CHAPTER

4 Preindustrial Societies

Agrarian and Pastoral Societies

This chapter continues the analysis of preindustrial social evolution begun in the last chapter by discussing agrarian and pastoral societies. It also examines various theories of the evolution of the entire range of preindustrial societies, and thus tries to explain the overall pattern of preindustrial technological, economic, and political evolution.

grarian Societies

Subsistence Technology

The first **agrarian societies** arose approximately 5,000 years ago in Egypt and Mesopotamia and slightly later in China and India. It was not long before agrarian societies were to be found over much of the globe. From the time when agrarian societies first emerged until the present day, the majority of people who have ever lived have done so according to the agrarian way of life. To the extent that this way of life remains today, it exists largely in substantially altered form in societies that are at least partially industrialized and are part of a worldwide capitalist economy. Hence, there are no true agrarian societies left in the world. But what were agrarian societies of the past like?

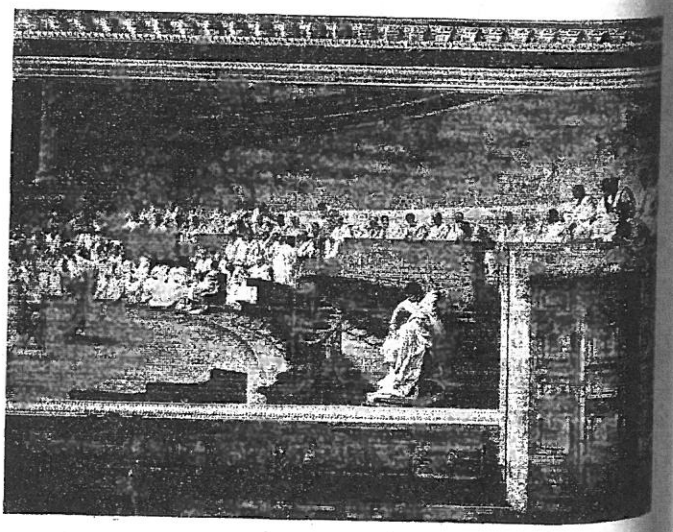
Agrarian societies rest upon true **agriculture.** Land is cleared of all vegetation and cultivated with the use of the plow and draft animals hitched to the plow. Fields are extensively fertilized, usually with animal manure. Land cultivated in this manner may be used more or less continually, and fallow periods are either very short or nonexistent. Farmers often crop a given plot of land annually, and in some cases several harvests may be reaped from the same plot of land in a single year.

A number of agrarian societies have existed in areas where rainfall was sufficient to nourish crops. Agrarian societies throughout Europe, for instance, were based on rainfall farming. But in many other agrarian societies, arid or semiarid climates have made rainfall farming impossible, and farmers have had to construct irrigation systems to water their crops. Farmers in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India, for example, practiced irrigation agriculture.

Agrarian farmers work much harder than do the members of earlier types of societies (Minge-Klevana, 1980). The tasks of clearing land, plowing, sowing and harvesting crops, tending animals, and so on require extensive labor inputs. Where irrigation systems must be constructed, people work even harder. Because of their efforts, agrarian farmers produce much more per unit of land than do horticulturalists, and they are able to produce large economic surpluses. But their greater efforts and larger surpluses do not yield for them a higher standard of living. Indeed, their standard of living is generally lower, and in some cases much lower, than that enjoyed by the members of horticultural societies. This apparent paradox will be resolved in due course.

Most members of agrarian societies are known as **peasants.** They are the primary producers—the persons who farm the land from day to day. Peasants differ from farmers in modern industrial societies, as well as from farmers in such preindustrial societies as colonial America, in their politically and economically servile condition to another class of persons, a landlord class, that owned or at least controlled the land and its products. But not all of the primary producers in agrarian societies have been peasants. Some have been slaves. Slaves differ from peasants primarily in that they are legally owned and can be bought and sold. In some agrarian societies—ancient Rome and Greece, for example—slaves actually outnumbered peasants.

Medieval England was characterized by an agrarian mode of economic production (Bennett, 1937). Between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries, English peasants lived in an overwhelmingly rural society, one in which there were few, comparatively small cities. The peasants lived in small villages that commonly numbered about 100 persons. They spent most of their lives doing farm work, much of which was carried out by teams of peasants working cooperatively. Some peasants farmed the land in a "two-field" fashion. They would work on one field in one year while allowing the other one to remain fallow; then the next year they would reverse



Scene from the Roman Senate. The Romans developed not only a complex state but also one of the largest empires the world has ever known.

the process. Other peasants farmed the land using a "three-field" system. One field would be planted in the autumn with wheat or possibly rye; another would be planted with oats, vetches, or barley the following spring; and in the meantime, the third field would lie fallow. The next year the fallow field would be sown with wheat; the first field with oats, vetches, or barley; and the second field would remain fallow, and so on. Naturally, by rotating crops and fields in this manner the peasants were trying to keep the fertility of the soil as high as possible.

Peasants also applied animal manure to the soil to aid in its fertility, but getting enough manure was a constant struggle for a number of reasons. Peasants seldom had enough animals to produce all the manure they needed. Also, they did not have unrestricted use of their animals, for their landlords appropriated them on some occasions. Fodder to produce a sufficient quantity of manure was also in short supply. So the peasants did the best they could under difficult conditions, and this meant that they sometimes worked marl or lime into the ground as an additional fertilizer. Numerous animals were kept by peasants, both as means of working the farm and as sources of food. Oxen and cows were extremely important for farm work, and both were used for food and hides. Naturally, cows provided milk as a food product. Sheep were kept for their wool and for food. Pigs were also kept, and they were perhaps the most highly valued of all farm animals, at least as food sources. They had special significance as food sources because they could be economically fed, they put on weight quickly, and they could be efficiently prepared for slaughter.

Farm work for the average English peasant was extremely demanding, and peasants put in many long, hard hours in order to meet their subsistence needs and pay their taxes. The following description of peasant labor should convey just how demanding peasant life really was (Bennett, 1937:82–83):

> Once all this was finished the peasant's labours were not so pressing, and he could turn to the many other secondary jobs waiting to be done. If the land was heavy, draining operations were constantly necessary and worth while; ditches wanted digging out after the winter floods, and the good earth put on to the land again; hedges and enclosures round the little home or any private bit of enclosure required attention, and so on. Then . . . it was time for the first ploughing of the fallow field, and the busy activities in the garden where such vegetables and fruits as were then available were grown.
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> So the days went by with plenty to occupy men till the end of May. The coming of June saw them making renewed efforts. The haymaking called for all their strength: first, there were the numerous compulsory days which they had to spend in getting in the lord's hay. . . .
>
> With the coming of August the peasant's activities reached their climax. Once again the demands made upon him by his lord were often very heavy. He had to appear in person again and again to gather in the lord's crops—and, although he usually worked one or two days more a week from August to Michaelmas than at other times in the year, this was not enough, and he had to give several extra days of his time as a boon or gift to his lord. And further, he had to come with all his family: everyone able to work, save perhaps the housewife, was pressed into service for so many days. This made the getting-in of his own crops a more difficult and anxious matter, and work during these crucial weeks must have been wellnigh unending.

Thus it was that the medieval English peasant toiled in his fields in a manner that the average hunter-gatherer or horticulturalist would have considered unthinkable.

Economic Life

In agrarian societies the trend toward the privatization of economic ownership that was characteristic of the development of intensive horticultural societies continues and intensifies. Although paramount ownership represents a significant movement in the direction of private ownership, it has many of the characteristics of lineage ownership and is by no means a true mode of private property. True private ownership is reached with the evolution of **seigneurial ownership** in agrarian societies. Seigneurial ownership prevails when a small class of persons, generally known as *landlords* (*seigneurs* in French), claims private ownership of vast tracts of land on which there live and work peasants or slaves who pay rent and taxes and provide labor services to these lords. There is nothing fictitious about this type of ownership, since landlords have the power to deprive others of the unrestricted use of land, and these other persons frequently do *not* make the day-to-day decisions about how the land is to be productively used.

Seigneurial ownership was the prevailing mode of ownership in medieval Europe. Following Max Weber (1978; orig. 1923), Eric Wolf (1966) has called the type of seigneurial ownership characteristic of medieval Europe **patrimonial ownership.** In this type of ownership, land is privately owned by a class of landlords who inherit it through family lines and who personally oversee its cultivation. Patrimonial ownership contrasts with another type of seigneurial ownership that Weber called **prebendal ownership.** Prebendal ownership exists when land is owned by a powerful government that designates officials to supervise its cultivation and draw an income from it. As Wolf notes, prebendal ownership was "characteristically associated with strongly centralized bureaucratic states—such as the Sassanid Empire of Persia, the Ottoman Empire, the Mogul Empire in India, and traditional China. The political organization of these empires attempted to curtail heritable claims to land and tribute, and asserted instead the eminent domain of a sovereign, a despot, whose claims overrode all inferior claims to domain" (1966:51).

It is important to note that in different agrarian societies at different times peasants often owned the land they cultivated and on which they lived, at least in the sense that they had legal "title" to this land. Yet even these so-called free peasants were effectively deprived of full control over this land, since the landlord class (or the state) held the administrative right to levy taxes against these peasants and to extract labor services from them, as well as control them in other ways. This meant that the economic situation of free peasants was usually little different from those who had no legal title to land at all.

The distributive mode characteristic of agrarian societies is often called **surplus expropriation.** It occurs when a class of landlords compels another class of dependent economic producers to produce a surplus from their fields and relinquish it to them. The surplus is handed over in the form of rent, taxation of various sorts, and various types of labor services. There are several crucial differences between expro-

priation and partial redistribution, two worth noting here. First, landlords have considerably greater power than chiefs, and they use this power to place many more economic burdens on peasant producers than chiefs are capable of placing on their followers. Second, the flow of goods and services between peasants and lords is substantially more unequal than is the flow of valuables between chiefs and commoners. It is largely in one direction only—from peasants to lords—and lords are under no obligation to redistribute economic surpluses to the primary producers and usually do not do so. Although there may be in some situations a fine line between partial redistribution and expropriation, in most cases it is not difficult to tell whether redistribution or expropriation is operating within a society.

Under medieval European feudalism, surplus expropriation was the dominant distributive mode. Peasants owed landlords a specified rent for the use of the landlord's land that they paid either as a portion of their harvests (rent in kind), or by money (cash rent), or some combination of the two. In the earlier days of the feudal period, rent in kind was the standard form of rent payment, but as the feudal system evolved in the later Middle Ages, cash rent began to replace rent in kind. Since the peasant was thus producing both for himself and for his landlord, he had to increase his own toil as well as that of his family in order to meet these economic demands. Peasants also had economic burdens in the form of taxes. For instance, peasants had to pay a tax to grind their grain in the lord's mill, another tax to bake their bread in the lord's oven, and yet another to fish in the lord's fishpond. (Since peasants did not own these resources, they fell into this sort of dependence on their lords.) A third type of economic burden placed on medieval peasants was that of labor services. Peasants were required to spend so many days working on the lord's demesne (his home farm, or personal land on which he, and not his peasants, lived), tilling the soil and tending the animal herds. This burden often became very oppressive and left the peasant little time to provide for his own family's subsistence by working his own lands.

In ancient Rome a vast system of surplus expropriation also existed, but this system rested primarily on slave rather than peasant labor. The huge supply of slaves on which Rome relied was acquired by political conquest of foreign lands. Slave labor was much cheaper than peasant labor and therefore was the principal labor mode in Roman society (Cameron, 1973). There were many great Roman estates that had large slave gangs working on them; Pliny, for instance, mentions one estate that had 4,117 slaves (Cameron, 1973). Where slavery rather than serfdom is the principal labor mode, the system of surplus expropriation is more direct and obvious. For example, to calculate their economic gain, the Roman landowners essentially had to determine the amount of wealth their slaves produced for them and subtract from this the cost of acquiring and maintaining a slave labor force.

Stratification

With the transition from intensive horticultural to agrarian societies, the limitations formerly placed on the stratification system were removed. The disappearance of the redistributive ethic and the removal of kinship ties between the members of different

social classes were associated with the emergence of extreme forms of social stratification in which the majority of persons were frequently thrown into conditions of extreme poverty and degradation. One of the most striking characteristics of agrarian societies was the immense gap in power, privilege, and prestige that existed between the dominant and subordinate classes. Indeed, agrarian societies are by far the most highly stratified of all preindustrial societies. (Unless otherwise noted, the following discussion is based on the description of agrarian stratification provided by Lenski, 1966.)

Agrarian stratification systems generally contained the following social classes:

- A political-economic elite consisting of the ruler and his royal family and a landowning governing class
- The retainer class
- The merchant class
- The priestly class
- The peasantry
- Artisans
- Expendables

Although the first four of these strata may be considered privileged groups, the privileged segment of greatest significance in all agrarian societies was, of course, the political-economic elite: the ruler and the governing class. Likewise, although peasants, artisans, and expendables were all highly subordinate classes, the peasantry, since it constituted a majority of the population, was far and away the primary subjugated class.

The ruler in agrarian societies—monarch, king, emperor, or of whatever title—was that person who officially stood at the political head of society. The governing class consisted of those persons who were ordinarily the primary owners of land and who received the benefits that accompanied such ownership. But in fact both the ruler and the governing class tended to be both major landowners and major wielders of political power, and there were vital connections between these two segments of the elite. Taken together, they typically comprised no more than 1 or 2 percent of the population while appropriating approximately one-half to two-thirds of the total wealth. They typically enjoyed a considerable (and often enormous) amount of power, privilege, and prestige in comparison to other classes. A majority of the huge economic surplus generated within agrarian societies almost always found its way into the hands of the entire political-economic elite.

The rulers of agrarian societies have generally controlled great wealth. By the end of the fourteenth century, for example, English kings had an average income of approximately £135,000 a year, an amount that was equal to 85 percent of the combined incomes of the 2,200 members of the nobility and squirearchy. Rulers of some of the great agrarian bureaucratic empires have fared much better than this. Xerxes, emperor of Persia in pre-Christian times, is said to have had an annual income that would have totaled $35 million by modern standards. Similarly, the annual income of Suleiman the Magnificent of Turkey was judged to have equaled $421 million; the

figures for Akbar the Great of India and his successor, Aurangzeb, are estimated at $120 million and $270 million, respectively. As for the wealth of the governing class, Lenski estimates that this class probably received on the average at least one-quarter of the total income of most agrarian societies. In late nineteenth-century China, for instance, the Chinese portion of the governing class (that is, excluding the Manchu segment of this class) received approximately 645 million *taels* per year in total income, a figure that amounted to 24 percent of the gross national product. Averaging out to about 450 *taels* per family head, the Chinese segment of the governing class had an annual income roughly 20 times that of the remainder of Chinese society.

Standing directly below the ruler and governing class in agrarian societies was the so-called retainer class. This class consisted of such functionaries as government officials, professional soldiers, household servants, and other persons who were directly employed to serve the ruler and governing class. Lenski estimates that the retainer class probably constituted around 5 percent of the population of most agrarian societies. A crucial role of this class was to mediate the relations between the elite and the common people. As Lenski notes, it was various officials of the retainer class who actually carried out the day-to-day work necessary for getting the economic surplus into the hands of the ruler and governing class. The actual privilege and social status of members of the retainer class varied considerably. Certain members of this class enjoyed greater privilege than some lower-ranking members of the governing class, while others of the class often enjoyed no special measure of privilege; their overall standing in society was perhaps only slightly better than that of the average peasant. On the average, however, members of the retainer class tended to share to a significant degree in the benefits of the wealth controlled by their employers. The retainer class was in effect a service class, but its general position in society was clearly nearer that of the privileged than of the disprivileged.

Also standing among the privileged segments of agrarian societies was the merchant class. Merchants, of course, engaged in commercial activity and were a vital part of the agrarian urban economy. The merchant class was often of great value to the ruler and governing class, since merchants dealt in many of the luxury goods that were purchased by the elite. Although many merchants remained poor, some amassed substantial wealth, and a few were wealthier than some members of the governing class. Yet, despite these material benefits, merchants were usually accorded very low prestige. In the traditional status-ranking system of China, for example, merchants were placed near the very bottom of the social scale, ranking even below peasants and artisans. Merchants in medieval Europe fared somewhat better, but they were still regarded as highly inferior to the governing class. Merchants appear to have been well aware of their low status, and many strove to raise their status to the level of the governing class by imitating its lifestyle.

Although the priestly class in agrarian societies was often internally stratified, in general it can be considered a privileged class. Indeed, priests have frequently commanded substantial wealth in many agrarian societies, and it has been a common pattern for them to be close allies of rulers and governing classes. In Egypt in the twelfth century BCE, for example, as well as in eighteenth-century France, priests owned 15 percent of the land. In pre-Reformation Sweden the Church owned 21

percent of the land, and in Ceylon, Buddhist monasteries are said to have been in control of about one-third of the land.

This privileged status of the priestly class as a whole no doubt resulted from the political alliances typically forged between priests and rulers and governing classes. The latter two groups have commonly sought priestly support for their oppressive and exploitative activities. Priests have therefore been properly rewarded for their aid to these dominant groups. However, the privilege of the priestly class was usually insecure. The holdings of this class were often confiscated by the political elite, and thus the economic alliance between the priesthood and the elite was often a shaky one. Moreover, not all priests were wealthy and of high status. In medieval Europe, for instance, priests were divided into an upper and lower clergy. The upper clergy lived in a privileged style consistent with its noble background, but members of the lower clergy—parish priests directly serving the common people—lived in a style resembling that of the common people themselves.

The peasant class in agrarian societies has occupied a distinctly inferior social, economic, and political status. Economically, the lot of peasants has generally been a miserable one, although the specific degree of their exploitation has varied from one society and one time to another. As noted earlier, a major burden placed on all peasants has been taxation, the principal means of separating the peasant from his surplus product. The oppressiveness of taxation has varied considerably. During the Tokugawa era in Japan, the rate of taxation of the peasantry varied from as little as 30 percent to as much as 70 percent of the crop. In China, approximately 40 to 50 percent of total peasant agricultural production was commonly claimed by landowners. In pre-British India, peasants apparently handed over from one-third to one-half of their crops to both Muslim and Hindu rulers. In Babylon during the time of Hammurabi, taxes ranged from one-third to one-half of the crop. In Ottoman Turkey, the tax rate varied from 10 to 50 percent. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russia, the rate was 20 to 50 percent.

In a number of agrarian societies, multiple forms of taxation have existed. One of the most striking illustrations of a system of multiple taxation comes from the period of Ottoman rule in Bulgaria. Here, the Turks imposed nearly 80 different kinds of taxes and obligations on the peasantry. One such tax was known as the "tooth tax," a levy placed on a village by the Turks after they had eaten and drunk there. In official terms, the tax was said to compensate the Turks "for the wear and tear sustained by their teeth during the meal" (Lenski, 1966:269). Incredible as such a tax seems, it does indicate the lengths to which many agrarian elites have gone to benefit themselves at the expense of the bulk of the population.

In addition to the burdens of taxation, peasants were also subjected to other hardships. One of these was the **corvée,** or system of forced labor. Under this system, peasants were obligated to provide so many days of labor either for their lord or for the state. In medieval Europe, for example, peasants were obligated to work on their lord's land a specified number of days per week throughout the year. During the building of the Great Wall in China, some peasants were kept on forced labor projects nearly their entire adult lives. Peasant hardships did not end with the bur-

press (and he frequently did), the peasant was under obligation to use them and to compensate the lord handsomely for such use. In some agrarian societies, the lord could take anything he desired from a peasant's personal property, and he could do so without payment. In medieval Europe, when a man died, his lord could claim his best beast. Furthermore, if a man's daughter married off the manor or without the lord's permission, the girl's father could be fined.

It should be obvious that the life of the average peasant was an extremely difficult one. By and large, life was lived with but the barest necessities for existence. The peasant diet was generally a poor one in terms of the quantity, variety, and nutritional adequacy of the food. Household furniture was extremely meager, and most peasants slept on straw-covered earthen floors. Sometimes conditions became so bad that a living was no longer possible and peasants had to abandon the land and attempt to sustain themselves by other means.

In addition to the severe economic deprivation typically suffered by peasants, the peasantry occupied a very low social status in all agrarian societies. A great gulf separated the lifestyles of peasants and the elite. The elite (and, to varying degrees, other classes as well) regarded peasants as extreme social inferiors, frequently conceiving of them as something less than fully human. In some agrarian societies, peasants were formally classified in various documents as belonging to essentially the same category as the livestock. Lacking all but the barest necessities of life, and deprived of any opportunity to pursue even such unremarkable amenities as an education or the cultivation of good manners, the peasantry stood in stark contrast to the privileged elite, where the social trappings of high status were a fundamental part of everyday life.

Standing below the peasantry in the agrarian stratified order were two other classes. One of these consisted of artisans, or trained craftsmen, a class that Lenski estimates probably represented about 3 to 7 percent of the population in most agrarian societies. Artisans were mainly recruited from among the ranks of the dispossessed peasantry. Although the incomes of peasants and artisans overlapped, artisans were generally worse off economically, many apparently living in destitute circumstances.

At the very bottom of virtually every agrarian society could be found a class of expendables. Constituting approximately 5 to 10 percent of most agrarian populations, these persons were found in urban areas. Their ranks were filled by beggars, petty thieves, outlaws, prostitutes, underemployed itinerant workers, and other persons who, as Lenski notes, were "forced to live solely by their wits or by charity" (1966:281). Members of this class suffered from extreme economic deprivation, malnutrition, and disease, and had a very high death rate. The sons and daughters of poor peasants who inherited nothing often fell into this extraordinarily hapless class.

One's class position in all agrarian societies was overwhelmingly determined by social heredity. Most persons died as members of the class into which they were born. Some social mobility did occur, however. Occasionally, a person rose in rank to one of the privileged classes. Nevertheless, such upward movement seldom occurred; downward mobility was much more common. As mentioned, children who inherited nothing from their poor peasant parents were often forced into either the

artisan or expendable class in order to maintain any sort of existence at all. Thus, the possibility of improving one's disadvantaged position in an agrarian society was greatly limited.

Politics

The chiefdom, containing only a limited capacity for compulsion, is inadequately backed by the administrative machinery necessary to overcome the most severe forms of resistance. When this administrative machinery is finally created, that form of political society known as the *state* has evolved. It is this type of political structure that prevails in nearly all agrarian societies.

The state not only continues the general evolutionary process of the increasing concentration of power but it also establishes a *monopoly of force* necessary to back that power up and ensure that the will of the power holders prevails. Indeed, this capture of a monopoly of force is essential to the very definition of a state. As Morton Fried notes (1967:230):

> Of great importance is the claim of the state to paramountcy in the application of naked force to social problems. Frequently this means that warfare and killing become monopolies of the state and may only be carried out at times, in places, and under the specific conditions set by the state.
>
> In the final analysis the power of a state can be manifested in a real physical force, an army, a militia, a police force, a constabulary, with specialized weaponry, drill, conscription, a hierarchy of command, and the other paraphernalia of structured control.

Although holding a monopoly of force is crucial to the nature of the state, other characteristics of states are also significant. First, the state emerges under conditions in which the significance of kinship ties is reduced. Kinship ties in chiefdoms serve to soften the use of coercive power. With the transition to the state, these ties between ruler and ruled are generally eliminated. Therefore, state-level rulers no longer subjugate their kinsmen, but dominate a great mass of unrelated individuals. Second, states promote elaborate legitimizing ideologies (van den Berghe, 1978). The naked use of force alone may be insufficient to guarantee compliance with the state's wishes, and rulers therefore commonly attempt to convince the people of their moral right to rule. The greater the psychological commitment of the people to the state, the less the likelihood of rebellion against it. Legitimizing ideologies have taken a variety of forms; but a very common tactic has been for state rulers to justify their rule in religious terms: to claim supernatural sanction of their role in society. Finally, unlike chiefdoms states have generally not been redistributive centers. The flow of the surplus to the state has been a one-way flow, and such surplus expropriation has resulted in substantial—indeed, often enormous—enrichment of the ruling powers.

The state in one form or another represents the outcome of a long process of political evolution in which democracy and equality were increasingly undermined



European peasants plowing in the mid-eighteenth century.

that powerful leaders no longer needed to promise to be generous to their followers. They could and did promise their followers little or nothing, save continual subjugation and constant toil, and they had a sufficient monopoly of force to back up their rule.

Pastoral Societies

Subsistence Technology

Pastoralism (or pastoral nomadism) is a highly specialized subsistence adaptation found in arid regions of the world poorly suited to agriculture. It is based on the tending of animal herds rather than the growing of crops. Exactly when and how pastoralism first emerged is still debated. It may have arisen as early as 8,000 years ago in parts of the Middle East (Hole, 1977; Cribb, 1991), but this is by no means certain. There is evidence that early in prehistory a number of groups seemed to depend heavily on domesticated animals. However, true pastoralism—exclusive or near-exclusive dependence on animal herds, with little or no agriculture—may be a more recent phenomenon, dating only from approximately 3700 or 3500 BP (Sahlins, 1968; Cribb, 1991; Barfield, 1993). In any event, although classic pastoralism occurs later in history than cultivation, it is not evolutionarily "higher" or "more advanced"

than agriculture. Rather, it is an alternative to agriculture in environments where aridity makes cultivation of the land difficult or impossible.

Pastoralists tend their animal herds year round and move seasonally with them in search of pasture (hence the name pastoral *nomadism*). Animals most frequently kept include sheep, goats, camels, cattle, and horses. Some pastoral groups depend on a single animal species, but most herd a number of different species. A few pastoralists practice no agriculture at all. These groups obtain agricultural products for their diet by trade relations with agricultural neighbors. Usually, however, pastoral groups engage in some agriculture in order to supplement the foods they obtain from their animal herds, but this is always distinctly secondary to their herding activities.

Pastoralists live and travel in relatively small groups that usually do not exceed 100 to 200 members. Population densities are quite low, usually fewer than 5 persons per square mile. Most of what pastoralists eat, of course, comes from their animal herds. They subsist principally on milk, meat, and blood. In eastern Africa, for instance, many pastoral groups have as their major dietary item a mixture of blood and milk obtained from their cattle. Although agricultural products generally supplement the diet, for some groups they do so only to a small extent.

Most pastoralists have been located in the dry regions of Asia and Africa: in southwest Asia, northern Africa, and the grasslands of eastern Africa. Pastoralism is also found in certain northern Eurasian forest regions, where reindeer herders predominate (Sahlins, 1968). Marshall Sahlins (1968:33) notes that the "classic locus of pastoral tribes is the transcontinental dry belt of Asia and Africa: Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, Turkestan, Iran, Arabia, the Sahara and its environs." Thomas Barfield (1993), a leading anthropological expert on pastoral nomads, categorizes the pastoral groups of the world into five zones:

1. *Africa just south of the Sahara, running from west to east, and from north to south in east Africa.* Here, cattle are the most prominent animal, although sheep and goats are also herded and donkeys are used for transport. Camels may be included in groups adjacent to the northern deserts. Some of the best studied groups in this region are the Dinka, Maasai, Nuer, and Turkana.
2. *The Saharan and Arabian deserts.* Pastoralists of this region usually specialize in just one animal, the dromedary (or one-humped) camel, which provides both food and transport. The people living in this region are Bedouin Arabs. This form of pastoralism is especially extreme not only because it relies on a single species but also because very large distances must be traveled in the cycle of annual migration.
3. *Central Eurasia, north of the Saharan and Arabian deserts, through the plateaus of Turkey and Iran and further east.* Pastoralists living in this region herd sheep, goats, camels, donkeys, and horses—virtually all of the animals known to pastoralists except cattle. Some of the best-known groups of this region are the

for food as well. Sheep, goats, cattle, and Bactrian (two-humped) camels are also herded. Today these groups are most commonly found in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Xinjiang, China. The most famous groups of this region are historical: the Hsiung-nu of the northern steppes of ancient China, the Scythians of southern Russia and the Ukraine, the Uighur of northwest Mongolia, and the Zunghar in the area where Russia, Mongolia, and China met. By far the most famous historical group, however, was the Mongols, who lived in the Mongolian steppe just north of China.

5. *The Tibetan Plateau and neighboring mountain regions.* Groups in this region live at extremely high altitudes unsuited for cultivation and where there are vast grasslands that are good for grazing animals. The animals that are herded are sheep, goats, and, most important, yaks. The yak is uniquely adapted to high altitudes and extreme cold, and is used for its hair, milk, meat, and also as a transport animal. Some groups also herd a yak/cattle hybrid known as a *dzo*, which can flourish at lower altitudes as well as high ones. The Drokba are a well-known group from this region.

The Hsiung-nu of the northern Chinese steppes were pastoralists who, beginning around 2200 BP, preyed upon Chinese civilization. Mounted on their horses, they regularly raided and looted it and wreaked all sorts of havoc (Barfield, 1989). They established an empire that was based on their extraction of an enormous amount of wealth by means of their raids. The Hsiung-nu were not interested in ruling China, but rather in escaping with their looted wealth back to the steppes. This was the key to their success. Because of their riding and military skills, Chinese civilization had great difficulty coping with them. (The Great Wall, in fact, was built as an effort to keep them out.) The Hsiung-nu were followed historically by the Hsien-pi and the Jou-jan (Barfield, 1993), and then, much later, by the Mongols, who engaged in the same raiding and looting strategy, only on a much larger scale. In the thirteenth century they were led by Chinggis Khan and his descendants and established the largest empire the world has ever known.

A well-known contemporary pastoral group is the Nuer, who numbered between 200,000 and 300,000 in 1930. They are pastoralists who live mostly in the Sudan in eastern Africa, but some of them live further east inside the borders of Ethiopia (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Service, 1963; Mair, 1974). Most of their territory is open grassland through which travels the upper part of the Nile River and some of its tributaries. They experience two very different seasons, a dry one between December and June and then a very wet one between June and December. During the dry season there is not enough water, but during the wet season there is too much. Most of their economic activity centers on the herding of cattle, but they do grow some crops, such as millet and maize. Like most pastoralists, they disdain cultivation, regarding it as irksome, and think of herding and caring for their animals as the best way to live. Cattle are cherished possessions that constitute the main form of wealth. They are pampered animals—talked to, petted, their horns tied with ribbons, and so on. Milk is the Nuer's main food throughout an entire year. It is drunk fresh, combined with millet into a type of porridge, and made into cheese. Blood is either boiled to thicken or allowed to coagulate into a solid substance. It is then



Masai herdsmen of east Africa with some of their cattle. The Masai are one of the world's best-known pastoral societies.

roasted before it is eaten. Cattle are eaten when they are too old to breed or if they suffer serious injuries.

The Basseri are pastoralists who live in the dry steppes and mountains of southern Iran (Barth, 1961). Numbering about 16,000 in the entire tribe, they are tent dwellers who move about with their animal herds. Their habitat is hot and dry. Annual rainfall is generally 10 inches or less, and most of this falls in the winter. The Basseri keep a number of domesticated animals, the most important of which are sheep and goats. The products of these animals provide the major part of subsistence. Donkeys are kept for transport and for riding, horses for riding only. Camels are maintained for use in heavy transport, and their wool is also of value. Poultry is sometimes found as a source of meat.

The milk obtained from sheep and goats is a most important product. Sour milk is a staple and is processed for storage. Cheese is made, although seldom during the periods of daily migrations. The best cheese is allegedly made during the summer, when the Basseri maintain a stationary residence. Lambs are slaughtered for meat. The hides of slaughtered animals are sold in markets and also used as bags for storing water, sour milk, and buttermilk. Wool is also an important animal product. Felt is made out of lamb's wool, and sheep's wool and camel hair are sold and used in weaving and rope making. Goat hair is also of value and is spun and woven.

Many agricultural products are included in the typical diet of the Basseri. Some of these are produced by the Basseri themselves, the rest being obtained in trade. Cereal crops such as wheat are planted when the tribesmen first arrive in their summer camps, and these are harvested before the departure from the camps. The agriculture performed by the Basseri themselves is very rough, and, in general, disliked and disdained. Therefore, many of the Basseri are reluctant to engage in it. Many of the Basseri's necessities are obtained through trade. Flour, sugar, tea, dates, and fruits and vegetables are obtained exclusively or mainly by trade. Material for clothes, finished clothes and shoes, cooking utensils, and saddles are purchased in markets.

Political Economy

Many pastoral societies are organized into uncentralized tribes that are highly egalitarian and in which political leadership is informal and leaders lack any real power or authority. The Nuer are a good example (Service, 1963; Mair, 1964, 1974). They do not have any permanent land rights and believe that land should be available for everyone. Cattle are owned by individuals, and some families may accumulate more cattle than others (and thus be somewhat richer), but unequal standards of living do not result, and thus there are no social class divisions. At the most, those who have more cattle may be given more prestige. Sharing and generosity are the norm in Nuer villages and even between villages.

The Nuer take exception to any form of behavior that might be interpreted as giving an order, and age is the only basis for deference (it is shown by younger to older people in a society famous for its finely graded age groups). Before they fell under the influence of European colonialism, fighting between Nuer tribes was regarded as a normal and even laudatory activity, but colonialism brought an end to this. At the time there were no individuals given special responsibility for the maintenance of order and settling of conflicts. After the fighting was stopped, such a role was created in the form of the famous "leopard-skin chief" (Mair, 1974). The leopard-skin chief, so called because he was the only person allowed to wear the skin of a leopard, had special responsibilities with respect to mediating decisions concerning acts of homicide and putting an end to feuds; however, he did not have any right to command the actions of others or to force obedience. As their principal ethnographer, E. E. Evans-Pritchard comments (1940:174–175):

> In taking the view that to regard the leopard-skin chief as a political agent or a judicial authority is to misunderstand the constitution of Nuer society and to be blind to its fundamental principles, we have to account for the part he plays in the settlement of feuds. We have stated that he has no judicial or executive authority. It is not his duty to decide on the merits of a case of homicide. It would never occur to Nuer that a judgement of any kind was required. Likewise he has no means of compelling people to pay or to accept blood-cattle. He has no powerful kinsmen or the backing of a populous community to support him. He is simply a mediator in a specific social situation and his mediation is only successful because community ties are acknowledged by both parties and because they wish to avoid, for the time being at any rate, further hostilities. Only if both parties want the affair settled can the chief intervene successfully. He is the machinery which enables groups to bring about a normal state of affairs when they desire to achieve this end.

By contrast with the Nuer, the Basseri constitute a stratified society that is politically organized as a chiefdom (Barth, 1961). The central leader is a chief who is granted considerable authority to command the actions of others. As Fredrik Barth (1961) notes, power is conceived as emanating from him, not delegated to him by his followers. The chief plays a major political role in settling disputes that the contending parties have been unable to settle informally. In this regard, Barth comments that the (1961:74)

> outstanding feature of the chief's position . . . is his power of decision and autocratic command over his subjects. . . . The right to command, to make decisions on behalf of persons in other tents than one's own, is a strictly chiefly prerogative. The monopolization by the chief of the right to command is a fundamental abstract principle of Basseri social structure.

Barth goes on to say that a Basseri chief "may give any person an order which the latter must obey without regard to any pre-established organizational pattern" (1961:75).

Not only does the chief have considerable power but he also has a great deal of material privilege and high status. He conducts himself in an imperial manner, lives in the largest tent, and maintains the highest level of consumption in his community. His high level of income derives both from inherited property and the right to collect various taxes from fellow tribesmen, the latter being collected in the form of so many sheep per hundred. This gives a contemporary Basseri chief an income of nearly 8,000 sheep. Taxes are also paid by followers in the form of clarified butter, and visitors to the chief's tent often bring livestock and other gifts. But chiefs are also redistributors in a manner highly reminiscent of chiefs in intensive horticultural societies. They are expected to be generous and often provide gifts of weapons and horses, at least to their more prominent subjects.

The chief is not the only wealthy or high-status man in the tribe. Other men can also accumulate wealth and rise in social rank. Some men are able, especially during a succession of economically successful years, to become wealthy herd owners, sometimes establishing flocks of sheep of 800 or even more. Nomads who accumulate large herds often invest some of the wealth in landed property and become part-time landlords. Barth comments (1961:105):

> The position of even a petty landowner is one of relative privilege. His title to land gives him entry into the local elite of his village and district, and in the case of wealthier landlords, also on a provincial or local level. In dealings with the local authorities, the man who owns land, however small the plot may be, is in an entirely different position from the ordinary villager.
>
> A transfer of capital from flocks into land holdings is thus economically advantageous to the wealthier herd-owner; it also offers striking social advantages within the framework of sedentary society. A number of Basseri choose to do this—frequently with no thoughts of future sedentarization. The land provides them with a secure store of wealth and a considerable annual income in the agricultural products needed in their normal pattern of consumption—it frees them from the necessity of purchasing these products and thus tends to increase the rate of growth of their herds. Unless disease strikes their herds severely, the process tends to become cumulative, with a steadily growing fraction of the nomad's wealth invested in land.

Thus, the Basseri have built a society considerably more developed than pastoral groups like the Nuer. They demonstrate the evolutionary possibilities that are contained within a pastoral economy.

Some pastoralists have even been able to create large-scale confederations and states. The classic example, of course, is the Mongol Empire. However, pastoral economies do not contain the internal conditions that will support such political

structures. They are usually spread out over too large an area and are too economically unspecialized (Barfield, 1993). Therefore, the creation of states has depended on external relations. The Hsiung-nu of ancient north China could only create an empire by looting the wealth produced by Chinese peasants and expropriated by Chinese landlords and the Chinese state. When the Chinese state collapsed in 220 CE, the Hsiung-nu no longer had any rich provinces to loot or a government to terrorize, and their empire collapsed (Barfield, 1993). The same was true for the Mongols of later times. Barfield (1993:151) notes, "The foreign policies of all imperial confederacies of Mongolia had a single aim: to extract benefits from China directly by raiding or indirectly through subsidies, and to establish institutionalized border-trade agreements. Without such revenue the imperial confederacy would collapse."

Causes of the Evolution of Preindustrial Societies

The Evolution of Subsistence Technology

Table 4.1 summarizes the main characteristics of preindustrial societies. The question is, What accounts for the evolution of preindustrial societies from one stage to the next? We will begin by looking at the evolution of subsistence technology. Why did hunter-gatherers gradually give up food collection in favor of food production? Why did simple horticulturalists intensify their cultivation techniques, and why did intensive horticulturalists in various parts of the world begin to farm the land by using plows and draft animals? It was once widely believed by social scientists of all sorts that subsistence technology was a self-generating, independent force in its own right. It was thought that technological changes occurred as the cumulative result of the inventive powers of the human mind. It was also believed that whenever new forms of technology became available, people automatically adopted them because they saw the benefits they would bring.

Most social scientists have now abandoned this view of technological change, and a variety of theories have been developed to explain both the shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture and the intensification of agricultural production. One of the most widely embraced explanations of the evolution of subsistence technology is the population pressure argument proposed in the mid-1960s by Ester Boserup (1965, 1981; cf. R. Wilkinson, 1973). Boserup holds that people have no inherent desire to advance their level of technology. She postulates that people wish to make a living by the simplest and easiest means possible. Their natural inclinations are to meet their subsistence needs by expending the least amount of time and effort. Since adopting new technologies actually results in people having to work harder and longer, they will not switch to new methods unless special conditions compel them to do so.

Boserup believes that the principal condition compelling people to advance their technology is **population pressure.** Population pressure exists when population growth causes people to press against food resources. As the number of mouths to be fed increases, a point is eventually reached at which people begin to deplete their resources and suffer a significant drop in their standard of living. Boserup argues that it is at this point that people will start to intensify production. They adopt

TABLE 4.1 The Main Trends of Preindustrial Social Evolution

Type of Society	Mode of Subsistence	Mode of Ownership
Hunter-gatherer	Hunting of wild animals using spears, spear throwers, bows and arrows, nets, and traps. Gathering of wild plant food using a digging stick. Fishing often undertaken, and in some environments may be a principal subsistence activity. Small nomadic bands.	Normally some type of communal ownership. Vital resources that sustain life owned by the entire community, and no person may deprive others of the full right to use these resources.
Simple horticultural	Small-scale gardening, often using slash-and-burn cultivation. Men prepare garden sites, but women commonly the principal cultivators. Gardens moved frequently, and fallow periods generally long (e.g., 20 to 30 years). Sedentary villages.	Typically lineage ownership, which is a variation on primitive communism in which resources are communally owned, but owning group is a kinship group rather than entire community.
Intensive horticultural	Small-scale gardening, commonly using slash-and-burn techniques but with more frequent and intensive cultivation of plots and shorter fallow periods (e.g., 5 to 10 years). May also involve extension of technological inventory to include metal hoes and construction of irrigation systems, as well as more extensive fertilization of garden plots. Sedentary villages.	Usually paramount ownership. Powerful chiefs claim ownership of large tracts of land and exert considerable control over how land is used. However, primary producers who live on the land retain substantial decision-making power over day-to-day cultivation.
Agrarian	Large-scale intensive agriculture employing the plow and traction animals. Fields entirely cleared of vegetation and cultivated permanently or semipermanently. Extensive fertilization to maintain soil fertility. Peasant villages, towns, cities.	Typically some type of seigneurial ownership. Land owned and controlled by a private class of landlords, or by a powerful governmental apparatus. Landlords exert great power over the primary producers (peasants or slaves) who cultivate the land and impose severe penalties on them for its use.
Pastoral	Reliance on animal herds in arid environments not well suited for cultivation. Herds moved on a seasonal basis. Some cultivation practiced, or plant matter obtained through trade. Nomadic camps, some semipermanent villages.	Varies between collective rights to land and land held as private property.

Mode of Distribution	Social Inequality/Stratification	Political Organization
Generalized reciprocity. Sharing and generosity pervasive and compulsory social habits.	Typically no stratification. Inequalities of privilege generally absent. Mild inequalities based on age, sex, and personal characteristics (e.g., courage, hunting skill) but these are inequalities of prestige and influence only. General equality permeates entire society.	*Band*: Primary political role is that of headman, with informal leadership capacity and no power over others.
Pure or egalitarian redistribution. Goods funneled into the hands of a leader, who is responsible for reallocating them to the entire community in an essentially equal fashion.	Typically no stratification. Inequalities of privilege generally absent. Main form of inequality is personal prestige as, for example, achieved by redistributor big men. Frequently "rank" societies in Fried's sense.	*Tribe*: Political leaders with considerable prestige but no real power. Leadership typically limited to local village level. Villages largely autonomous politically (i.e., no political unification or centralization).
Partial or stratified redistribution. Goods funneled into the hands of a central social group that retains a large portion of these goods for its own subsistence and for building and maintaining a governmental administrative apparatus. Some reallocation.	Typically first emergence of genuine stratification. Common pattern is division of society into three social strata (chiefs, subchiefs, commoners). Power and privilege of chiefs limited by people's demands for their generosity. Redistributive ethic retained, preventing extreme stratification.	*Chiefdom*: Centralized political system organized into a hierarchy of powerful chiefs and subchiefs. Individual villages lose political autonomy and become subordinated to a centralized authority.
Surplus expropriation. A highly imbalanced and exploitative relationship between landlords and primary producers. Landlords extract surplus through rent, taxation, demands for labor services, and other mechanisms.	Typically extreme stratification. Bulk of population normally a subjugated and exploited peasantry. Rulers and governing classes possess great wealth and power. Serfdom and slavery most common forms of subordination of bulk of the population. Caste in some places. Poverty and suffering widespread. Placement of individuals in class structure largely by birth, but some mobility.	*State*: Political system having great concentration of power in the hands of a small elite, monopolization of the means of violence, expropriation of surplus production, and a legitimizing ideology.
Varies from pure redistribution to stratified redistribution.	Varies from highly egalitarian to rank to stratified societies.	Usually tribes, but some chiefdoms; confederations and even states occasionally established through interaction with other states.

new forms of technology and work harder and longer in order to produce more food to feed more people. Simple horticulturalists, for example, may begin to adopt more intensive horticultural techniques. Likewise, intensive horticulturalists may switch to plow agriculture.

It is imperative to realize that Boserup's argument does not assume that the switch to more intensive technologies will lead to the resumption of old standards of living, let alone to any long-term improvement in the standard of living. Although this may occur in the short run (Conelly, 1992), the effect over the long haul is almost inevitably the continued deterioration of living standards. Her argument is simply that the adoption of more intensive modes of production is necessary in order to maintain as high a living standard as possible under the imposition of greater numbers.

Mark Cohen (1977, 1985) uses the logic of Boserup's argument to explain the origin of agriculture on a worldwide basis. Cohen notes that ancient hunter-gatherers had probably long understood how to domesticate plants and animals, but waited for perhaps tens of thousands of years before putting their knowledge to use. Apparently, they saw no benefits to the practice of agriculture, and they probably saw it as a less desirable way of making a living than collecting food from nature's storehouse. Indeed, when contemporary hunter-gatherers are asked by anthropologists why they do not practice agriculture, they usually respond with something like, "Why should we work harder in order to live no better than we're living now?" Richard Lee (1979), for example, asked a !Kung man named /Xashe why the !Kung did not adopt some of the practices of their agricultural neighbors, and /Xashe replied, "Why should we plant when there are so many mongongos in the world?"

As noted in the previous chapter, evidence from paleopathological studies indicates that all over the world hunter-gatherer societies of some 30,000 years ago show evidence of better nutrition and health than much more recent horticultural and agricultural societies (Cohen and Armelagos, 1984). Compared to later agricultural populations, ancient hunter-gatherers showed less evidence of infection and chronic malnutrition, less biological stress that would have disrupted childhood growth, and fewer dental cavities and less oral disease. Individuals in the ancient hunter-gatherer populations also seemed to live just as long, if not slightly longer, than the members of later agricultural communities. If, then, ancient hunter-gatherers were reasonably well nourished and knew how to plant crops but avoided doing so because that would mean more work for no improvement in their lives, what finally compelled some of them to cross the threshold to the agricultural way of life? Cohen argues that the reason was a "food crisis" due to growing population. He holds that hunter-gatherer groups in several regions of the world finally outgrew the capacity of their environments to sustain them at an acceptable standard of living. When this occurred, they were forced to start producing their own food in order to stave off the food crisis. They became willing to work harder because they now had something to gain from it.

Cohen's theory of the origin of agriculture is still widely debated by archaeologists, who are the social scientists best qualified to judge it. Some anthropologists and archaeologists feel that it is an "old" theory that is no longer "cutting edge." It is undeniable that the theory is, in terms of the current rate of scientific advance, a

rather old one, but newer is not necessarily better. To think so is to commit what the sociologist Robert Merton has called "the fallacy of the latest word." We find Cohen's theory highly plausible for several reasons, especially in terms of what we know about the attitude of modern hunter-gatherers to the practice of agriculture, and a number of modern anthropologists and archaeologists have developed theories of agricultural origins that give population pressure a significant role (Binford, 1968; Harner, 1970; Flannery, 1973; M. Harris, 1977). Moreover, the leading current competitors to Cohen's theory, although "cutting edge," leave a great deal to be desired. These theories emphasize either *climate change* (Henry, 1989; McCorriston and Hole, 1991), *resource stress* (M. Harris, 1977; D. Harris, 1977; Hayden, 1981), or *particular patterns of social organization* (Hayden, 1992; Bogucki, 1999).

The most serious problem with the climate change and resource stress theories is that they are usually designed to explain the Neolithic in only one part (or at most a few parts) of the world. The theories of Henry and of McCorriston and Hole are intended to explain only the Middle Eastern (southwest Asian) Neolithic—in fact, these authors deny the possibility of any general theory of the worldwide transition to agriculture—and Marvin Harris's theory is unsatisfactory in explaining the Neolithic in southwest Asia, southeast Asia, or China (Fiedel, 1987). (Hayden's theory has other serious difficulties, but these are too complicated to discuss here.) It is precisely where these theories fail that Cohen's succeeds. His theory is predicated on the enormously important fact of the *worldwide* transition to agriculture, as well as on the fact that in at least four different regions of the world, agriculture was independently invented. As Cohen has argued, the worldwide character of the Neolithic at approximately the same time in world prehistory is of such striking significance that only a general theory that explains this whole process can hope to succeed.

Recent theories that emphasize certain patterns of social organization have their own difficulties. One type of theory has been developed by Brian Hayden (1992), who earlier (1981) favored a resource stress explanation. Hayden's later theory assumes that agriculture first arose in bountiful environments that allowed hunter-gatherers to produce economic surpluses and engage in competitive feasting. As this feasting escalated, people's increasingly competitive desires created the need for larger and larger surpluses, and food production arose in order to make larger surpluses possible. One problem with this theory is that food production did not always arise in bountiful environments conducive to competitive feasting. In fact, food production probably arose in most instances in environments of scarcity rather than abundance. To the best of our knowledge there is no real evidence that the origins of agriculture and competitive feasting are found together in the archaeological record. More than likely, Hayden has the relationship between agriculture and competitive feasting backwards. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, competitive feasting is most likely to be found in societies that have already adopted agricultural techniques.

Another social model of agricultural origins has been presented by Peter Bogucki (1999). Bogucki argues that in foraging societies strong sharing norms prevent people from being motivated to engage in food production because they would be required to give away a large amount of what they harvested. People will not become motivated to cultivate unless they can keep what they can produce, and this

can only happen when the primary economic unit is something smaller than the band. In late hunter-gatherer times, foraging bands became atomized into what Bogucki calls "protohouseholds," which were kin groups that were economically self-sufficient. The formation of these groups is what led to the practice of agriculture because, with the obligation to share now lifted, these groups' members acquired the incentive to invest the greater time and energy it took to produce their own food. People now began to maximize their food production because they could store economic surpluses for later use.

This theory is unpersuasive for a variety of reasons, but especially because it makes the unwarranted assumption that prehistoric band societies would have continued to enforce their strong sharing norms even if people had started to farm the land and produce economic surpluses. This assumption is contradicted by what we know about food-storing hunter-gatherer societies. As noted earlier in this chapter, hunter-gatherers in bountiful environments have often been able to collect large economic surpluses and store them away for various uses, including such things as elaborate competitive feasting. Food-storing hunter-gatherers are usually highly stratified and have abandoned their strong norms emphasizing sharing. Food-sharing norms do not have a life of their own and are no longer necessary when individuals can produce what they need to survive, and more besides. Moreover, even in band societies that strongly enforce sharing norms, the household is still a relatively autonomous economic unit. When sharing occurs, people share more with their own kin than they do with the band as a whole.

Although there is still a good deal of disagreement concerning the causes of the early transition to agriculture, social scientists are more certain about the role of population pressure in leading to the **intensification of agricultural production.** Boserup (1981) herself presents considerable evidence that changes in the level of population density precede changes in the mode of economic production. For example, she points to the fact that the population increase in Japan from about 1600 to 1850 was closely followed by a shift in the intensity of production. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Boserup also notes that decreases in population density often seem to be followed by an actual *regression* in cultivation techniques. For example, in recent centuries some areas of South America experienced population reductions resulting from new diseases introduced by encroaching Europeans, and the indigenous societies of these regions regressed to less intensive cultivation techniques. Likewise, in the early twentieth century farmers in Tanzania, Vietnam, Ceylon, and India adopted less intensive agricultural methods when they were resettled by their governments to less populated regions and given more land to use. This was true even when the purpose of the resettlement was to spread more intensive methods to the areas of immigration.

Much additional research has supported the view that population pressure is the basic cause of preindustrial technological evolution. Increasingly intensive systems of agricultural production seem to have arisen as a response to growing numbers in such diverse regions of the world as South America, New Guinea, ancient Mesoamerica, and ancient Mesopotamia (Carneiro, 1968; Clarke, 1966; Sanders, 1972; Adams, 1972).

The Evolution of Political Economy

Gerhard Lenski (1966) presents a well-known theory of the evolution of economic life and stratification. Because of its emphasis on the role of an economic surplus, we suggest calling it the *surplus theory*. Lenski's theory assumes that humans are essentially self-interested creatures who strive to maximize their own well-being. They behave largely according to a principle of enlightened self-interest, cooperating with each other when it can further their interests, and struggling with each other when that seems the avenue to the satisfaction of their interests. The theory also assumes that the objects individuals seek are always scarce relative to the desire for them, and that individuals are unequally endowed by nature to compete for the attainment of scarce objects.

Lenski (1966) argues that cooperation and sharing are strongly emphasized in small-scale hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies because these modes of behavior are essential to the satisfaction of individual interests. People will share with each other when such sharing is to their long-run benefit. When this condition is not met, however, people compete and contend and increasingly unequal economic and social arrangements will emerge. The crucial change that leads from cooperation to competition and conflict is a society's ability to produce an economic surplus. When a surplus becomes available, a struggle for control of it seems inevitably to arise, and the surplus ends up largely in the hands of the most powerful individuals and groups. As a society's level of economic productivity grows, the size of its surplus grows; growing surpluses produce ever more intense struggles to control them, and thus increasingly unequal societies. What, then, determines the size of the surplus? According to Lenski, it is a society's technological capacity. Technological advance is therefore the key to the evolution of political economy.

The empirical data discussed earlier on the evolution of stratification are highly consistent with Lenski's theory. However, there are some problems with the theory, and the close association between technological development and stratification pointed to by Lenski seems to mislead us theoretically. Although highly correlated with stratification, technological development may not be the actual causal factor. The major difficulty with Lenski's theory involves his assumption about the origin of an economic surplus. Lenski appears to assume that economic surpluses are more or less automatic results of technological advance. Yet this cannot really be the case. Technological advance makes surpluses possible, but, as Ester Boserup (1965) points out, people will not automatically desire to produce them because to do so involves more work for questionable results.

Boserup assumes, quite reasonably we think, that people generally follow a **Law of Least Effort**—they prefer to carry out subsistence activities (and many others for that matter) by expending a minimal amount of time and energy. If people are not naturally inclined to produce surpluses, then the question arises as to how they can originate at all. The answer would seem to involve political compulsion: People produce surpluses because other people are able to compel them to do so. And if this is the case, then stratification, at least in the sense of differential economic power, already exists. Surpluses, then, actually follow closely on the heels of the develop-

ment of stratification (cf. Elster, 1985:169). To see how this can happen, and to see what is ultimately behind such a process, we propose an alternative theory that can be called the *scarcity theory*.

The scarcity theory, which is derived from suggestions made in the work of Michael Harner (1970, 1975), Morton Fried (1967), Richard Wilkinson (1973), and Rae Lesser Blumberg (1978), holds that the ultimate cause of the evolution of economic life and increasingly unequal social structures is population pressure. The following scenario may be imagined for purposes of illustrating the theory. Population pressure against resources has eventually led hunter-gatherers to begin adopting agricultural modes of subsistence, and agriculture eventually entirely displaces hunting and gathering. The "primitive communism" of hunter-gatherers gives way to the ownership of land by large kinship groups, but nonetheless ownership is still largely communal rather than private. However, further increases in population pressure cause horticulturalists to become more concerned about landownership.

Increasing scarcity in the availability of land suitable for cultivation leads some families to increased "selfishness" in landownership, and some families begin to own more land than others. Additional population pressure leads to still greater selfishness in landownership, and eventually private modes of property ownership emerge out of what was originally communal ownership. Since unequal access to crucial economic resources now exists, one segment of society is in a position to compel other segments to work harder in order to produce economic surpluses. The owning group lives off these resources and as a result is gradually able to withdraw from all direct economic production and become a kind of early or primitive "leisure class." Since technological advance has accompanied population pressure and declining standards of living, surpluses are now technologically as well as politically feasible. With additional advances in population pressure and technology, unequal access to resources becomes even more severe, and stratification intensifies under greater political compulsion by owning groups.

Of course, unequal landownership and political compulsion are not the only reasons that people will produce surpluses. Another good reason to produce them is to have food available in storage that can be used in lean times (M. Harris, 1977). This is one of the motives of chiefs in intensive horticultural societies. As we discussed earlier, African and Polynesian chiefs would often draw on their storehouses during times when harvests were insufficient to feed people adequately. However, this reason for surplus economic production cannot account for the development of significant economic inequalities. For those to develop, people have to be motivated to produce surpluses of a magnitude above and beyond what might be needed in reserve, and for that some type of compulsion is needed.

The scarcity theory holds that something probably very much like the process described above has happened in human history, and not just once, but many times. It is important to see that the scarcity theory and the surplus theory are similar in some ways—both are materialist and evolutionary theories. Whereas the surplus theory regards technological advance as the basic cause of the development of stratified political economies, the scarcity theory claims that the causal relationship between technology and stratification is illusory. It holds that both are results of population pressure and the scarcity of resources that this produces. The scarcity

theory is favored here because the surplus theory seems to be contradicted by Boserup's interpretation of the causes of technological change and the data that support her interpretation, yet the scarcity theory fits Boserup's claim very nicely.

Humans seem to be creatures who need little prodding to compete for status, wealth, and power (Sanderson, 2001). The economic demands of small-scale band and tribal societies place strict limits on such competitive striving, but when these demands are lifted later in social evolution, competition begins to take center stage and economic and political inequalities emerge and increasingly widen. This means that stratification systems have, so to speak, a "life of their own"—they become to a large extent detached from their original causes. Lenski himself recognizes this and stresses it. Once groups with unequal access to the means of production emerge in society, advantaged groups are highly motivated to maintain their advantage, and enhance it if possible. Stratification systems therefore tend to be inherently self-perpetuating and self-enhancing.

FOR FURTHER READING

Works by Harris (1974, 1977), Service (1971), Lenski (1966), Fried (1967), Johnson and Earle (2000), Minge-Klevana (1980), Plattner (1989), Wilk (1996), Diamond (1997), and Bogucki (1999), mentioned in the suggested reading list at the end of Chapter 3, are also highly relevant to the current chapter since they deal with the full range of preindustrial societies. Boserup's *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth* (1965) is the classic work on population pressure as the driving force in the intensification of economic production in preindustrial societies, and Mark Cohen's *The Food Crisis in Prehistory* (1977) is a detailed argument for population pressure as the primary cause of the emergence of agriculture. Patricia Crone's *Pre-Industrial Societies* (1989) is a valuable work that succinctly summarizes the basic features of agrarian societies. Eric Wolf's *Peasants* (1966) is a classic work on peasant society, and Samuel Popkin's *The Rational Peasant* (1979) is a well-known study of the rational foundations of economic life in peasant societies. Jonathan Haas, in *The Evolution of the Prehistoric State* (1982), provides an excellent discussion of archaeological evidence regarding the origin of the state with a particular focus on opposing theories of state origins.

The best work on pastoral societies that covers the entire pastoral world is Thomas Barfield's *The Nomadic Alternative* (1993). His *The Perilous Frontier* (1989) is a fascinating work on the Hsiung-nu, the Hsien-pi, the Mongols, and other historical horse-riding pastoral empires. See also Krader (1963) and Morgan (1987) on the Mongols. Fredrik Barth's *Nomads of South Persia* (1961) is a classic work on an Iranian pastoral society, the Basseri. Mair (1974) contains a discussion of several African pastoral societies. Lancaster (1981) discusses the Rwala Bedouin, and Goldstein and Beall (1989) provide an important work on Tibetan pastoralists.

Chapters 14, 15, and 16 of Sanderson's *The Evolution of Human Sociality: A Darwinian Conflict Perspective* (2001) contain extended discussions of economics, politics, and social stratification in preindustrial societies. These chapters cover some of the same issues discussed in this and the previous chapter of the present work, but also contain many additional discussions and take the analysis to a deeper theoretical level.

James Scott's *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) shows how, despite the invariable construction of systems of domination and inequality in large-scale societies, people dislike being dominated and develop various subtle (and often not-so-subtle) strategies of dealing with this domination.

CHAPTER

5 The Rise of the Modern World

This chapter tells the story of the early beginnings of the modern world, which had as its centerpoint the rise of the capitalist mode of production as the dominant form of economic life. Closely associated with the rise of capitalism was the emergence of increasingly large-scale and powerful nation-states and the rise of an international system of states. In order to understand why these evolutionary events occurred, one needs to understand a long-term trend in the development of economic markets.

The Emergence of Economic Markets

That economic institution known as "the market" exists when people offer goods and services for sale to others in some more or less systematic and organized way. It is important to distinguish between the terms *market* and *marketplace*. A **marketplace** is a physical site where goods and services are brought for sale and where buyers assemble to purchase these goods and services. In precapitalist societies, marketplaces are physical sites found at a small number of designated locations within the society. But in modern capitalism, the marketplace is "diffuse," meaning that it is spread pervasively throughout society. The **market,** by contrast, is not a physical place but a social institution, or a set of social relationships organized around the process of buying and selling valuables.

Societies in Relation to the Market

Paul Bohannan and George Dalton (1962) have distinguished three kinds of societies with respect to their relationship to the market: marketless societies, peripheral market societies, and market-dominated societies.

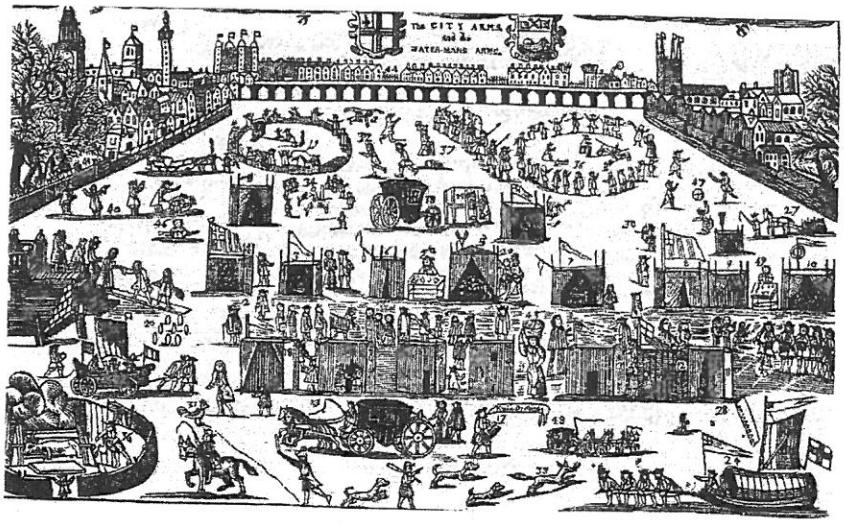
Marketless societies have neither markets nor marketplaces. Although there may be a few economic transactions based on buying and selling, these are casual and few and far between. Since marketless societies have no markets, subsistence is not provided by market principles but by the mechanisms of reciprocity or redistribution. The !Kung, the Kaoka-speakers, and the Yanomama are marketless societies, as are indeed the vast majority of hunter-gatherer and horticultural groups.

Peripheral market societies have marketplaces but market principles clearly do not serve to organize economic life. In such societies, people may frequently be

highly secondary economic phenomenon. People do not receive their subsistence through marketplace activities but through reciprocity, redistribution, and expropriation. In peripheral market societies, "most people are not engaged in producing for the market or selling in the market, or those who are so engaged are only part-time marketers" (Bohannan and Dalton, 1962:7).

Peripheral markets are found quite frequently among intensive horticulturalists, and almost universally in agrarian societies. The Aztecs, highly intensive horticulturalists who dominated Mexico during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, had peripheral markets of considerable scope and significance (Beals and Hoijer, 1971). In each city throughout the Aztec empire there existed large markets, and these markets were connected to each other and to the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlán by a system of traveling merchants known as *pochtecah* (Hassig, 1985). A huge market located in a suburb of Tenochtitlán took place every fifth day. Potential buyers came to this market from miles around to buy the many and varied goods that were offered in it: gold, silver, jewels, clothing, chocolate, tobacco, hides, footwear, slaves, fruits and vegetables, salt, honey, tools, pottery, household furnishings, and many other items.

Peripheral markets were also significant in medieval Europe (Heilbroner, 1985). Markets in the small cities of medieval Europe were places where peasants would bring some of their harvests for sale. Merchants and artisans who lived in these cities, however, were more important to the life of the marketplace. These merchants and artisans manufactured goods to be sold in the markets and made their livings from such sale. Medieval Europe also had a special kind of marketplace activity known as a *fair*, which flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Abu-Lughod, 1989). This was a type of traveling market, held usually once a year, to which merchants from all over Europe came to sell their products. The fair combined social holiday, religious festival, and intense economic activity. At some of these fairs, merchants brought a considerable variety of products for sale, such as



Frost fair on the Thames, England, 1683.

silks, horses, drugs, spices, books and parchments, and many other items (Heilbroner, 1985).

Market-dominated societies have both markets and marketplaces (i.e., "diffuse" marketplaces), and the market principle—the principle of buying and selling goods according to the forces of supply and demand—governs all important decisions concerning production, distribution, and exchange. In these societies, various types of reciprocity and redistribution may be found, but they are of very minor significance indeed. The only genuine market-dominated societies are those characterized by modern capitalism, whose emergence we shall begin to look at shortly.

Aspects of the Market in Preindustrial Societies

In preindustrial (or *precapitalist*) societies in which manufacturing occurs as a substantial economic activity, it is usually a small-scale undertaking, generally confined to the homes of artisans or to a few small shops located in the marketplaces (Sjoberg, 1960). Even the largest workshops in **precapitalist societies** would be quite small by modern standards of manufacturing. With no mass market for goods, and thus strict limits on the formation of capital, productive units must necessarily remain small.

Precapitalist forms of specialization occur relative to the product rather than the production process. Each craftsman fashions an entire product, from beginning to end. As Sjoberg notes, "Specialization in product is often carried to the point that the craftsman devotes his full time to producing items made from a particular raw material; thus we have goldsmiths, coppersmiths, silversmiths, silk weavers, wool weavers, and so on, each with their own guild" (1960:197). In addition, the precapitalist craftsman typically functions as his own merchant in selling the final product.

In virtually all large-scale precapitalist societies with significant manufacturing sectors, craftsmen and merchants are organized into work organizations known as *guilds*. Guilds are specialized by occupation; they include as their members all persons who perform the same occupation or a highly specialized branch of an occupation. Sjoberg (1960), for instance, lists the following guilds in just one precapitalist city, Beijing in the 1920s: carpenters (Sacred Lu Pan Society), shoe fasteners (Sewers of Boots and Shoes Guild, or Double Thread Guild), tinkers (Clever Stove Guild), clock stores (Clock Watch Commercial Guild Association), leather stores (Five Sages Hide and Skins Guild), vegetable merchants (Green or Fresh Vegetable Guild), barbers (Beautify the Face Guild), and waiters (Tea Guild).

The most important function of guilds is creating and maintaining a monopoly over a specific type of economic activity: "The right to pursue almost any occupation concerned with manufacturing or trade, or even services, is possible only through membership in the guild that controls it" (Sjoberg, 1960:190). In exercising their monopolistic control over occupations, guilds engage in a variety of activities. As Sjoberg points out, they determine the selection of personnel for an occupation; train members for their work, usually through a master-apprentice relationship; set standards of workmanship for their members; control the output generated by their

members; protect their members from excessive restrictions that might be placed on them by governmental or religious bodies; and assist their members in establishing shops or purchasing the raw materials they need to complete their work. Clearly, guilds play a crucial role in the lives of precapitalist craftsmen and merchants. Indeed, they are roughly comparable in their basic aims to today's labor unions and business and professional organizations.

What about price determination? In modern capitalism, prices for goods and services are determined by abstract supply and demand forces. Individuals may expect to go into stores and find fixed prices already attached to items. It has generally been understood that prices in precapitalist settings are usually not established in this way; rather, they are set by what is called *haggling*. Haggling occurs when a potential purchaser asks a merchant how much he wants for an item, the merchant replies, and then the purchaser offers a counterprice, which is usually much lower than that mentioned by the merchant. The seller and buyer then negotiate (haggle over) the price until eventually an agreement is reached or the buyer leaves in disgust. Haggling is often the typical mode of price determination in societies where mass markets do not exist and thus where sellers and buyers have little "knowledge of the market" for any given item. In addition, since haggling can take up large amounts of time, time must not be a valuable and scarce resource, as it is in modern capitalism. Therefore, haggling can occur only in settings in which people are seldom in a hurry to accomplish their everyday tasks (Sjoberg, 1960).

The question of the degree to which precapitalist economies are "rationally" organized is also a crucial one. Modern capitalism is a supremely rational type of economic system in the sense that there are a variety of sophisticated techniques used in the conduct of business—techniques designed to maximize economic productivity and growth. Thus, modern capitalists use advanced forms of accounting, finance, workplace organization, and marketing in the conduct of their business activity, and these procedures are crucial to their success. In precapitalist markets, however, such a rational organization of economic activity has generally been thought to be typically absent (Sjoberg, 1960). This nonrationality (not to be confused with "irrationality") of economic activity is expressed in numerous ways. For one thing, artisans and merchants commonly do not adhere to fixed work schedules closely regulated by the clock. On the contrary, they often start work at different hours in the morning and stop work at different times later in the day, according to the nature of other noneconomic activities in which they are engaged. In addition, precapitalist manufacturing is normally characterized by little synchronization of effort. Workers in one sector of manufacturing have little knowledge of what is happening in other sectors, and they make little if any effort to coordinate their activities with the activities being undertaken in these other sectors. Finally, the marketing of goods in precapitalist societies is generally subject to little standardization. For example, merchants seldom grade or sort their products, and there is little standardization of weights and measures. As Sjoberg notes, this lack of standardization is linked to the absence of a mass market and thus to the highly personalized nature of market activity.

Some Qualifications: Precapitalist Commercialism and Its Growth

No sooner have we stated these traditional perspectives than we have to qualify them. Kajsa Ekholm and Jonathan Friedman (1982), for example, suggest that market activities have played a much greater role in earlier societies than has generally been recognized. They oppose the traditional division of "the world's history into distinctive market/nonmarket or capitalist/pre-capitalist systems," and maintain the "point of view that there exists a form of 'capitalism' in the ancient world" (1982:87–88). In other words, Ekholm and Friedman object to the very conceptualization of peripheral market societies, or at least claim that this conceptual category does not apply as broadly as ordinarily thought.

Ekholm and Friedman do not claim that there are no differences between ancient societies and modern capitalism; they argue simply that the differences are less great than people have been taught to believe. Other scholars go even further. Barry Gills and Andre Gunder Frank (1992), for example, suggest that there has been extensive commercial activity in many agrarian societies over the last 5,000 years, and that the shift to modern capitalism in the sixteenth century was less radical than is usually thought. They believe that the extent of markets and commercialism over the last few millennia has been greatly underestimated. Gills and Frank rely on studies of precapitalist markets by such social scientists as Morris Silver (1985), Philip Kohl (1978, 1989), and Joan Oates (1978). These scholars show that in ancient agrarian societies there frequently existed large-scale markets, including price-setting markets regulated by supply and demand; private warehouses stocked with goods; merchant middlemen; extensive investment in capital goods; large-scale trade networks; strong profit motives; and the accumulation of capital. Indeed, some societies—the Phoenicians of the late second and early first millennia BCE, for example, or the Italian city-states of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE—were highly specialized for trade and overwhelmingly dependent on it.

Gills and Frank make an extremely important point, and it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the traditional view of the limited significance of markets in the precapitalist world must be strongly qualified. Market behavior and institutions were rarely if ever dominant in precapitalist societies, but in many of them, especially the more advanced agrarian ones, market activities played an important role. Indeed, since about 5000 BP there has been an important process of **expanding world commercialization** (Sanderson, 1994b). The existence of such a process is indicated by growth in the size and density of trade networks, as well as by increases in the number of large cities and the size of these cities.

In the first few centuries after 5000 BP, most trade networks were relatively small and a limited quantity of goods passed through them. Trade networks were either local or, at best, regional in scope. By about 2200 BP—in the early beginnings of the ancient Roman world—there had emerged a large-scale trade network stretching all the way from China through the Middle East to Mediterranean Europe (Curtin, 1984). This was a trade network obviously spread over a large portion of the world, and a much greater quantity of goods passed through this network than any-

thing seen in the local or regional trade networks of earlier times. By about CE 1000, trade networks had become even more extensive and with a still greater volume of trade (McNeill, 1982; Wilkinson, 1992). The growth of cities tells the same story. In 4250 BP, only 8 cities in the world had populations greater than 30,000, but by 2430 BP, there were 51 cities of this size, together totalling 2,877,000 in population. After a decline in cities following the fall of Rome, the process of urbanization accelerated once again. By CE 1000, there were 70 cities having populations between 40,000 and 450,000 (totalling 5,629,000), and by CE 1500, there were over 75 cities with populations between 45,000 and 672,000 (totalling 7,454,000) (Wilkinson, 1992, 1993).

It is clear, then, that the traditional view of precapitalist market and commercial behavior cannot stand unchallenged. Commercialism was frequently of considerable importance in the precapitalist world, and it grew steadily in importance over a period of some 4,500 years. Moreover, the growth of world commercialization had major implications, for it contributed decisively to the massive takeoff into modern capitalism that began in sixteenth-century Europe. Indeed, without acknowledging this long-term process of world commercial expansion, it is not possible to explain the emergence of the modern capitalist world.

The Origins of Modern Capitalism

Perhaps the greatest social transformation in world history was the European transition to the capitalist mode of production beginning in the sixteenth century. During this period there was also a relatively independent process of capitalist development in Japan. What kind of economic system preceded capitalism?

European Feudalism

The system of economic life that prevailed in western Europe from approximately the collapse of the Roman Empire until the advent of modern capitalism was known as **feudalism.** Feudalism was especially characteristic of France, Germany, and the British Isles, although it existed in other parts of western Europe as well. The basic unit of economic production under feudalism was the **manor.** The manor was overseen by a powerful feudal landlord and cultivated by numerous peasants. The average peasant held perhaps as many as 30 acres of land on which he lived and that he cultivated for his own living. The land held directly by the lord for his own use was known as the **demesne.** As seen earlier, the relationship between lord and peasant was a highly unbalanced and exploitative one. The peasant owed the lord so many days of work on the demesne, and he also had to pay dues of various sorts. For instance, he often rendered certain food products and paid certain fees, such as those exacted by the lord when the peasant used the lord's winepress, oven, or grinding mill. Just how different the feudal system was from modern industrial society can be seen in the following remarks about feudalism by Douglass North and Robert Thomas (1973:11):

> The customs of the manor became the unwritten "constitution," or the fundamental institutional arrangement of an essentially anarchic world, most properly viewed as small isolated settlements, frequently in the lee of a fortified place and surrounded by wilderness. The wooden or earth castle, the knight, and the relatively self-sufficient manor had emerged as the most viable response to the collapse of order and the recurrent invasions of Norsemen, Moslems, and Magyars. While the terror of foreign marauders had declined by the middle of the tenth century, the land seethed with continual warfare and brigandage as the power of local lords waxed and waned. Feudalism provided a measure of stability and order in this fragmented world....
>
> Commerce between different parts of Europe had always been potentially of mutual benefit, since the variety of resources and climatic conditions induced differentiation of crops and livestock. But trade had been sporadic because so many dangers within the wilderness beset the traveling merchant.

Commercial Expansion and the Decline of Feudalism

As the feudal system wore on in the countryside, it was gradually confronted by the growth of towns. Sometime after CE 1000, and especially after 1100, parts of the continent of Europe began to undergo significant commercial expansion centered in the towns (Lopez, 1971; Cipolla, 1993). Existing towns grew, often quite rapidly, and new towns sprung up throughout Europe (Cipolla, 1993). Urban society was expanding at the expense of the countryside, and so much so that Cipolla (1993) remarks that the urban growth of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries marked a "turning point of world history." Cipolla goes on to note that the European towns of this period were different in some crucial respects from the towns of other civilizations, such as China, the Byzantine Empire, and the ancient Greek and Roman world. The merchants and craftsmen of these towns held a socially inferior position, as they have in almost all agrarian civilizations. The ideals of the landlord classes and of rural life dominated and submerged the ideas of the urban classes, and towns were simply organs within a larger overwhelmingly rural organism. The towns of late medieval Europe, on the other hand, enjoyed considerably more economic and social independence. In the words of Cipolla (1993:120–121),

> The medieval city was not just part of a larger organism, but an organism in itself, proudly autonomous and clearly separated from the surrounding countryside. Physically, the city was separated from the countryside by walls, moat, and gates. More important than that, the city was another world from a legal point of view, too. When a person passed through the gates of a city, he became subject to different laws, as when today we cross the border from one country to another. The contrast was as sharp in cultural as in economic terms. The merchants, the professionals, the craftsmen who lived in the towns did not acknowledge the control of the rural world or its cultural values; on the contrary, they evolved their own culture and their own values. The emergence of European towns in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries was not a spin-off of regional evolution. It was rather the expression of a cultural and social revolution which was based in the towns. The champions of the rural-feudal establishment were well aware of this, and they did not hide their indignation.

It was the growth in the number and size of these towns, and the growing conflict between the urban merchant classes and the rural landlord classes, that began to spell the end of the old feudal system and that paved the way for the emergence of a capitalist mode of production after the fifteenth century. But before we discuss the rise of capitalism and its eventual dominance of economic life, we need to consider what capitalism as a mode of economic life *is*.

The Nature of Capitalism

There has been considerable debate concerning exactly when **capitalism** began; the answer given is usually a matter of how capitalism is defined, and here there is debate as well. History's most famous student of the capitalist system was Karl Marx. For Marx, capitalism was a type of economic system in which some individuals owned vital productive resources that they used in an effort to make the maximum profit. These individuals, whom Marx referred to as the **bourgeoisie** (or capitalists), employed another group of persons, whom Marx called the **proletariat** (or working class), who through their labor produced goods that the capitalists could exchange in the market for a profit. The capitalist was able to earn a profit because he paid the worker less than the full value of the goods that the worker produced. Marx argued that the profits of the capitalist did not arise through the simple process of the exchange of goods—through mere buying and selling. Rather, profits were generated through the process of production itself, and the act of selling goods only served to realize the profits that were already there in the creation of the product by the worker.

In Marx's view, then, capitalism required the existence of a class of workers who sold their labor power—their capacity to work—to capitalists for wages. Only through the exploitation of workers by capitalists in the wage relationship could profits be generated. Marx thus identified the beginnings of the capitalist mode of production with the Industrial Revolution in England in the middle of the eighteenth century, because it was not until this time that wage labor and the factory system became prominent economic phenomena.

Of course, Marx was well aware that the vigorous search for profits began in western Europe long before the Industrial Revolution. Beginning as early as the late fifteenth century, some European nations embarked on colonial expeditions in which the search for profits was of paramount significance. And during the seventeenth century, the search for profits was an obsession of governments throughout Europe. Yet Marx argued that the mode in which profits were realized in these centuries was fundamentally different from the mode in which they were obtained after the Industrial Revolution. Before the Industrial Revolution, profits were obtained through exchange rather than production relationships: through buying and selling rather than through the exploitation of a class of wage workers. A company could make profits by buying a product in one region of the world where its cost was low, and then selling it in another region in which a greater price could be asked. Marx identified this type of economic activity as a sort of capitalism, but he called it **merchant capitalism** in order to distinguish it from the **industrial capitalism** of a later era. Only industrial capitalism was a "true" system of capitalism for Marx.

Although some contemporary social scientists believe that Marx's distinction should be strictly maintained (e.g., Wolf, 1982), other social scientists, including many Marxists, hold a different view. Most notable among these is Immanuel Wallerstein (1974a, 1974b). Wallerstein rejects Marx's distinction between merchant and industrial capitalism and claims that capitalism is simply production in a market in which the aim of the producers is to realize the maximum profit. For Wallerstein, it does not matter whether there are wage workers or not. Indeed, for him several types of coercive, nonwage labor have existed within the capitalist mode of production. What is crucial about capitalism for Wallerstein is that the maximum accumulation of profits over time be the guiding aim of economic activity. Wallerstein believes that this requires the exploitation of workers, but that this exploitation may take a variety of forms, not just the exploitation of wage laborers. Given his conception of capitalism, Wallerstein sees it originating in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in conjunction with the rise of European colonialism.

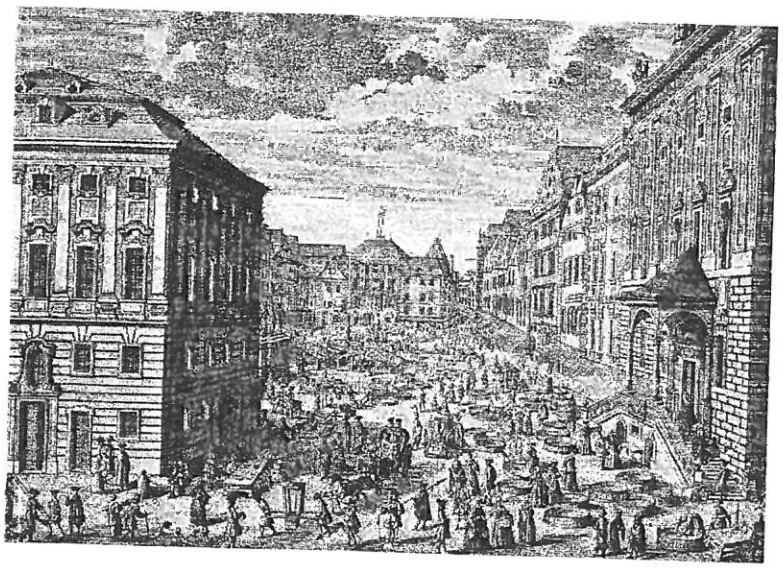
This book is more sympathetic to Wallerstein's point of view but frankly recognizes that the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century dramatically changed the nature of capitalism. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution inaugurated a phase of capitalist development that was in certain crucial respects qualitatively different from anything that had previously existed. In siding with Wallerstein, we can scarcely overlook this important fact.

Early Capitalism between the Thirteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

The most important commercial centers of Europe were in the northwest, primarily in what is now Belgium, and in southern Europe, especially the Italian city-states. The commercial expansion of this period contributed in a very significant way to the capitalist "great leap forward" that began in the sixteenth century.

In the northwest, the city of Bruges was an integral part of a growing center of merchant capitalism. It was part of a large trading area that covered the Mediterranean, Portugal, France, England, the Rhineland, and the Hanseatic League (Braudel, 1984). The Hanseatic League was a trading association of merchant capitalists who carried out their activities all the way from England to the Baltic Sea. In the south, a vigorous form of merchant capitalism developed in such Italian city-states as Florence, Pisa, Rome, Genoa, Venice, Siena, Prato, and Lucca (J. Cohen, 1980). The most important of these city-states were overwhelmingly specialized for trade. Banking became significantly developed, and merchants were highly admired and respected. The famous Medici, who were the richest Florentine bankers, merchants, and industrialists, were ensconced at the very top of the social and economic ladder (J. Cohen, 1980).

Jere Cohen (1980) argues that many of the capitalist methods and practices created in Italy during this time provided the basis for the spread of capitalism to other parts of Europe. As he notes, double-entry bookkeeping, marine insurance, and commercial law were invented by the Italians, who were the only ones to use them until the sixteenth century. The greatest of all the Italian city-states was Venice. This city-state was overwhelmingly devoted to foreign trade, the return on which has



Scene from a Viennese market, approximately 1730.

been estimated at an extraordinary 40 percent (Braudel, 1984). According to the great French historian Fernand Braudel (1984:123), Venice's "merchants firmly controlled all the major commodity trades in the Mediterranean—pepper, spices, Syrian cotton, grain, wine and salt." Venice's wealth and significance were also evident in the number of her galleys and cargo vessels.

While the capitalism of these centuries was for the most part merchant capitalism, a surprising amount of industry and manufacturing had developed. Some textile industries were highly mechanized, and manufacturing played an important part in the economies of several city-states, Venice included (J. Cohen, 1980). For example, "in Florence in 1338 there were said to be as many as 200 workshops engaged in cloth manufacture, employing a total of 30,000 workmen or about a quarter of the whole occupied population of the city" (Dobb, 1963:157).

The Seventeenth Century and Mercantilism

By the sixteenth century, the center of capitalist activity in Europe had begun to shift from Italy to northwest Europe, first to Antwerp and then later to the Netherlands, England, and France. And, as Braudel (1984) notes, capitalism came to be associated with large territorial states rather than small city-states. In the seventeenth century, these large territorial states vigorously promoted capitalism in the form of **mercantilism.** Mercantilism involved governments' granting of monopolies to trading companies so that the companies could benefit from trade between the European nation and its colonies elsewhere. Monopolies for trading companies were not new to the mercantilist era, but the specific economic context in which these monopolies were granted—that of colonial trade—was (Beaud, 1983).

Mercantilist practices created an economic situation in which manufacturers in the European countries could receive extremely favorable terms of exchange for their products. Efforts were undertaken to prevent the colonies from manufacturing

items that would compete with those being produced in the home country. Moreover, every effort was made to encourage the import of raw materials from the colonies to the home country, the raw materials to be brought in at low prices, turned into manufactured goods, and then sold at very high profits (Beaud, 1983).

The great mercantilist trading companies of the seventeenth century were established in the Netherlands, England, and France. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company was formed. This company acquired a monopoly on trade with India, forbidding the English, the Portuguese, and the French to engage in such trade. The company had an army of nearly 12,000 men and a navy of between 40 and 60 ships. It brought into Europe each year between 10 and 12 million florins worth of goods. Between 1619 and 1663, the Dutch came to dominate the routes of the Far East. From 1648 to 1650, they imported from this area pepper and spices in quantities constituting 66 percent of all purchases and, in the same period, textiles totaling 14 percent of all purchases. They also began sugarcane production in Java. On the home front, the Netherlands established important processing industries, such as wool and linen processing; diamond cutting; and the dyeing, weaving, and spinning of silk. Other industries included sugar refining, brewing, distilling, tobacco and cocoa refining, and lead working (Beaud, 1983).

England became a major rival of the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. In 1600, the English East India Company was formed under a charter from Queen Elizabeth, and within 15 years the company had established more than 20 trading posts. These were located in India, certain islands in the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, and in Hiratsuka, Japan. Between 1610 and 1640, England's foreign trade increased by ten times. English kings "distributed privileges and monopolies, regulated and organized the control of manufacturers, prohibited the export of wool, and raised taxes on imported French and Dutch fabrics; Acts of Parliament went so far as to make obligatory the use of woolen cloth for mourning clothes" (Beaud, 1983:28–29). Moreover, especially vigorous mercantilist practices were carried out under the guidance of the statesman Oliver Cromwell. He issued a navigation act specifying that "European goods could be transported only on English ships or on ships belonging to their country of origin; products from Africa, Asia, or America could be imported only on ships of England or the colonies" (Beaud, 1983:29).

Mercantilist policies were also prominent in France. Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIV, and Jean-Baptiste Colbert were the principal governmental personages associated with French mercantilism. Under Cardinal Richelieu, who was called on to handle royal finances in 1624, various protectionist measures were established. These involved such things as a protective tariff on textiles in 1644 and a 50-cent per ton tax on foreign ships in 1659. But mercantilism in France reached its apex between 1663 and 1685 under Louis XIV and his chief economic minister, Colbert. For these men, the trading companies were regarded as the armies of the king, the manufacturers of France as his reserves. Beaud (1983:39) states:

> [Colbert] watched over the establishment of more than 400 manufactures. There were "collective" works which brought together several artisan centers which benefited as a group from conferred privileges. . . . There were "private" works, individual enterprises (Van Robais in Abbeville), or large companies with branches in

> several provinces, especially in mining and metallurgy . . . and woolen goods. Finally there were royal manufactures, which were the property of the sovereign. . . . The counterpart to the privileges (monopolies, of production or of sale, exemptions and financing) was strict controls (norms, quantity, quality). These policies developed luxury and export production (tapestries, porcelain, glassware, luxury fabrics) as well as basic production (iron working, paper making, armaments) and products for common consumption (woolen and linen fabrics, etc.). . . .
>
> State policy extended to commerce as well as production. The French East Indies Company (1664) received a fifty-year monopoly on trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.

Capitalism as a World-System

An extremely influential perspective on the development of capitalism has been presented by Immanuel Wallerstein in his multivolumed *The Modern World-System* (1974a, 1980, 1989). Wallerstein regards capitalism as constituting, from the sixteenth century on, what he calls a **world-system.** Wallerstein defines a world-system as any relatively large social system having three principal characteristics:

1. A high degree of autonomy; that is, the system is self-contained in the sense that it does not depend for its existence on something outside it, although it will interact to some degree with other world regions
2. An extensive division of labor or specialization of roles within the system; this specialization is both geographical and economic, there being different kinds of economic activities devoted to different kinds of products in various geographical zones of the system
3. A multiplicity of societies and cultures, or the existence of different groups adhering to different traditions, speaking different languages, and so on

Wallerstein identifies two basic types of world-system: world-empires and world-economies. A **world-empire** is a world-system that is politically and militarily centralized and unified, every group within the empire being subordinate to one political center. Ancient Rome and classical China and India, for example, were organized according to this type of world-system. A **world-economy** is a world-system that lacks political and military centralization and unification. It therefore contains not only a multiplicity of societies and cultures but also a multiplicity of sovereign political units as well. In the past, there may have been numerous world-economies, but all of these either collapsed or quickly became converted into world-empires. In the modern world, however, there is only one world-economy: the capitalist world-economy, which has existed from the sixteenth century to the present day. Although Wallerstein notes that there have been attempts to turn this world-economy into a world-empire (most notably by Spain in the sixteenth century), these attempts have failed, and capitalism to this day has remained a politically decentralized system. Wallerstein holds that this political decentralization has greatly contributed to the long-term persistence of capitalism, inasmuch as empires tend to stifle innovation and individual creativity, factors that are basic to the capitalist organization of production.

But what exactly is a world-economy? What integrates it, or holds it together? Rather than being integrated by an overarching political structure, the capitalist world-economy is held together by a set of economic relationships involving the production and exchange of valued goods and services. In this sense the world-economy does not have the "tightness" of integration of a world-empire, but is a rather loosely structured network of economic relationships. These relationships involve extensive geographical and labor specialization. On the basis of such specialization, Wallerstein identifies three basic types of economic units that compose the world-economy: the core, the periphery, and the semiperiphery.

The **core** consists of those nation-states that dominate the capitalist world-economy and expropriate the bulk of the surplus produced within it. In the core are found those societies that are the most economically advanced or developed, that have the greatest degree of technological advancement, and that have the strongest governments and military structures. The wealthiest capitalists within the entire world-economy reside in the core, establishing economic enterprises there and in other parts of the world-system. Core societies specialize in the production of the most advanced goods—so-called *leading sector* goods. **Wage labor**—work performed by employees who bargain with employers in a labor market for the rate of compensation and the conditions of work—predominates as the mode of labor organization. Wallerstein suggests that wage labor is the predominant labor mode because work in the core is more highly skilled than work elsewhere, and more highly skilled work can be done more profitably when wage labor is employed.

The **periphery** is that segment of the world-economy that is most extensively subjected to surplus expropriation by the core. There is an intimate economic relationship between the core and the periphery, one in which the core dominates and exploits the periphery, which in turn becomes economically dependent on the core. The periphery has in most respects those characteristics that are the reverse of what one finds in the core. The societies and regions of the periphery are those that are least economically developed, that have the lowest levels of technological advancement, and that have the weakest governments and military units (or no sovereign governments or military units at all). The periphery specializes in the production of raw agricultural and mineral products for export, and **forced labor** rather than wage labor predominates here (or at least has done so historically). Forced labor is any system of labor in which workers are not legally free to sell their labor power in a market and are therefore politically compelled by members of some other group to work for them. The main historical types of forced labor have been slavery and serfdom. Under **slavery,** workers are owned outright and are under the complete political control of their owners. Under **serfdom,** workers are tied to specific parcels of land from which they have no freedom to move away. Wallerstein believes that since most work in the periphery is unskilled compared to work in the core, forced labor systems are more suitable because they are less costly.

The **semiperiphery** is that segment of the world-economy that operates between the core and the periphery. Wallerstein conceives of it as both an exploiter and as itself being exploited: It is an exploiter of the periphery, but it is exploited by the core. The societies of the semiperiphery are more technologically and economically

advanced than those of the periphery, but less so than those of the core. They have stronger governments and military units than those found in the periphery, but weaker governments and military units than those possessed by core societies. Another way of characterizing the semiperiphery is to say that it contains features of both core and peripheral societies. Semiperipheral societies thus carry out certain economic activities that are typical of core societies—leading sector activities using wage labor—in conjunction with other economic activities characteristic of the periphery—export products using some type of coercive or semicoercive labor system.

For Wallerstein, capitalism is a vast system of surplus expropriation that goes on not only *within* regions but *between* them as well. Marx focused his attention on the surplus expropriation that went on within core societies, using England as a model. Wallerstein, though, has broadened the Marxian model of capitalism to a worldwide level. He recognizes with Marx that capitalists exploit workers within the developed European nations, but he goes a step further in asserting that there are crucial relations of economic exploitation that go on between nations, especially between core and periphery. Wallerstein views the periphery as having a vital role to play in the capitalist world-economy. Peripheral societies are organized by capitalists in the core to produce goods under conditions (e.g., cheap labor, abundant land and other resources) that yield extremely high rates of profit, and thus the periphery contributes substantially to the development and enrichment of core societies. (The relationship between core and periphery will become clearer in due course, especially in Chapter 9, where the problem of economic development and underdevelopment is discussed.)

Wallerstein's notion that capitalism has constituted a world-system from its very inception is a rather revolutionary idea. Before Wallerstein, all analysts of capitalism, including Marx himself, limited their analyses to individual nation-states. But Wallerstein believes that the proper unit for the analysis of capitalism is the world-system as a whole. He argues that one cannot comprehend what goes on in any single part of the world-system without understanding what is simultaneously going on in other parts of that system, indeed in the world-system as a whole. He believes that in order to understand the modern world from about 1500 on, societies can no longer be viewed as separate, independent units. Instead, they must be viewed in terms of their participation in or connection with a world-economy. This is a very bold idea, and the extent to which Wallerstein is correct is still hotly debated (cf. Skocpol, 1977; Brenner, 1977; Zolberg, 1981). Certainly one must be careful about pushing Wallerstein's world-system concept too far. However, despite its various limitations, the concept is a very useful one for understanding the modern world and its evolution over the past five centuries.

The Capitalist World-Economy from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

Since its inception in the sixteenth century, the capitalist world-economy has been undergoing continual *expansion* and *evolution*. By saying that it has been expanding,

we mean that it has been increasing its geographical range to cover ever wider areas of the globe. By saying that it has been an evolving system, we mean that its various components—core, periphery, and semiperiphery—have been changing their structure as parts of the whole. As we will see in the final two chapters, capitalism is now a vastly complex and immensely technologically sophisticated system that covers virtually the entire globe. But, as a world-system, what was it like during its early stages?

The first European nations to make a bid for core status in the sixteenth century were Spain and Portugal. These were the first European societies to engage in colonial expeditions in other regions of the world. Spain, in fact, attempted to turn the capitalist world-economy into its own world-empire. By the late sixteenth century, it was clear that these societies would no longer be at the head of the world-economy. Their places were taken by the Netherlands, England, and France, the main core societies from the late sixteenth century through the nineteenth century. Of these, the Netherlands was initially dominant. In these societies the principal economic activity was capitalist farming. Nobles increasingly leased their land out to tenants for a money rent and the land came to be farmed for profit. Many former nobles and peasants were converted into capitalist farmers. Much land was also turned over to the grazing of sheep, giving rise to an important wool industry in England. Industries of various types were also of growing significance in these core societies.

The periphery in the sixteenth century consisted of two major world regions: Iberian (Hispanic and Portuguese) America and eastern Europe. In Hispanic America, the Spaniards had established important colonies given over to large-scale agriculture and, more importantly, to gold and silver mining. Forced labor systems established by the Spaniards produced large quantities of gold and silver ore, which were exported back to Europe to be turned into coinage. The influx of these precious metals contributed in a major way to the expansion of the money supply in Europe and thus had a great impact on the world-economy. In Portuguese America (Brazil), sugar plantations were established and came to depend on extensive slave labor imported from Africa. Sugar became a commodity greatly valued in Europe for sweetening coffee and making chocolate.

In the other major peripheral region, eastern Europe, large-scale grain farming was the primary economic activity. This was carried out under a forced labor system that was essentially like the serfdom of earlier days. The peasant-landlord relation still prevailed, but peasants were producing for a world economic market, not simply for their lords. During the sixteenth century, eastern Europe, Poland especially, was a major exporter of grain to western Europe.

The semiperiphery in the sixteenth century was located in Mediterranean Europe, primarily in Italy and ultimately in Spain and Portugal. Sharecropping was the principal form of agricultural labor, and industry mainly involved the production of high-cost products, such as silks.

After the middle of the seventeenth century, England began to replace the Netherlands as the major core society, due in large part to the military defeats the English imposed on the Dutch. France also began to supersede the Netherlands, but the French did not attain the degree of success that the English did. During this time,

several new societies entered the periphery. The most important of these were the U.S. South, a slave colony of England devoted to the production of numerous agricultural goods, and the slave societies of the West Indies, established primarily under the influence of the British and the French. The West Indian plantation societies were devoted heavily to sugar production. The semiperiphery at this time also expanded to include Sweden, Prussia, and the U.S. North.

The Development of Capitalism in Japan

Traditionally, the rise of modern capitalism has been understood as a distinctly European phenomenon, and thus Europe has been viewed as containing a developmental dynamic that was largely absent in the rest of the world. This argument, though, can no longer be sustained, for at least one other society, Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868), also revealed a marked tendency toward capitalist economic development. Moreover, this capitalist development was a largely indigenous phenomenon and had little to do with any European influence. This must be so, for between 1639 and 1853, Japan adopted a policy of almost complete isolation from economic and political contact with Europe (Pearson, 1991).

Japan was the one society outside Europe to develop a genuinely feudal political-economic system (P. Anderson, 1974b). Feudalism emerged perhaps as early as 1185, but it is generally argued that the full development of the feudal system did not occur until 1338. The period from 1338 to 1600 has been called the classical age of Japanese feudalism, and the period from 1600 to 1868 (the Tokugawa era) has been called the period of late feudalism (Reischauer, 1956; J. W. Hall, 1970).

It used to be thought that the Tokugawa period was one of economic stagnation, but in the last several decades it has come to be recognized that this period was actually one of great economic vitality. Daniel Spencer (1958) claims that during this period Japan experienced the widespread commercialization of agriculture, an increasing flight of peasants into the towns and cities, large-scale urbanization, the worsening economic condition of the feudal nobility, increased monetization of the economy, and the beginnings of the factory system. Urbanization was so extensive that John Whitney Hall (1970) calls it "astounding." The growth of Edo (modern Tokyo) was truly remarkable; at the end of the sixteenth century it was only a small village, but by the early eighteenth century it had reached 500,000 inhabitants, and by the end of the eighteenth century it was well past one million in population. By the early nineteenth century, Japan was even more urbanized than Europe, and Edo had become the world's largest city.

Another striking feature of Japanese economic development during the Tokugawa epoch was the gradual *proletarianization* of the labor force (T. C. Smith, 1959; Leupp, 1992). Proletarianization is the process whereby workers are gradually converted from forced labor, such as serfdom, to wage labor, and it is an unmistakable sign of capitalist development. Proletarianization was most marked in urban areas, but it occurred in rural areas as well. By the end of the Tokugawa period, wage labor had become the dominant mode of compensating labor in the urban economy.

Recognition that modern Japan's capitalist roots extend back several centuries is a tremendously important accomplishment and a badly needed corrective to the old view of Tokugawa economic stagnation. Yet, focusing on the Tokugawa period may itself be starting too late, for the true roots of Japanese capitalism may be found several centuries earlier. It seems that important economic developments were occurring in Japan as early as the thirteenth century. At this time Japan was deeply enmeshed in a network of foreign trade with other parts of Asia, especially China. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, foreign trade grew rapidly, and trade ventures were extended to more distant parts of the Far East. Japan was clearly a maritime economic power in these times (Sansom, 1961; Reischauer, 1956; J. W. Hall, 1970).

By the end of the Tokugawa period, Japan had become an essentially capitalist society in economic terms, even though it still retained old-fashioned feudal political and social institutions. By this time, the economy was clearly in the hands of the urban merchants rather than the feudal landlords (Spencer, 1958). As we shall see, this relatively independent trajectory of capitalist development in Japan holds major implications for understanding the rise of modern capitalism.

Explaining the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

Explaining the transition from feudalism to capitalism has turned out to be one of the knottiest theoretical problems in contemporary social science. Numerous theories have been offered, but there has been little consensus about them. These theories contain weaknesses critical enough to preclude any of them offering a satisfactory explanation of the transition to capitalism. (An extended explication and critique of these theories may be found in Sanderson, 1994a, 1995, 1999b.) A serious weakness in nearly all of the theories is that they have been developed exclusively with respect to the European transition, ignoring the Japanese transition to capitalism altogether. The interpretation of the transition to modern capitalism set forth in this book, by contrast, has been explicitly developed to explain both the European and Japanese transitions, and thus is designed as a general theory. Our assumption is that any adequate social-scientific theory must apply to as many instances of a phenomenon as possible. Concerning the rise of capitalism, since there are only two cases, an adequate theory of this phenomenon should apply equally to both, and not merely to one alone.

The interpretation of the rise of capitalism set forth here contains two parts. First, there were several common characteristics of Europe and Japan that operated as important *preconditions* facilitating their transition from feudal to capitalist economies. Second, there was a *great historical trend*—expanding world commercialization—that provided the necessary context within which the preconditions operated to facilitate a capitalist transition. It was the interaction of these two kinds of factors—common preconditions on the one hand and a major historical trend on the other—that led to the transition to modern capitalism when and where it occurred. (A much more detailed presentation of this theory is found in Sanderson, 1994a, 1995, 1999b.)

Medieval Europe and medieval Japan shared at least five basic characteristics, each of which contributed in its own way to the emergence of modern capitalism. First, there was the factor of *size*. Japan and two of the three leading capitalist countries of early modern Europe, England and the Netherlands, were very small. Small geographical size minimizes the costs necessary to create systems of transportation and communication that help bring about economic development. Europe and Japan contrasted markedly with most of Asia, because most Asian societies, such as China and India, were bureaucratic empires spread out over large landmasses. The costs of maintaining large empires constitute a serious obstacle to capitalist development.

Second, there was *geography*. Japan and the leading capitalist countries of northwest Europe were located on large bodies of water that allowed them to give predominance to maritime rather than overland trade. Historically, in the long agrarian era those societies containing the greatest amount of commercialism—a kind of early capitalism or "protocapitalism"—have generally been ones in which maritime trade predominated (Amin, 1991). Maritime trade allows for a much more extensive and efficient development of networks of economic exchange than does overland trade.

A third factor was *climate*. Europe and Japan both had temperate climates, which is important when one recognizes that the greater part of the world colonized by Europe had tropical or subtropical climates. Japan's temperate climate, or perhaps its far northerly location, allowed it to escape European colonization, which meant that its economy never became subordinated to or dominated by some foreign economic power. In the modern world the least economically developed nation-states have generally been those exposed to many years of colonial domination by Europe. One of the reasons why Europe and Japan were the colonizers rather than the colonized was probably their temperate climate and northern latitudes.

Fourth, there was a demographic factor, *population growth*. Europe as a whole numbered about 30 million people in CE 1000 and grew rapidly from that point until about 1300. Population then underwent a dramatic decline until about 1450, largely due to the Black Death, but it began to grow again around 1450. It totalled some 67 million in 1500 and about 111 million by the mid-eighteenth century (Livi-Bacci, 1992). In Japan, population doubled from the twelfth to the sixteenth century (Taeuber, 1958), and by the beginning of the Tokugawa era, it had one of the world's densest populations (Janetta, 1987). Population continued to grow during the Tokugawa epoch, rapidly during the first half of the epoch but more slowly during the second half (Hanley and Yamamura, 1972). Population pressure on the land was clearly increasing in both Europe and Japan, and some scholars, such as Marvin Harris (1977), have seen this as contributing to the declining efficiency of feudalism and thus as necessitating a capitalist shift. Be this as it may, population growth in both regions led to extensive urbanization, larger pools of workers, expansion in the size of markets, and increased economic specialization (Boserup, 1981). All of these factors were critical for the growth of capitalism.

Finally, the *political structures* of Europe and Japan were similar in that they were the only true feudal regimes in world history (P. Anderson, 1974b). The key to

feudalism is political decentralization or fragmentation. Great landlords divide their land into parcels known as **fiefs,** and grant these fiefs to lesser landlords, known as *vassals,* in return for military service and protection. Land may be even further subdivided, and the result is a hierarchy of lords whose political rule extends only so far as their ownership and control of land. It has been widely asserted that feudalism contributes to capitalist development because its politically decentralized nature gives an unusual amount of economic freedom to the merchant classes. Large centrally organized empires tend to stifle mercantile activity because it is a threat to the mode of surplus extraction used by rulers and governing classes. The freedom given to merchants under the feudal regimes of medieval Europe and Japan was probably the most important precondition that helped push these parts of the world forward as the first states to undergo a capitalist revolution.

These five preconditions did not operate in a vacuum, however, but occurred in the context of the great historical trend discussed at the beginning of this chapter—expanding world commercialization. The argument is that the rise of capitalism could only be a slow and gradual process because of the generalized hostility of landholding classes to merchants, the carriers of capitalism throughout history. As noted earlier, merchants generally occupied a very low position in the status-ranking systems of agrarian societies, despite the great wealth they sometimes accumulated. Therefore, mercantile activity could not expand rapidly because landlords would not allow it. Nevertheless, landlords were still dependent on merchants because they desired many of the goods merchants offered. Mercantile activity thus had to be preserved, and this gave merchants the opportunity to expand their activities slowly but surely. In due time, mercantile activity expanded to the point at which it could act as a kind of "critical mass" stimulating the huge leap in capitalist development after the sixteenth century.

Explaining the emergence of modern capitalism means explaining why capitalism arose when it did (why in the sixteenth century rather than in earlier or later periods), and also why it occurred first in particular regions (northwest Europe and Japan rather than other parts of Europe, Asia, or elsewhere). The theory offered here explains this "when" and "where" of capitalist development. Capitalism could not have occurred earlier (or at least much earlier) in world history because of the slow expansion of world commercialization and the need for a "critical mass" of mercantile activity to trigger a capitalist takeoff. That critical mass was not reached until sometime around CE 1000–1500. Numerous economic historians have thought that China during the time of the Sung Dynasty (CE 960–1275) was ready to take off into capitalism, but the tremendous economic advances it made during this time were eventually short-circuited (Elvin, 1973; E. L. Jones, 1988). The reason why this Chinese economic development petered out can be found in its unfavorable preconditions, especially the fact that China had a large landmass and a highly centralized and very powerful bureaucratic state. Northwest Europe and Japan had the most favorable preconditions for capitalist development at that time in world history during which a critical mass of commercialization had been achieved, and thus they were the world's first regions to experience the transition to the system that is now known as modern capitalism.

The Political Sphere: The Formation of National States

What was happening in the political realm in the development of the modern world? In his pathbreaking work *Coercion, Capital, and European States* (1990), Charles Tilly identifies three major types of states that existed in Europe during the millennium from CE 990 to 1990: *large territorial states;* small states with extremely fragmented sovereignty, such as *city-states* and *urban federations;* and *national states.* Tilly shows that these states were not randomly situated in space and time; on the contrary, each type of state was found in a particular time and was associated with a particular form of economic organization.

The large territorial states were associated with regions where the landlord class was overwhelmingly dominant in the economy and where capitalism was weak and capitalists few. Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Brandenburg Prussia (now part of modern Germany) were states of this type. Here, there was an extremely strong alliance between the landlord class and the state. City-states and urban federations, by contrast, were found where there were many powerful capitalists who had concentrated large amounts of capital. As a result, there was a strong alliance between capitalists and the state, and the state was largely devoted to serving the economic interests of capitalists. City-states and urban federations were most characteristic of what Tilly has called the inner geographical core of Europe, especially the Italian city-states and the Dutch Republic.

These two different forms of the state were found in the first half of the millennium we are considering—from CE 990 to 1490. After the latter date, **national states** began to form. During the first half of the second millennium CE, there was nothing resembling a national state—that is, a large centrally coordinated state highly identified with a particular nationality, what today one calls, for example, England, France, or Germany. In fact, during these earlier times, England, France, and Germany did not yet exist as such. These regions and many others were divided into hundreds of smaller states. As Tilly (1990:39) states, there was an "enormous fragmentation of sovereignty then prevailing throughout the territory that would become Europe." There were perhaps as many as 500 states within the boundaries of Europe. In the Italian peninsula there were roughly 200 to 300 independent city-states, and in what is now southern Germany there were 69 free cities and numerous bishropics, duchies, and principalities. What a contrast with the present, where there are, or at least were before the eastern European nationalist movements of the early 1990s, only 25 to 28 sovereign European states (Tilly, 1990).

According to Tilly, the national states of Europe formed as a result of the strong concentration of both capital and military might. The new national states beginning to evolve in the sixteenth century were massive structures compared to most of their predecessors. Huge state bureaucracies were built, and these bureaucracies were devoted to both economic and military activities. They played a large role in managing and guiding the economy and in making war against other national states. Large standing armies were created to replace the relatively small

private armies characteristic of feudalism. Historians have commonly referred to these new national states in their early years as forms of **absolutism** or **absolutist monarchy.** Perhaps the most important of the new monarchies were Spain, England, and France. In Spain, beginning in the late fifteenth century, the Hapsburg Dynasty came to power with the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella. The Hapsburgs concentrated their attention on plundering the wealth of the New World through the establishment of colonies in the Americas. The treasure controlled by the Hapsburgs was greatly swelled by the precious metals shipped back to Spain from its overseas colonies. Absolutism in France was the result of a gradual development dating as far back as the fourteenth century (P. Anderson, 1974b), but it was in the late seventeenth century, under the reign of Louis XIV, that French absolutism achieved the zenith of its power. Louis XIV was the supreme symbol of absolute rule throughout all of Europe. He is reputed to have said "l'État, c'est moi" ("I am the state").



Portrait of Louis XIV, the "Sun King." Louis was one of the great absolute monarchs of all of Europe in the seventeenth century.

Although he may never have uttered those precise words, such language clearly expresses his view of his own power (Burns, 1973). The weakest and most short-lived of all the western European absolutisms was formed in England. Absolutism began there in the late fifteenth century with the rise to power of the Tudors, who were eventually replaced by the Stuarts at the beginning of the seventeenth century. English absolutism was not to survive past the end of the seventeenth century.

Thus it was that, after the sixteenth century, a system of interlocking yet highly competitive states was created, what is today called the **interstate system** (Wallerstein, 1974a, 1974b; Chase-Dunn, 1989a). This system was initially confined to Europe, but by the late twentieth century it had spread to encompass the entire world. The world is today divided into more than 180 sovereign states that engage in numerous economic, political, and military interactions with one another.

Within the interstate system, no single state has ever succeeded in achieving such a level of political control over all of the others that a world-empire would have resulted. There have been several efforts at such world-empire creation—most notably by the Hapsburgs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by Napoleonic France in the early nineteenth century, and by Germany in the twentieth century (Chase-Dunn, 1989a)—but each of these efforts failed. It would seem that the very logic of capitalism as an economic system makes it extremely difficult for a world-empire to emerge. As soon as any state begins to follow a path that it hopes will lead to world political domination, the other states start to gang up on it so as to prevent such an occurrence. Thus, capitalist economics and the interstate system go hand in hand. Indeed, had the capitalist world-system ever succumbed to world-imperial domination, it is doubtless the case that its essentially capitalist nature would have disintegrated (Wallerstein, 1974a, 1974b; Chase-Dunn, 1989a).

Much controversy has arisen over whether the capitalist world-economy and the interstate system are fused together as part of a single reality, or whether the interstate system is a substantially autonomous reality in its own right. Scholars such as Theda Skocpol (1977) and Randall Collins (1986) see the interstate system as largely autonomous (cf. Zolberg, 1981). They argue that capitalism and the interstate system are intertwined, but that the world political system must be studied as a reality in its own right. States are actors in a world political order in which political and military objectives cannot be understood simply in terms of capitalist economic interests. There is a great deal of truth in this assertion. It would be very difficult, for example, to explain such forms of contemporary political conflict as that between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs, between many Islamic states (e.g., Iraq) and the United States, or between Northern Irish Catholics and England simply in economic terms. Nonetheless, the position adopted in this book is that the political and military objectives of capitalist states cannot seriously depart from the capitalist economic interests that form the context in which these states operate. In Christopher Chase-Dunn's (1989a) words, there is only "one logic" within the capitalist world-system, a single logic in which economics and politics are essentially inseparable. The driving force behind this logic is, of course, that of ceaseless capital accumulation. It is the contemporary global force *par excellence*.

FOR FURTHER READING

Classic works on European feudalism are Bloch's *Feudal Society* (1961; orig. 1930) and Georges Duby's *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (1968). See also Critchley (1978), Fossier (1988), and Le Goff (1988). Lynn White's *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962) is a famous analysis of some of the most important technological innovations of the feudal era.

Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System*, volumes 1 and 2 (1974b, 1980), is the classic statement of his world-system perspective and its application to European capitalist development until the mid-eighteenth century. Wallerstein (1979) contains some of his earliest essays developing the world-system perspective. Christopher Chase-Dunn's *Global Formation* (1989a; updated ed. 1998) is an excellent and highly comprehensive summary of world-system theory by another leading world-system theorist. See also Shannon (1996) and Sanderson (1999b:181–243). Fernand Braudel's *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century* (3 vols., 1981, 1982, 1984) is a magisterial discussion of European capitalism from many angles. Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) is a classic work by an eminent anthropologist that examines preindustrial modes of production and the transition to European capitalism from a type of world-system perspective. Other good but much briefer overviews of the transition to modern capitalism can be found in Beaud (1983), A. K. Smith (1991), and Kriedte (1983).

Israel (1989) and de Vries and van der Woude (1997) provide good discussions of the emergence of Dutch capitalism between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. A much more detailed discussion of Sanderson's theory of the rise of capitalism in Europe and Japan is found in his *Social Transformations* (1999b:168–178). Alternative interpretations of the rise of modern capitalism can be found in Dobb (1963), Sweezy (1976; orig. 1950), Weber (1958; orig. 1904), Chirot (1985, 1986), J. A. Hall (1985), Mann (1986), Abu-Lughod (1989), North and Thomas (1973), E. L. Jones (1987, 1988), R. Wilkinson (1973), Harris (1977), and P. Anderson (1974a).

On Japanese feudalism and the Japanese transition to capitalism, see J. W. Hall (1970), Reischauer (1956), Spencer (1958), Sheldon (1958), Yamamura (1980), Leupp (1992), T. Smith (1959), P. Anderson (1974b), Hane (1992), Yoshihara (1986), and Halliday (1975).

Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) argues that there was already a world-system in place from the mid-thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth centuries. Barry Gills and Andre Gunder Frank (1991; Frank, 1990, 1991; Frank and Gills, 1993) argue for the existence of a 5,000-year world-system of which the modern world-system is but a continuation. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall (1997) argue that world-systems are very general phenomena and the appropriate unit of analysis for studying the evolution of social life. They look at several different types of precapitalist world-systems, from the very simple to the highly complex.

Frank's *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (1998) and Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (2000) are excellent scholarly works that challenge the received wisdom that Europe was the economically most advanced region of the world-economy in the sixteenth century. Frank claims that Asia (especially China) was the center of the world-economy in the centuries before and after 1500, and that Europe did not really spurt ahead of Asia until after 1800. At the present time, he claims, the center of the world-economy is shifting back to Asia. Pomeranz makes a similar argument, although he sees China as essentially economically even with Europe (rather than ahead of it) prior to 1800. He attributes Europe's (mainly England's) economic superiority after 1800 largely to the presence of coal deposits and the many benefits offered by the possession of overseas colonies in the New World. See also Blaut (1993) and Goody (1996).

Charles Tilly's *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (1990) is an excellent discussion of the rise of national states in Europe. See also Tilly and Blockmans (1994) and P. Anderson (1974b).