

TOWARDS AN EXO-SOCIOLOGY: CONSTRUCTS OF THE ALIEN

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INTRODUCTION

Of many issues to be confronted in the long-term development of a sociology of extra-terrestrial, intelligent societies (ETIS), the most crucial is that of assumptions that can reasonably be made. While such studies await the unlikely event of contact with ETIS, an intellectual preparation may increase sophistication in current sociological theories and observations of the institutional world. If contact with ETIS should occur, then a prior analysis of likely problems may avert disaster.

What can be assumed after the discovery of an ETIS? Social organization? A culture of symbols, of interaction? Socialization with social and physical adaptation? A social structure of economic and political institutions? Religion? Deviance? Social class contradictions? Social classes? To apply such categories uncritically would anthropomorphize the ETIS. Could an exo-sociology be constructed by using familiar sociological concepts? Perhaps. But first, some hidden cultural strata of presumptive ideas must be revealed concerning "alien" peoples. Sociological theories of human societies partly depend on buried assumptions regarding human nature. The epistemology defining ETIS requires discussion prior to deriving any first principles.

To what extent do human conceptions of the stranger or the alien serve as objectified answers to human problems? Cultural fantasies thrive in empirically unknown areas. In the case of ETIS such myths prevent us from seeing extra-terrestrial societies for what they are. This is a necessary preparation for an effective exo-sociology. Yet, profound cultural implications can be drawn. Thatcher (1978) warns of "cosmic culture shock" following extra-terrestrial contact. How would Christianity respond, given the belief that humans "are made in God's image"? If mythical preconceptions guided our response, could we successfully overcome the dislocations of a superior technology? Sharp (1952) reported the devastating cultural impact of the steel axe on the Yir Yoront. Social relations, gender roles, economic institutions, traditional ideas and values became irreparably disrupted

when steel axes replaced stone axes.

FIRST CONTACT BY EUROPEANS

The expansion of European colonial society into what is now the "third world" had the character of a first contact by aliens. To the Europeans, the peoples they met were strange, and in some ways, non-human. These feelings and perceptions were reciprocated by those they conquered.

Prior to the imperial expansion of Europe, the world consisted of a series of largely disconnected societies. Occasional intercultural contact was a "contact of beads along a thread" (Worsley 1968 9). Members of each society peered beyond their physical boundaries into a cultural void, and mythical constructs-ancestors, perfectly good and bad idealizations, gods and goddesses-peered back. The cargo cults movement in which the Melanesians believed that American planes were flying in gifts from their ancestors is a classic example (Worsley 1957). The subjective understanding that all humans belonged to one world had yet to be created through colonialism, industrialization, and bureaucratization introduced and institutionalized by European states. Their preconceptions of the "alien" non-European were crucial in forming the world system (Sachs 1976).

EUROPEAN MYTHOLOGY:**BASIC PREMISES**

The fantasies politically imposed on native peoples by Europeans reflected European culture, and served as mythological answers to European social problems. Seven premises are basic to the imperial European world view.

Premise 1: The first asserted the "natural superiority" of the European. This self-fulfilling belief derived from Christianity, and on the evidence of technological superiority. However, the social disintegration resulting from contact was also the result of previously uncontaminated populations succumbing to diseases to which Europeans had become immune. There was a 97 percent die-off of native Central Americans during the first fifty years following Cortez' arrival (McNeill 1976). This tragedy served to prove to both native peoples

and Europeans that the gods had intended the "new lands" to be colonized by the invader.

Premise 2: The second premise concerns the European interpretation of history. The notion of the original Garden of Eden persisted in the soft primitivism of the "noble savage" (Keeley 1976; Howe 1977). Uncorrupted by civilization, natives could be introduced to good and evil through a Christian awakening. The explorers romantically idealized them according them the images of classical Greece. Artists depicted Tahitians and Hawaiians in classical poses near huts resembling temples, and wearing toga-like clothes (Smith 1960). Noble savages lived freely and naturally, as happy children. Such proto-racism answered 18th Century intellectual questions about comparative progress. While the "natural civilization" of Europe was never in doubt, noble savages represented to the imperial humanists a "second chance" to civilize the natives without incurring the heavy costs so apparent in Europe.

Premise 3: In the concrete situations of contact, the Europeans met resistance. The paternalism of the noble savage myth turned easily into the hard primitivism of viewing native peoples as barbarians. Rousseau expressed shock at the killing of a French explorer by the Maori: "Is it possible that the good children of Nature can really be so wicked?" The existence of barbarians implied the natural superiority of the civilized European. Accompanying these assumptions were two views of human nature which Horton (1966) identifies as *homo duplex* and *homo damnatus*.

Premise 4: *Homo duplex* asserts that human beings are made of two parts, one egoistic and primitive, the other altruistic and civilized. The latter socialized self controls the antisocial impulses of the animal-like ego. To the degree that the altruistic self is undeveloped or breaks down, then Hobbes' war of all against all prevails. Golding (1955) depicts *homo duplex* whereby the civilized veneer of English schoolboys disintegrates to reveal a barbaric primitivism when they were stranded on a tropical island. *Homo duplex* assumes a natural climb from the savage to the civilized, from child to adult.

Premise 5: An earlier view, *homo damnatus*, naturally divides the human world into the morally superior and the morally inferior. *Dam-*

natus provided an earlier basis for social Darwinism, elegantly supported by the civilized versus barbarian dichotomy. But it was more severe than *duplex* by implying a moral ascription. In resisting the European, the native revealed a natural inferiority, proving that the ego of *duplex* naturally dominates and never can be overcome. The missionary's function was to civilize, or Europeanize the morally superior natives that "naturally" cooperated, and to condemn and delegitimize those who resisted.

Premise 6: The Europeans viewed nature as a resource which advanced peoples had a natural right to exploit and control. Nature possessed no rights of its own. Its processes were relevant merely as a utility for the continued development of European progress. Nature thus included any feature of the planet that could be used, including the peoples of non-European culture. They were defined as "raw" while the Europeans were "cooked". (Levi-Strauss 1969)

Premise 7: Finally, the European mythology emphasized "masculine" values while denigrating "feminine" values. This functioned to rationalize the lower status of women. And native peoples were also defined as feminine in contrast to the rational masculinity of Europe. In time, with the emergence of bureaucracy as the dominant organizational form, objective consciousness, rationality and calculability, formed a constellation of preferred views for transforming the world of nature (Roszak 1969). The subjective, intuitive, and aleatory are suppressed and endowed with forbidden power. Objective consciousness rightly controls the subjective, lest the subjective should destroy the hard-won achievements of rationally evolved civilization.

NATIVE MYTHS AND EUROPEANS

The complementary issue asks how the Europeans were perceived by the native peoples whom they conquered. Necessarily the meaning and motives of the invaders was interpreted within the mythological frame that lay beyond the boundaries of the society in religious or ideological language. Captain Cook's arrival in Hawaii coincided with the festival of the God, Lono. Cook was assumed to represent, the God, and given suitable honors (Dawes 1968). Messianic Aztec myth

predicted the coming of a beneficent man who was similarly identified with Cortez (Idell 1956). In time, the native peoples developed a more realistic understanding.

EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL MYTHS

ETIS mythology has four implications. 1) What is popularly called "outer space" is mythological space. As in the past, the unknown territory extending beyond each culture shades into the mythical, so outer space exists as a symbolic screen. At a short distance above the earth's surface the ETIS culture projects its imaginings onto a "void". 2) Many of the earlier European premises persist in the modern technocratic world culture. 3) These premises are still viewed as relevant to contemporary problems. 4) The potential for disaster exists if such mythologies are used to guide our assessment of extra-terrestrial beings. Policies based on such premises may require the destruction of ETIS in favor of human colonies. But if the ETIS are more powerful, human society could suffer the fate of the non-Europeans because of our misconceptions. Whether a political dimension exists would depend on our perception of ETIS and some provision for their rights.

SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

Science fiction films in recent years have been seen by millions over the world. These films socialize attitudes and interpretations of ETIS and the likely nature of contact. These films create a dialectic of the impersonal, objective science and the emotional, subjective magic as two competing forms of reality. The magic form is viewed whether as primitivism or as the source of omnipotent powers. In the film 2001, a technological society has objectified and depersonalized humans. The computer personality, "HAL" is the only character in the film other than a child to possess an emotional or subjective side. The surviving astronaut is magically reborn into cosmic consciousness on arrival at the alien "star-gate" near the planet Jupiter.

In "Star Wars" the Empire coerces its dehumanized military staff in routinizing humanity's dark side. The Rebels' source of ultimate resistance is the uncorrupted Force, an irrational and intuitive power. In the film "ET" the Extra Terrestrial displays magical

powers such as telekinesis which counters the faceless technocratic authority. In the film, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," communication with ETIS begins with the mystical implanting of a drive to go to the Devil's Tower, and is completed with music and displays of light. Solutions to our current problems are seen to result from forces that lie outside the scientific culture. In many of the films, the true humanity of individual scientists is recovered through contact with the non-humans.

The noble savage survives in these films, where the creatures are innocent, child-like, and wise. Here, a natural alliance between the non-human and the heroic child is implied. These creatures have not been corrupted by civilization, so a child's eye view of problems may lead to solutions (Puschmann-Nalenz 1977). But an important scene is ET's corruption through alcohol. As a child, ET has supersensitive and emotional powers that are spread emphatically to children rather than adults, as significant others.

The barbarian image is explored in 'Star Wars', but the polarity is reversed. The Empire is barbaric, evil, and inhumane. The Rebels guard the core values of civilization. If they are destroyed, the true dark ages commence. In the film 2001, human history is a process of technological evolution from savagery to civilization, a classic 18th Century typology.

Homo damnatus appears in Star Wars as Darth Vader the Evil, and Obi Wan Kanobi the Good. The moral superiority of the child and ET compared with the inferiority of the State and its scientists appear in ET and Close Encounters. *Homo duplex* is implied in the 2001 depiction of human history from the war against all at the dawn of time to the over socialized explorers on the voyage to Jupiter. The film assumes that the civilizing process is at an end. Humanity must be reborn to transcend entirely both the ego and the superego.

In these films the universe is shown as a resource for the human species, much as the earth is defined by the dominant economic systems today, and as Europeans once regarded the non-European world. In 2001, the irrepressible human spirit of discovery is a claim on the rest of the universe. In Star

Wars, planets simply serve as theaters of war. They are a stage for resolving human contradictions, where planets are destroyed or changed for the combatants' use. A final theme asserts a natural superiority of humans. American industrialized values win in Star Wars through Luke Skywalker and Han Solo. Non-humans appear either as teddy bears, barbarians, drifters, or wizards. The aliens are obviously more advanced than the humans. But this is not the result of species ascription, since humans are about to join the galaxy on the road to cosmic ascendancy.

CONCLUSION

A fully developed exo-sociology may prove revitalizing to the profession. In the larger cultural setting, the dangers of mythological preconceptions concerning ETIS or any peoples classed as alien should be apparent from this review of the earlier European first contact with the "aliens".

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HARVEY

Continued from Page 170

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