_{22} express the intrinsic nature of the system and environment respectively. (The laws that govern them are implicitly learnt in the Search Conference.)

Figure 1B shows the original condition at t_0 , which consists of the system and its environment, where both system and environment are making changes at t_1 . These result in a new set of conditions consisting of a changed system and a changed environment at t_2 . In this case, the changes are directly correlated and, therefore, adaptive.

The necessary conditions for adaptation are:

- two variables exist at the same time,

- each with a set of values,
- which reach exact correspondence at the time when a certain event happens or a goal is reached.

When these conditions are satisfied, then those functions of environment and system are *directively correlated* in respect of the goal and the starting conditions (Sommerhoff, 1969). They are acting to bring about the same state of affairs from the same starting point.

There are of course, an infinite number of cases in which system and environment are not directly correlated and, therefore, stand in a maladaptive relationship.

In Figure 1, the two models show how system and environment act jointly to produce a new one. The critical differences between the two models are that:

- the open system is a picture of a point *in time* with change expressed through learning and planning, while the directive correlation is a picture *over time*;
- the open system includes adaptive and maladaptive relations, while the directive correlation expresses precisely when adaptation is or is not occurring