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Beyond "The Original Affluent Society": A Culturalist Reformulation [and Comments and Reply]

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Beyond "The Original Affluent Society"

A Culturalist Reformulation¹

by Nurit Bird-David

This paper examines Marshall Sahlins's "Original Affluent Society" in relation to recent developments in modern hunter-gatherer studies and reveals a theoretical confusion of ecological and cultural perspectives within it which has hitherto been overlooked. Drawing comparatively on three case studies—the Nayaka of South India, the Batek of Malaysia, and the Mbuti of Zaire—it then reformulates Sahlins's argument using the culturalist method of economic analysis. At the same time it demonstrates the explanatory and analytical dimensions of this new method.

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The idea of "the original affluent society" was first presented during the 1966 "Man the Hunter" conference, which laid the foundations for the anthropological study of modern hunter-gatherers. The participants—social anthropologists, archaeologists, human biologists, ecologists, and demographers—were struck by the brief contribution of Marshall Sahlins, a non-specialist invited discussant, in response to their papers (Sahlins 1968a).

1. My thanks go to Barbara Bodenhorn, Ernest Gellner, Keith Hart, Caroline Humphrey, Tim Ingold, Marilyn Strathern, and James Woodburn for comments on the early version of the paper and to Alan Barnard, Harvey Feit, Stephen Gudeman, and Richard Lee for their support of the earlier paper in which I began to explore these ideas.

Sahlins later produced a much longer essay on the idea for *Les temps modernes* (1968b), and this became the basis for the first chapter of his *Stone Age Economics* (1972). The book was a highly controversial text on tribal societies, and the essay itself—which proposed, essentially, that the hunting-and-gathering way of life provided unparalleled affluence for its followers—became notorious both inside and outside anthropology. It was hotly debated by scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines that shared an interest in the evolution of human society. It has since become the representative text on hunter-gatherers in introductory courses (see, e.g., Cole 1988) and appears on the reading lists of most anthropology departments. Despite their initial enthusiasm, however, up to the 1980s specialists gave Sahlins's essay little serious or direct attention. It was rarely challenged or further explored through empirical research. It is fair to say, in fact, that in their research—as opposed to their teaching—many anthropologists made an effort to ignore it.

The explanation for the fate of "The Original Affluent Society" during this period is complex. The general interest in it no doubt reflected our symbolic and ideological needs and our (Western) construction of the prehistoric past. Furthermore, the essay was timely in dispelling certain inadequate conceptions of "primitive" economic life and disclosing anthropologists' ethnocentric biases. Beyond this, it marked the inception of modern hunter-gatherer research and constituted certification of its legitimacy. Above all, most specialists, and many other scholars as well, recognized, if only intuitively, that Sahlins "had a point." We sensed that he had touched on something essential to the hunting-and-gathering way of life, although—and this is the problem—we did not know quite what it was.

The ambivalence of specialists had to do with gaps between data and conclusions. Intended to provoke as well as to document, the essay soared beyond conventional scientific discourse, appealing directly to Western fantasies about work, happiness, and freedom. It offered, as a result, a peculiar synthesis of theory and data, insight and banality, breadth of view and gimmicky wit, all so craftily blended together as to make it extraordinarily resistant to analysis. Had specialists attempted to engage with Sahlins's essay in the years immediately following its publication, they would have encountered three problems in particular.

First, despite the paucity of reliable data, Sahlins drew quantitative and pseudo-quantitative conclusions concerning hunter-gatherers' work ("a mean of three to five hours per adult worker per day in food production" [1972:34]) and leisure ("a greater amount of sleep in the day time per capita than in any other condition of society" [p. 14]). In addition to the anecdotal observations—perceptive in their own terms—of explorers and missionaries he relied upon three professional studies. Two of these had been undertaken in the course of a 1948 American-Australian expedition in Arnhem Land by McCarthy and McArthur (1960)—the first a nutritionist, the second an anthropologist. The third, a remarkable

and pioneering work on the Dobe !Kung by Lee (1968, 1969), was influenced as much by Lee's evolutionary objective as by his actual fieldwork experience, which only in subsequent years came to include a more rounded study of the !Kung way of life. These case studies provided samples too small to be statistically meaningful: they concerned 13 and 9 individuals in the two Arnhem Land camps and an average of about 30 individuals in the Dobe !Kung camp, studied for one, two, and three weeks respectively.² Nor were Sahlins's conclusions capable of further testing. It is difficult enough to study "work time" among time-illiterate peoples who scatter across rough terrain as they go hunting and gathering, singly or in small groups, not only for need but for leisure, let alone to construct a comparable parameter for other peoples that pursue activities of an entirely different kind.

Second, Sahlins integrated into the argument concepts which specialists would have found difficult to use in economic analysis at that time. How could they address in analysis and pursue in the context of fieldwork suggestions that hunter-gatherers follow the "Zen way" to affluence or that "a pristine affluence colors their economic arrangements, a trust in the abundance of nature's resources rather than despair at the inadequacy of human means" (1972:29)?

Finally, and most important, although Sahlins acknowledged the difficulties involved in studying contemporary peoples as descendants or representatives of prehistoric hunter-gatherers, in discussing evolutionary processes of the macro- time scale, he projected ethnographic observations of the micro- time scale—which left much to be desired. Extraordinary as it now seems, a close examination of the published sources, McCarthy and McArthur (1960) and McArthur (1960), shows that even the nine adults who constituted the Fish Creek group were in fact encountered in a missionary station and invited to participate in an "experiment" (McArthur 1960:91). Not only that, but they "became so tired of the diet, the greater part of which was animal food, that on 12 October, the fifth day of the survey, two of the men walked into Oenpelli to get flour and rice." Luckily, they acquiesced to the researchers' wishes and "willingly handed over these foods until the conclusion of the experiment"—and so "the quantitative survey was continued" (McCarthy and McArthur 1960:147). As for Lee's early quantitative study, while it was more sophisticated and less contrived, it nevertheless focussed on a selected group that represented 58% of the 425 !Kung counted in the Dobe area in 1964—the others were involved in other activities or did not stay for the four-week survey (Lee 1969:52–54)—and Lee later found that even these selected people had previously been working for wages and had occasionally grown their food (1979:409; 1976:18).

In short, "The Original Affluent Society," in spite of

its importance, remained too complex for straightforward examination by students of modern hunter-gatherers for many years after its publication. It thus became a kind of a sacred text. It was left untouched and unapproached, and there evolved an oral tradition, passed down from teacher to student, which gave it an acceptable meaning (see Barnard and Woodburn 1988: 11–12). We continued to include it in our reading lists, as much for its historical importance as for that "something" which we felt it had and also because we had nothing better to offer. Occasionally a (bright) student would exclaim, "The king is naked!" but we considered it a king even if indecently dressed.

Recently, however, ecologically oriented specialists have taken up the essay and, drawing on advances made during the intervening years in both fieldwork and theory, read it as a hypothesis to be tested by means of empirical research (e.g., Hayden 1981, Hawkes and O'Connell 1981, Hawkes et al. 1985, Gould 1982, Hill et al. 1985, Headland 1987, Smith 1987). A major session was devoted to their work at the recent Sixth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies in Fairbanks, Alaska. Making use of quantitative data collected within research projects informed by optimal foraging theory (Winterhalder and Smith 1981), these specialists have focussed mainly on hunter-gatherers' work time. They have reported that Sahlins's argument does not apply universally, because some peoples—for example, the Ache, the Alyawara, the Agta, and even the !Kung (see esp. Hawkes and O'Connell 1981, Headland 1987, Hill et al. 1985, Hayden 1981, Lee 1979: 278)—work on average at least six hours a day. They have argued that the studies Sahlins used were not universally representative (a charge which can be made against virtually any anthropological work) and, moreover, that they take account neither of the societies concerned at large nor of the full seasonal cycle, let alone of irregular ecological changes. They have also addressed the construction of the parameter "work time" and argued that it is misleading because it does not include time devoted to constructing and maintaining tools, the preparation of food, child care, and the informal exchange of information. While most of these scholars have challenged "The Original Affluent Society" on these grounds, some have concentrated on Sahlins's idea of "limited wants," reframing it within evolutionary-ecological theory (e.g., Hawkes et al. 1985, Smith 1987, Winterhalder 1990) and asking whether "limited needs" had any ecological rationale in terms of optimal foraging theory ("time minimizing," "opportunity maximizing," and "energy maximizing").

Twenty-five years after the idea was introduced, it is indeed time to revisit "The Original Affluent Society." Yet it is not enough to pick up components of the argument such as "work time" and "limited needs" and pursue them piecemeal. To understand what Sahlins was trying to get at, we must first penetrate the essay analytically and strip the argument of its rhetorical and polemical excesses. This is the first objective of this paper. The second objective is to offer an up-to-date culturally

2. Lee's output-input study was carried out over a period of four weeks, but he excluded one week during which his own contribution to subsistence effort was too great to be overlooked.

oriented analysis of hunter-gatherers' work and material welfare. In recent years a culturalist method of economic analysis (following Gudeman 1986) has developed, and its application to the study of hunter-gatherer economy has already begun (see Bird-David 1990). Drawing on culturally oriented data, new and old, concerning three groups—the Nayaka of South India, the Mbuti of Central Africa, and the Batek of Malaysia—I will argue that Sahlins's argument, duly updated and reconceptualized, does indeed hold.

I will, however, confine myself to the modern dimension of "The Original Affluent Society," leaving the evolutionary dimension to be pursued separately at a different analytical level of abstraction and with due care for the massive problems involved. The recent debate on the status of modern hunter-gatherers (e.g., Solway and Lee 1990, Wilmsen and Denbow 1991), which I have addressed elsewhere (Bird-David 1988, n.d.), lies outside the concern of the present paper, since it does not deal with how the modern peoples in question have come to be the way they are—through evolution or as a result of colonialism.

An Analysis of "The Original Affluent Society"

Along with all other observers of modern hunter-gatherers, Sahlins was struck by what he described as their "peculiar" economic behaviour. In his terms, they have only a few possessions, which can be manufactured easily from materials which lie in abundance around them, and display a notable tendency to be careless about them and to lack interest in developing their technological equipment. Lack of foresight is apparent in "their propensity to eat right through all the food in the camp, even during objectively difficult times," and in their "failure to put by food surpluses and develop food storage" (pp. 30–31). Many of these features have since been combined by Woodburn in a single construct, "the immediate-return system" (1980, 1982, 1988).

In "The Original Affluent Society" Sahlins intended to offer a culture-specific explanation of this "peculiar" economic behaviour. Referring to the formalist/substantivist controversy of the 1960s, he set himself against the use of "ready-made models of orthodox Economics, especially the 'microeconomics' taken as universally valid and applicable *grosso modo* to primitive societies" (1972:xi). He expressed, instead, a commitment to "a culturalist study that as a matter of principle does honour to different societies for what they are" (p. xi) and to a view of the economy as "a category of culture rather than behaviour" (p. xii). Any lingering uncertainty about his theoretical position is dispelled by *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976), where he argued for an economic analysis that takes into consideration peoples' cultural constructions of the material world and challenged the assumption that there is an economic sphere which is regulated by practical reason. Interestingly, he specifically criticized analyses which present a "naturalization

of the hunter-gatherer economy" and concern themselves with the "naturalistic ordering of culture" instead of "the cultural order of nature" (1976:100).

What he did in "The Original Affluent Society" was, however, precisely the reverse of his intention: he discussed hunter-gatherers' work in terms of practical reason and ecological constraints and analysed their economy with none other than a microeconomic model focussing on individuals' optimal, rational behaviour. He argued, in fact, that the imminence of diminishing returns shaped the hunter-gatherer economy, first imposing mobility and then enforcing prodigality (pp. 31–33). "Hunters and gatherers," he concluded, ignoring their culture altogether, "have by force of circumstances an objectively low standard of living" (p. 37, emphasis added).

How did this happen? It was not for lack of trying. Sahlins offered two promising cultural propositions. The first was that affluence is a culture-specific relation between material wants and means and that hunter-gatherers achieve it by reducing their material wants through cultural processes: "Want not, lack not." This would have been a good starting point from which to explore the ideas of hunter-gatherers in relation to their economic conduct and thereby to provide a culturalist framework for understanding their economic arrangements. But Sahlins did not pursue it, in part because of lack of relevant data and conceptual apparatus and in part, unfortunately, because he sacrificed the issue to wit and glossed this proposition as the "Zen way." In so doing, he diverted attention from the hunter-gatherers' own ideas, since, needless to say, "honour[ing] different societies for what they are" means projecting upon them neither Western nor Zen ideas.

Sahlins's second cultural proposition was, essentially, that hunter-gatherers have confidence in their environment and that their economic conduct makes sense in relation to that confidence. In "Notes on the Original Affluent Society" he put this boldly, arguing that "a certain confidence, at least in many cases, attends their economic attitudes and decisions. The way they dispose of food on hand, for example—as if they had it made" (1968a:86). Notably, most of the speakers in the discussion that followed (1968a:89–92) addressed their comments to this proposition, designated by one of them as the "thesis of confidence in the yield of the morrow" (Helm 1968:89). Although they discussed it in a preliminary way, in impressionistic terms, and did not find it equally applicable to all cases, the consensus was that this proposition did apply to peoples whose economies were later to be characterized as "immediate-return systems" and in restricted ways to other groups as well.

When Sahlins made the same point again in "The Original Affluent Society," however, he added a qualifier which brought to an end the interest he and others had shown in this proposition. He wrote: "My point is that the otherwise curious heathen devices become understandable by the people's confidence, a confidence which is the *reasonable* human attribute of a generally successful economy" (p. 29, emphasis added). He later

indicated that by "successful economy" he meant gaining a livelihood while retaining a low ratio of work time to leisure time. While the initial proposition could clearly have led to a culture-sensitive analysis—because confidence in the natural environment reflects cultural representations as much as objective, ecological conditions—this addition reduced it to a practical reason and prepared the way for the ecological proposition.

Sahlins did not, I think, go back on the explanatory importance of hunter-gatherers' confidence in their environment. He simply laid his bet on another proposition which he had come to believe would make his case more strongly. Reputed to be central and crucial to "The Original Affluent Society," this proposition was that hunter-gatherers work an average of three to five hours per adult per day. In retrospect, and taking into account the recent work discussed briefly above, it is clear that he bet on the weaker horse. However, even in the essay itself one can see how the illusion evolved and, moreover, that this proposition is not a necessary condition for Sahlins's argument.

Pre-1968 theory had explained hunter-gatherers' economic dispositions in terms of their unrelenting quest for food. Sahlins's attack on this theory was what made his essay historically important, but he addressed it only to pave the way for his own. It would have been sufficient for that purpose to point out—in a general way, and, without going into the problematic statistics—that what were then new and exceptionally rich empirical findings conclusively showed that hunter-gatherers did not work relentlessly. (This would also have confirmed the impressions of attentive travellers and missionaries.) However, Sahlins chose a more polemical and dramatic approach, and as a result, while he debunked the old theory sensationally, he lost control of his own.

He overprocessed the ecologically oriented quantitative data from the aforementioned studies and in the course of that adopted the analytical construct of "work time"—a modern Western construct par excellence that is meaningful within the ecological paradigm but not in a culturalist study. Moreover, with the zeal of the newly converted, he further quantified the quantitative measures of work time that, with considerable caution, Lee and McArthur and McCarthy had provided and so arrived at estimates of "four or five hours" (in the case of the Arnhem Land Aborigines [p. 17]) and "an average of 2 hours and 9 minutes per day" (in the case of the Dobe !Kung [p. 21]). The simplistic reduction of the data to these two figures was unfortunate, because when he then turned to his other sources he found in them suggestive comparable estimates: "two or three hours," "three or four hours," and "an average of less than two hours a day" (p. 26, citing Grey 1841, vol. 2:263; Eyre 1845:254–55; Woodburn 1968:54). He himself was aware that the estimates were "very rough," but —lo and behold!—they were similar to each other and to the estimates just mentioned. (Sahlins further highlighted the similarity by printing the estimates in boldface.) These were similar enough, in any case, for scholars who had just discovered what has been called the "magic

number" in hunter-gatherer studies—the 25-strong hunter-gatherer band—and suggested a second magic number, "a mean of three to five hours" of work per adult worker per day.

This seeming fact was sufficient for Sahlins's case: if they worked so little, they indeed enjoyed unparalleled affluence. Furthermore, it made the cultural propositions simple corollaries of this fact: if hunter-gatherers could gain an adequate livelihood by working so little, it was obvious that they could easily get what they wanted and did not want more than they could easily get, and, furthermore, it was obvious ("reasonable") that they had confidence in their environment. Thus, Sahlins centered his concluding theory on the ecological proposition, which should not have been offered (since there was neither sufficient evidence nor any theoretical need for it), and abandoned the cultural propositions.

It is as a result of this that he provided a theory of *abundance with cost* (owing to ecological dictates) when he had set out to offer the opposite, a theory of *affluence without abundance* (owing to cultural influences). His theory was, in Winterhalder's terms, "the neoclassical formulation preceded by a minus sign" (1990:498)—a neat formula in the best formalist fashion that lacked culture-sensitive depth. Worst of all, the whole argument came to appear doubtful in the light of subsequent work because the ecological proposition upon which it rested had been called into question. I would argue, however, that in drawing attention to the explanatory power of hunter-gatherers' trust in their environment, Sahlins did point the way towards a culturally oriented theory of hunter-gatherers' economic behaviour. He was on the threshold of what can now be pursued by using the culturalist method of economic analysis.

The Cosmic Economy of Sharing

No one can seriously suppose either that all modern hunter-gatherers will be the same or that any point needs to be made of this. It seems, however, that not only do hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems share the economic features which perplexed Sahlins (whilst other modern hunter-gatherers differ from them in various ways) but at least some of them view their natural environments in a similar way: they have, in Gudeman's (1986) terms, very similar primary metaphors. These metaphors are drawn from their social institutions and constitute the cores of the metaphorical models that Gudeman has called local economic models. I shall move on to discuss these metaphorical models and then show that this ethnographic material provides substance for Sahlins's cultural propositions, a basis on which to refine them, and, in addition (and as Sahlins suspected) a means of making sense of these hunter-gatherers' economic behaviour.

I began to explore the primary metaphors of hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems in an earlier paper (Bird-David 1990), where I examined one metaphorical model—the giving environment—in relation to

patterns of exchange and ownership in the context of a contrast between the South Indian Nayaka and their shifting-cultivator neighbours the Bette and Mullu Kurumbas. Here I discuss a closely related metaphorical model—the cosmic economy of sharing—in relation to subsistence activities in the context of a comparison between the Nayaka and two other groups with immediate-return systems, the Mbuti of Zaire and the Batek of Malaysia. Each group has animistic notions which attribute life and consciousness to natural phenomena, including the forest itself and parts of it such as hilltops, tall trees, and river sources. I shall examine the way in which they construct their relationship with these agents—at once natural and human-like—by looking eclectically at their ritual and myth and their everyday discourse and conduct and by paying special attention to the metaphors which they use. Four features in particular are prominent:

First, the natural (human-like) agencies socialize with the hunter-gatherers. The Mbuti *molimo* festival, for example, is, in fact, precisely about this: the Forest visits the Mbuti camp, plays music, and sings with the people (Turnbull 1961). The Batek similarly say that the supernatural spirits, called *hala'*, "come to earth merely for the pleasure of sharing a good singing session with the Batek." During the fruit season, Batek frequently sing for—and with—the natural spirits (Endicott 1979:219). The Nayaka confine the merriment of a communal get-together with the natural agencies to a festival normally held once a year. However, throughout this festival, which lasts 24 hours, they converse, dance, sing, eat, and even share cigarettes with natural-cum-ancestral spirits, which they invoke by shamanistic performances.

Second, the natural agencies give food and gifts to everyone, regardless of specific kinship ties or prior reciprocal obligations. The Mbuti, for example, explicitly say that "the forest gives them . . . food and shelter, warmth and clothing" (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:253; 1978:165). They view game, honey, and other natural foods as "gifts" (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:161, 180, 277; 1961:61, 237). The Batek, according to their origin stories, hold that the *hala'* created most of the plants and animals especially for the Batek (Endicott 1979:54–55, 72) and now demand nothing in return, not even (with a few exceptions) sacrifices or offerings (p. 219). According to some versions, some *hala'* even turned themselves into the plants and animals that the Batek eat (p. 67). The *hala'*, the Batek say, keep large quantities of fruit blossoms in their abodes, "like goods on a shop shelf" (p. 44), and release the fruit in season, "freely bestowing their bounties" (p. 219).

Third, the people regard themselves as "children of" the forest, the term connoting generic ties rather than simply bonds of emotion and care. For example, not only do Mbuti often refer to the forest as "father" and "mother" (Turnbull 1965:252; cf. Mosko 1987) and say that it "gives them . . . affection" (1965:253) but also they describe it as the source of all spiritual matter and power, including the vital essence of people's lives (*pepo*) (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:247, 252). They describe

the forest as a "womb" (Turnbull 1978:167, 215; 1983:30, 32, 44) which plays a part in the conception and development of a Mbuti foetus (Turnbull 1978:165, 167–70; 1976 [1965]:178; cf. Mosko 1987:899). In a similar vein, although from the opposite perspective, the Nayaka not only refer to natural agencies (especially hilltops and large rock formations) by the terms *dod appa* (big father) and *dod awa* (big mother) and to themselves correspondingly by the terms *maga(n)* and *maga(l)* (male and female children) but also say that dead Nayaka become one with the forest spirits. They do not exclude their own immediate forefathers, and furthermore, they perform secondary mortuary rituals to help their deceased relatives join the forest spirits. The Batek also address the end point of the life-cycle, though they depict a two-stage transformation. They say that the spirits of their dead relatives first go to the land of the dead, where superhuman friends and relatives transform them into superhumans and teach them the skills and songs of the *hala'*; thereupon they become *hala'* and move to the *hala'* place (Endicott 1979:111–15, 219).

Finally, these groups not only depict their ties with the natural agencies as ties of sharing between relatives but also explain experiences which could be seen to be at odds with this cultural representation in its own terms, as temporary, accidental, and remediable exceptions. The Mbuti, for example, say that mishaps occur when the forest is asleep. Then they have to awaken it by singing and "draw the forest's attention to the immediate needs of its children" (Turnbull 1961:87; 1976 [1965]:257). The Batek even go in for a preventive measure and believe that as long as they sing, the *hala'*, who like the songs, will send food in abundance (Endicott 1979:54, 56, 219). The Nayaka explain mishaps in another way, though they too effectively relocate the violation outside the natural agencies. They maintain that the natural agencies are generically benign but, interestingly, "people from far away," through sorcery, have affected them. Nevertheless, as for the Mbuti, it is simple enough for Nayaka to restore the order of goodness. Through divination they make it known that the natural agencies are not at fault, and the natural agencies turn back into their normal, benign selves.³

While we will never know for certain how Nayaka, Mbuti, or Batek relate to their environments, it is clear enough that the metaphor of sharing provides an important clue to it. Drawn from the institution of sharing so common in these hunter-gatherers' social life, it is a primary metaphor which can help us to loosen slightly the bonds of our own Western ways of viewing the world. Whereas we commonly construct nature in mechanistic terms, for them nature seems to be a set of agencies, simultaneously natural and human-like. Furthermore, they do not inscribe into the nature of things a division between the natural agencies and themselves

3. In the case of extreme and lingering problems, it is believed that a local Nayaka has interfered with the natural agencies and has made them harmful. There is a more elaborate way of addressing this problem.

as we do with our "nature:culture" dichotomy. They view their world as an integrated entity. While many other non-Western peoples view the world in this fashion, it seems that hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems distinctively view their ties with the natural agencies in terms of visiting and sharing relationships. We can say that their world—according to the metaphorical template carried by the image of sharing—is a cosmic system of sharing which embraces both human-to-human and nature-to-human sharing. The two kinds of sharing are constituents of a cosmic economy of sharing.

Hunting and Gathering as Aspects of the Cosmic Economy of Sharing

The culture-specific dimensions of hunting and gathering can be brought into relief by examining them through the metaphorical model of the cosmic economy of sharing. Within it, they are constructed as acts of nature-to-human sharing which stimulate further acts of sharing in the world.⁴ During the past 20 years, we have learnt a great deal about hunter-gatherers' human-to-human sharing. We have learnt that sharing is a social event which demonstrates relatedness, affection, and concern. In economic terms, the value of sharing often lies in its occurrence—in that it secures recurrence—rather than in the value of the resources involved in the particular transaction. Verbally, agents praise generosity in general and generous individuals in particular, but at the same time, in what has come to be called demand sharing (see Bird-David 1990, Peterson 1988), they moan excessively about their poverty and needs. Practically, would-be-recipients request what they *see* in the possession of others and do not request them to produce what they do not appear to have. With these aspects of sharing in mind, we can see that these hunter-gatherers do indeed engage with their natural environments as with sharing partners in at least four ways.

First, as in the case of human-to-human sharing, they care about going on forays just as they do about the value of their products. For example, on some days they collect items of no immediate use and of no great value, and, having collected something, return to the camp, even in the middle of the day. A concern with the activity itself—as much as, and sometimes more than, with its yield—is even more conspicuous when people engage temporarily in other subsistence activities. They continue to go on expeditions in the forest every now and then, even though they often collect little or nothing at all and could do without it. When they forage in the forest, they feel that they are in touch with the natural agencies. The Batek, for example, "feel they are being brought closer to the *hala*" (Endicott 1979:67). The

Mbuti experience a communion with the forest in that "the moment of killing . . . [is] . . . a moment of intense compassion and reverence" (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:161). In some of their stories, the Nayaka even tell of encounters with their supernatural relatives during the course of gathering. According to one story, for example, a woman dug up roots and came upon an elongated stone (the Nayaka point out that it resembles the human body in its shape and refer to it as *kalu* [deity]). She brought the stone to the hamlet (where it still is) and placed it with the other items, including other stones as well as personal mementoes of deceased relatives, that are ceremonially entertained and fed once a year.

Second, like sharing, hunting and gathering are social events and contexts for socializing. The Batek, for example, do not "view work as a burden. . . . Most men and women approach their economic activities enthusiastically" (K. L. Endicott 1980:650). "Women often go fishing with their children as a way of filling an hour or two after other work has been completed" (p. 634). They often say when they go that "they are tired of sitting around camp" and when they return that "they were just playing around at fishing" (Endicott 1979:21). Nayaka families often walk in the forest, each on its own, at a slow, indulgent pace. While picking up usable items, they observe what has happened since last they were there, what has blossomed and what has wilted, and talk about it in a leisurely way. Mbuti approach their hunting in a similar way, as is vividly evident in the following example (which is especially interesting in that it is provided by an ecologically oriented ethnographer [see Hart and Hart 1986], who is here describing a hunt for commercial ends): "The overall pace of the hunt is so leisurely that old people and mothers with infants may join. Between casts of the nets, the hunters regroup . . . to share tobacco or snacks of fruit and nuts gathered along the way . . . to flirt and visit, to play with babies" (Hart 1978:337).

Third, as in human-to-human sharing, seeing constitutes a crucial moment in hunting and gathering activities.⁵ These hunter-gatherers tend to appropriate what they see rather than to search for something they want. They often set off from their huts with no particular sense of what they want to acquire in mind and collect what they happen to see on their way. Moreover, although it is impossible to see far ahead in the forest, they often do not even plan their route, instead going in the direction which seems best at the time. Again, they rarely request the natural agencies to produce more resources. They use, for example, very few if any magical means to try to improve their luck in hunting, fishing, and other endeavours (Endicott 1979:22). Seeing also establishes right of first access to resources in the forest, and this is particularly noticeable with respect to certain valued resources—for instance, certain kinds of

4. It should also be useful to look at hunting and gathering from the perspective of the sociology of work, which since the 1950s has gone well beyond the examination of work as labour.

5. Among the !Kung and some northern hunters individuals "see" game in divinatory dreams and then set out to get it, or they "see" where it will be best to go foraging (e.g., Lee 1979, Tanner 1979).

honey—which can be collected repeatedly in the same place. The individual who first sees the tree on which it is annually found owns the tree, which means that he has the right to initiate the collection expedition.

Finally, echoing demand sharing in the human realm, these hunter-gatherers both praise the goodness and generosity of the natural agencies and (regardless of what they actually have) frequently complain of hunger and other insatiable needs. During their 24-hour shamanistic sessions, the Nayaka, for example, repeatedly do both. Similarly, the Mbuti complain of food shortage, although they also frequently sing to the goodness of the forest as they walk in it and as they hunt and gather alone and in groups (Turnbull 1976 [1965]:167, 256; 1961:57, 79; 1978:164). As in human-to-human sharing, complaints and praise are but complementary idioms in an economic discourse premised on giving (see Bird-David 1990).

From this ethnographic glimpse of hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems it appears that the metaphor of sharing is a clue both to their views of their environment and to their action within it. Recent theory—from diverse perspectives—indeed shows that cognition (concepts, especially metaphorical ones, and percepts) is interrelated with action (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gibson 1979, 1982; Ingold 1989), and this is, of course, in harmony with our own most commonplace experience. For example, our use of the metaphor “a dog is a friend” indicates that through close interaction with the dog we have come to perceive and approach it as a friend. Even when we represent the dog as an animal, in the course of what Marx called the life activity we engage with the dog as our friend and express this in various ways in our conduct and discourse.

The primary metaphor of “sharing” is thus a concept with which *we* can make sense of the hunter-gatherers’ economic arrangements (Gudeman 1986) and, moreover, a metaphorical concept by which *they* make sense of their environment, one that guides their action within it. Through their close interaction with the environment they have come to perceive it, and act with it, as with a friend, a relative, a parent who shares resources with them. Though in certain contexts they talk about aspects of their environment in “knowledge of” terms, for the most part in the course of their life activity they normally engage with it as if they were in a sharing relationship.

The metaphor “the natural environment is a sharing partner” thus constitutes an analytical tool (to be used with caution, in awareness of the inevitable uncertainty of our own authorship, continually checked and refined as we use it) to examine the issues which Sahlins raises in “The Original Affluent Society.” For example, how do hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems construct their needs vis-à-vis their environment in culture-specific terms? Do they trust their environment, and in what culture-specific sense? How does this metaphor make sense of their seemingly “peculiar” economic behaviour?

Rewriting Sahlins’s Cultural Propositions

Do hunter-gatherers have “confidence in the yield of the morrow”? Being keen observers of nature’s vicissitudes and ecological variations, hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems are as cognisant of uncertainties in the “yield of the morrow” as we are, and probably more so. They have experienced periods of hardship in the past and know only too well that such periods may recur. Nevertheless, as in a sharing relationship, although they do not know—and know that they cannot know—what the natural environment will provide, they are confident that under normal conditions it will give them food. Moreover, irrespective of what they obtain in any particular hunting and gathering event—in any momentary episode of the life-long engagement of sharing—the very fact that they have obtained something in their eyes reaffirms their relationship with the natural agencies and therefore secures the recurrence of sharing. In a sense, then, they do have “confidence in the yield of the morrow”—a confidence born of the view that the environment is morally bound to share food and other material resources with them and that under normal conditions it will.

There is a certain truth in Sahlins’s suggestion that hunter-gatherers have “limited needs,” although it is empirically—not merely theoretically—inaccurate to say that they restrict their material desires in the way that Zen believers do. True, they are not interested in possessions and do not go to a great deal of bother to obtain and accumulate them. However, it is equally apparent that they delight in abundance when circumstances afford it and that they consume ostentatiously what they have. Furthermore, to quote Barnard and Woodburn (1988:12), their “demand for food and other goods from anthropologists, as well as from members of their own societies, is very great, indeed at times almost insatiable.” Although these observations seem contradictory, they make sense given that these peoples construct their material requirements from their natural environment—and also, in many ways, from their social environment—in the way in which they construct their demands in a sharing relationship. They culturally construct their needs as the want of a share. Therefore, they require of their environment what they see when they see it and do not request it to produce more. But at the same time they enjoy and exhaust what they have obtained, however much it is, and persist in their demands for shares, irrespective of what they already have. They thus restrict their material wants, but in the way in which one does within a sharing relationship.

Not only food but also technological means are constructed as objects which are shared between the environment and people. This means that they are also regarded as items which can be appropriated from the environment, used without effecting modifications, and then returned to it, directly or via other people. As Woodburn has pointed out, these people often pick up tools just before, and for, the imminent collection of a

resource and then leave them behind. They do not concern themselves with developing their technological equipment, although, if the environment provides sophisticated equipment, such as a gun or a Land Rover, they will readily use it, while showing the same remarkable (but not "peculiar") disposition to be careless about it. Their expertise has come to be the sophisticated use of the material means which the environment provides.

With one critical proviso, there is also value in Sahlins's suggestion that hunter-gatherers' economic dispositions are predicated on abundance. The proviso is that "abundance" is an assumption of their economic model—homologous with and opposite to the assumption of scarcity in Western economic models. In non-extreme situations, irrespective of what we have, the assumption of scarcity has a bearing upon our decisions, choices, and actions. In the case of these hunter-gatherers, the assumption of abundance has the same function. It is consistent with their view of the natural environment as a sharing partner, which implies that as human agents appropriate their shares they secure further sharing. The assumption of scarcity is consistent with Westerners' mechanistic view of the natural environment, which implies that in the course of time, as human agents use up resources, the total stock is depleted.

In conclusion, then, Sahlins suggested that hunter-gatherers follow the "Zen way" to affluence, which presupposes that "human material wants are few and finite, and technical means unchanging, but on the whole adequate" (1972:2). This way contrasts, he argued, with the modern Western one (the "Galbraithian way"), whose assumptions are appropriate to market economies—"that man's wants are great, not to say infinite, whereas his means are limited, although improveable." Hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems in fact follow a third way—the "sharing way"—to affluence. Their way is based on assumptions appropriate to their sharing economy—that material wants are linked with material means which are available for sharing. (They want a share of however much is available.)

Further, Sahlins observed that in the Western market economy "all economic activity starts from a position of shortage. . . . one's resources are insufficient to the possible uses and satisfactions" (1968a:86). In this respect, the hunter-gatherers' case is the reverse. All economic activity starts from a position of affluence (affluence as a premise). One expects to obtain sufficient resources—at times of abundance even in excess of possible uses and satisfactions.

Finally, Sahlins wrote that "otherwise curious heathen devices become understandable by the people's confidence" (1972:29) and that hunter-gatherers behave "as if they had it made" (1968a:86). He was right on both points—if read to say that just as Westerners' behaviour is understandable in relation to their assumption of shortage, so hunter-gatherers' behaviour is understandable in relation to their assumption of affluence. Moreover, just as we analyze, even predict, Westerners' behaviour by presuming that they behave as if they

did not have enough, so we can analyze, even predict, hunter-gatherers' behaviour by presuming that they behave as if they had it made.

Towards New Ecological Propositions

In terms of the cosmic economy of sharing, then, the "peculiar" economic behaviour of hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems makes sense. Moreover, reconceptualized in this way, Sahlins's cultural propositions hold. But the reader is likely to ask: under what ecological conditions can people maintain, and live by, such an economic model? Furthermore, do they in fact have abundant resources, or do they merely think that they do? These are our questions, framed within our models; the people in question would not ask them. Nevertheless, most of our colleagues in the world of learning and in policy-making circles—let alone most students of hunter-gathering peoples—think in Western terms. We therefore have to address these questions, especially since Sahlins's implicit assumption that hunter-gatherers' confidence in the environment is explained by abundance (albeit under conditions of enforced mobility and prodigality) does not hold.

Unfortunately, much as we might want to explore the ecological dimension of these hunter-gatherers' cultural-economic system in their own terms, we cannot do so. In the case of the farmers of the eastern Andes, Gudeman and Rivera (1990) have shown that Westerners, and even certain Western economists, can engage in direct conversation with the local people, but this is possible only because of the close affinity between the local model, the folk Western model, and the model of certain Western economists (they argue for a historical link dating to the Iberian conquest of the Americas). In the case of the hunter-gatherers, in contrast, there is a fundamental disjuncture between the Western and the local model: the terms of each exclude the other. While the Western model presupposes a detached observer concerned with an inanimate nature, the local one presupposes an actor personally involved with an animate natural environment (see Ingold 1989).

However, as I have shown above, the local model relates experientially to action and, moreover, to the same physical reality—the natural environment—with which we are concerned. Therefore, although we cannot translate their experience into our terms, we can come to understand it (see Lakoff 1987:chap. 17) by finding a new way of looking at the natural environment. We need to create a new metaphor of our own and use it as an imaginative cognitive model. Ideally, this metaphor will evoke the way in which these hunter-gatherers relate to their environments in terms equivalent to their own. From such a metaphor we should be able to deduce new, testable propositions and gain novel perspectives on their economy.

I think that there is a metaphor which fills the bill, and it involves the Western institution of the bank. Not only is it the major institution of exchange in the West-

ern economy, and therefore equivalent to sharing, but we draw on it metaphorically, just as the hunter-gatherers draw on sharing, when we are dealing with resources which, for us, are ambiguously placed between the animate and the inanimate (we have, for example, blood banks and semen banks).

Furthermore, the bank is a system which is both concerned with the circulation and use of resources and founded on trust. Individuals save resources for future need, but instead of keeping their valued resources privately they deposit them in the bank, in trust, so that when the time comes they will be able to repossess either them or their exact equivalent instantaneously. For the most part, however, these resources are meanwhile accessible to the public for gainful use, on the basis of the statistical fact that at any given time only a fraction of the savers will claim their deposits. Now, the hunter-gatherers not only have trust in their natural environment and regard its resources as their due shares but, indeed, also make intermittent claims on those shares. They engage in occasional opportunistic pursuit of other subsistence activities (for example, labouring for their neighbours) and frequently shift between these and hunting and gathering (see Bird-David n.d.). Moreover, the bank is a system which can only work if people do not withdraw proceeds from it in order to hoard or circulate them within restricted, private circles. This is precisely the case among the hunter-gatherers and is, after all, what the social institution of sharing is all about. It seems, therefore, that the metaphor "nature is a bank" captures the essence of these hunter-gatherers' engagement with the natural environment while embodying the material basis as well as the cultural aspect of their economy.

Among the many possible propositions which can be deduced from this metaphorical model, there is one which is relevant to the question of the ecological foundations of the local economic model. This is that the hunter-gatherers can maintain their trust in the natural environment—and a successful economy—even when the natural environment cannot, in fact, provide sufficient resources for everyone simultaneously. This hypothesis may seem paradoxical, but it is no more so than the case of the Western bank (see Samuelson 1951:323). The crucial ecological condition may be, as it is in the banking system, a minimum threshold of resources which corresponds to the fraction of the group that is likely to make claims on its shares instantaneously. To explore this possibility, we will need to move away from the goose-chase study of "near pure" hunter-gatherers and look instead at the temporal and idiosyncratic structures of hunting and gathering in the heterogeneous groups that we encounter. We will need to find out what portion of the group pursues foraging at any given period of time, how frequently individuals within the community shift between subsistence activities, and how often they hunt and gather. We may then be able to work out the minimum ecological threshold for a successful economy premised on trust in the natural environment. There is a related proposition of which we must be

aware: this kind of economy can collapse as a result of a breakdown of confidence even when there is no crucial decline in the level of natural resources. The history of banking systems provides examples of this, and we may find also hunter-gatherer cases.

The second question, and the more intriguing one, concerns the extent to which these hunter-gatherers' cultural-economic system generates wealth. Does the fact that they view their environment as rich make it richer? Ecologically oriented scholars have already explored the proposition that sharing—human-to-human sharing—constitutes a kind of collective insurance against unpredictable natural fluctuations and argued that it safeguards individuals from poverty (e.g., Wiessner 1982, Cashdan 1985, Smith 1988, Gould 1982). They have not, however, gone far enough. They ignore both a fundamental part of the ecological equation and the way in which the actors themselves view their environment. Since these scholars view natural resources as an independent variable, they take into account neither the stochastic link between past human use and present level of natural resources nor the fact that, like money in a bank, natural resources left in nature can grow.

The metaphorical model "nature is a bank" implies a more complex development of their proposition, namely, that sharing constitutes an insurance scheme which also involves investment in a banking system. Not only does it safeguard individuals from unpredictable troubles but also it increases their resources. The simpler way in which this may happen can be best explained by an example drawn from a non-monetary banking system. For instance, with the blood bank each individual protects himself by giving blood when he can and receives blood when he needs it. However, the total volume of blood in the bank meanwhile increases as well, because what may not have been a resource before now becomes one. For example, blood which may have been the wrong type for one's friends and relatives becomes a usable resource once it is deposited in the bank. We need to explore whether these hunter-gatherers' economy works in a similar way. For instance, does the general sharing of large game generate wealth because a large amount which would have been wasted on one's own friends and close relatives stretches farther when it is divided among all members of the group?

The second and more complex way in which a banking system generates wealth can be illustrated by our monetary banking system, in which money in fact generates more money. The folk explanation is simple enough: we say that money grows, and, noticeably, we ourselves use the metaphor "money in the bank is like a plant in nature." The technical explanation is complicated and lies in the paradoxical nature of circulation and ownership in this system (put simply, it has to do with the fact that for each pound sterling in the bank, there are about four individuals who simultaneously own it and use it). We need to explore the ways in which this may happen within these hunter-gatherers' economic system. The sharing of large game, for example, may also generate wealth in an additional way: recipi-

ents of meat are likely to postpone hunting, since they have had a share and since they are confident that meat is secured in the bank of nature until they need it, meanwhile allowing more time for natural increase. I suspect that if we examine the temporal and idiosyncratic patterns of foraging, as well as patterns of ownership and circulation, with these aspects of the banking system in mind, we will find that in many other ways these hunter-gatherers' economic system, premised on trust in the natural environment, does generate wealth. Sahlins summarized his case by the catch phrase "Want not, lack not." It may well be, however, that the hunter-gatherers' case is "Think rich, be rich."

Conclusions

The fundamental flaw in "The Original Affluent Society" was Sahlins's conflation of cultural and ecological perspectives. As shown here, however, this problem can be resolved, and the relevant empirical studies then show that Sahlins did indeed "have a point"; his essay is a king that could—and should—be scientifically reclothed. The evocative title of his essay was inspired by John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1969 [1958]). It is ironic that Galbraith in fact emphasized the impact of ideas on the economy, arguing—in a mirror image of what I have argued for the hunter-gatherers in question—that the assumption of scarcity continues to influence economic conduct in the increasingly wealthy West and thereby acts to preserve poverty. The irony is doubled, for in the second edition of his book Galbraith criticized those who misread his argument and overrated his point on the shortening of work hours. His main argument was that the way to the really affluent society lies in an ideological disengagement between production and economic security and between production and income. These ideas are precisely the ideas which are embodied in the cosmic economy of sharing. In respect to their cultural ideas, therefore, hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems constitute the original affluent society in a more comprehensive sense than Sahlins envisaged.

Comments

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Bird-David's model of a "cosmic economy of sharing" is, in reality, two models. For Model 1, she abandons the opposition between nature and culture, social relations and cosmology, to ask that hunter-gatherer practices upon the environment be comprehended as "an inte-

grated entity," a single cosmic continuum structured through the logic of the hunter-gatherer model of "the cosmic economy of sharing." From the vantage point supplied by this model, the anthropologist sees that it is only by imagining the cosmos and deriving a sense of how and why they have to share with it (and within it) that hunter-gatherers come to sing to the forest, hunt for the joy of hunting, claim only what they immediately see, water stones, blame the forest for misfortune, and so on. With a theoretical grasp on the indigenous, this essentially constitutive model of cultural form gives access to the signified practice of hunters. It tries to make sense of what is ecologically inexplicable and, from an anthropology debated amidst the constructed naturalness of commoditised existence, to reintegrate and dissolve what moderns tend to extract as Economy. Moreover, this model makes the social relation of reciprocity among hunters themselves intelligible. Thus "the cosmic economy of sharing" provides "the metaphorical template carried by the image of sharing." Accordingly, both human-with-human and human-with-forest acts of sharing crystallise about the basic categories of this single indigenous template. Neither a "social relation" nor a "principle" of reciprocity is privileged.

Model 2, by contrast, resuscitates the nature: culture split. "Society" happens first of all, and, in both anthropological and indigenous terms, the model/template of "the cosmic economy of sharing" seems to have become an afterthought. The imagined cosmos becomes "a clue to their views of their environment and to their action within it"; thus a hunter-gatherer world of things and actions already constituted by a different set of determinations is presupposed. Social reality and the image of nature have come apart again. The indigenous model and its semi-ritual effects (e.g., watering stones, singing to the forest), formerly cultural models *for* action (Geertz), have become cultural metaphors *of* reality, and this is a reality structured below the level of a distinctly disembodied symbolic representation (Lakoff and Johnson).

Concretely, the forest, the desert, or the ice-cap becomes the epitome of a friend and sharing partner but, for all practical purposes, only an "as if" person of the band—a credible but nonetheless *imaginary* extension of the real networks of pooling and reciprocity, a fiction that expresses its fictionality as well as its signified. Accordingly, belief in the forest's imaginary potency is conceived to be about as strong as the belief that one's dog is really just another human person (which is to say, excepting for neurotic poodle-combers and the blind, not very strong at all). In the meantime, "the cosmic economy of sharing" has been put away in the kennels, and a metaphorical look-alike has been taken out.

So what of sharing itself, if it no longer crystallises about the same symbolic template as practices oriented towards the imaginary ecological friend and, indeed, if it is to be accorded a higher coefficient of reality than practices sprung from the metaphorical imaginary?

Bird-David is not explicit. But in the space created by the paring down of culture to metaphor, processes of sharing with both real persons and the personified niche seem to become appended to a social rationality of environmental conservation. This is summed up by the analogy with banking, suggestive of a return to economism. (And, if so, what then to make of the critique of Sahlins?) The environment is not to be depleted; social sharing makes conjunctural overproduction unnecessary; ritualised investments in the environment express metaphorically the goodwill that "really" does have to be banked, in terms of not working hard and not accumulating, if survival is to be ensured. Practical reason, therefore, stalks "the cosmic economy of sharing"—a rationality that seems to be a safeguard, an insurance policy, against the failure of the imaginary to lock its own practical effects inside the real ecological threshold. But if this is so, is such an imaginary economy of sharing necessary? Why does it exist? Even from the limited perspective of a static frame (which can never reveal anything of the strength of a unit of culture), the theory seems improbable because it leaves too much of culture redundant.

The paper is provocative because it is eclectic. Two questions emerge. First, does eclecticism matter? Secondly, is the anthropological argument between concepts of culture as metaphor/representation and concepts of culture as mythical realities, habitus, ontology, and so on, decidable? For modernism, the answer to the first question has to be yes, in which case the answer to the second question depends upon the study of contact situations and transformation. Thus, if hunter-gatherer culture is metaphorical, it will change rapidly to "make sense" of social change and economic "progress." If, by contrast, it is made of "mythical realities," "progress" is unlikely; hunters will remain hunters and impose upon the thrust of modernity the cultural significance of hunting. This was the crux and portent of Sahlins's essay. In a sense, the economism of "The Original Affluent Society" is a bit beside the point.

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In reexamining Sahlins's "the original affluent society" Bird-David raises broad economic and cultural issues with respect to hunting and gathering societies. I comment primarily on the former with brief reference to work that I undertook in western Arnhem Land among Gunwinggu-speaking hunter-gatherers in 1979 and 1980. My research set out to answer two questions of relevance to Bird-David's essay: the minor question was whether the indigenous economy was "affluent" in Sahlins's sense (Altman 1984), the major one whether Gunwinggu people who were incorporated into the Australian welfare state could be called hunter-gatherers (Altman 1987). In setting out to answer these questions

I was well aware of the work of both McCarthy and McArthur (1960) (because Fish Creek was only 100 km from Momega where I was based) and Sahlins (1972). I was also aware of the conceptual, methodological, and data shortcomings that bedevilled Sahlins's proposition: even a decade ago there was a growing published literature (see, e.g., Johnson 1975, Jones 1980, Minge-Klevana 1980) that identified these. Finally, I was familiar with the work of Meehan (1982), who had resided with hunter-gatherers at Kopanga in central Arnhem Land in 1972 and 1973. This research allowed me to make some statements about "affluence," although in contrast to Sahlins (and Bird-David) I made no attempt to move from the particular to the general on the basis of these observations.

The major conceptual problem that Sahlins faced was that his measurement of affluence used the Western notion of labor time, or hours worked. Even among advocates of time-allocation analysis it is widely recognized that not only duration of work but also "density" of work (Erasmus 1980) needs to be considered (see Gregory and Altman 1989:103–14). Affluence, however, can also be measured and cross-checked using other criteria, such as dietary intake and social accounts. At Momega, for example, people spent 3.6 hours per adult per day in materially productive work, daily dietary intakes of 2,850 Cal and 133 g of protein per capita were well above benchmark requirements, and subsistence made the major contribution (64%) in imputed income to the local economy, hence the materialist definition of the subjects as "hunter-gatherers."

The crucial methodological problem in Sahlins's argument was his error in ignoring the demographic composition of groups and the associated extent of work participation. The most extreme mistake occurred with the Fish Creek data: the monitored group comprised adults only and no dependents. In economics terminology, at Fish Creek labor force participation was 100%. Similarly, at Momega, the adult participation rate was 100%. Hence the average 3.6 hours per day that adults worked converted to 25.2 hours per week (over a seven-day week), which is not dissimilar to the assumed 40 hours per week worked by the 60% of adult Australians in "full-time employment" at that time.

On the basis of these findings I accepted the "affluence" proposition, although I argued that this affluence was a modern condition largely underwritten by the financial contributions of the Australian welfare state and access to bought food and new technology. Indeed, it was quantitatively demonstrated by reconstruction that, assuming similar group size, demographic structure, environmental conditions, and resource utilization efficiency, such affluence would not have been sustainable under the traditional conditions that existed in parts of Arnhem Land into the 20th century. This impossibility was partly a result of ecological constraints: contemporary surveys of indigenous floral and faunal resources available during certain seasons but in particular during the mid-wet season indicate that even small dispersed

populations would have had difficulty in meeting a certain minimum level of living without considerable work effort (see also Hawkes and O'Connell 1981, Meehan 1982).

I can understand the cultural, historical, and political contexts of the very big question that Sahlins (1968a, 1972) was asking. Using the tools of neoclassical economics (and time-allocation techniques are a product of time and motion studies in industrial societies), Sahlins demonstrated very cleverly that Paleolithic hunter-gatherers did not necessarily live on the subsistence margin and that if affluence could be measured in terms of hours worked, then hunter-gatherers may have worked no harder than people in modern industrial societies. Sahlins's essay was path-breaking: it instantly debunked deeply ingrained evolutionary perspectives on hunter-gatherers. Subsequent criticisms do not detract from the significance of his corrective, and it is for this reason that it is regularly set for anthropology students—as much for the questions he raised as for the questions he answered.

What I cannot understand is the anthropological culture that generates questions like Bird-David's at a different historical moment, when remaining hunter-gatherer societies are either incorporated into the world economy or are under threat from a range of powerful industrial interests. Bird-David's aim in exhuming the corpse of Sahlins's seminal essay is unclear: is she putting forward a neo-evolutionist model under the intellectual umbrella of "culture"? Are there no more urgent questions for social anthropologists to be asking in the 1990s? What needs explanation is why in contemporary contexts hunter-gatherers often demonstrate unlimited, rather than limited, material wants. Why is it that at Momega and, according to the literature, elsewhere modern hunter-gatherers have apparently insatiable demands for shotguns, rifles, motor vehicles, cassette recorders, CD players, televisions, and VCRs?

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Bird-David's analytical contribution in this article is offset by its disparaging tone. Because such a tone pervades the recent hunter-gatherer literature, I want to address it. The implication of these writings is that the 1960s cultural-ecological repudiation of the image of food collectors as on-the-verge-of-starvation savages was ethnographically unsubstantiated and ethnologically simplistic. It would be better instead to invest the caloric (choleric?) energy in extensive and intensive reading of the subject matter. We concentrate more on the notorious than on the notable, the extensive literature that did not make headlines. The "Man the Hunter" conference

was convened not to search for new propositions concerning the cultural ecology of simple societies but to confirm and expound existing ones. Two antecedents of the conference, for example, were the Ottawa symposia focused on band societies and on cultural ecology (Damas 1969a, b). To reiterate some analytical concerns copiously expressed in the past:

1. The only objective, systemic gauge of success is adaptation as measured by survival and well-being. As an East African native who operated with the Hadza early on, I can state—"culturalist method of economic analysis" notwithstanding—that by the objective measure of well-being (predictable, easy, and unimpeded discharge of basic human functions, as suggested by G. A. Harrison) the Hadza had a more efficient strategy for need resolution than more complex cultures. "Affluence," "standards of living," and "derived needs/wants" are, in contrast, subjective and etic evaluations.

2. The general and the particular must be differentiated. Sustainable early-'60s generalizations were abstracted from particulars derived from studies of small-scale societies. They proposed that humans in small-scale societies are no more dirty savages than they are noble savages, but because of the extended period of time over which small-scale societies are known to have existed they display more "experiential predictability" and, therefore, more "need-resolving efficiency" than techno-industrial societies. No one has said that God created hunter-gatherers in a state of immutable ecological grace. Whether particulars such as sharpening arrowheads or attending the boss's cocktail party are labeled culture-core or not, both represent calories expended to meet culture-specific needs. They are thus the particulars on which generalizations regarding behavioral attributes at different levels of cultural complexity rest.

3. Because culture is a learned, integrated construct and not a template of reality, it is essential that we keep the absolute distinct from the relative. Observations such as "There is no development of technological equipment or food storage for difficult times" are particulars relative to their space/time context which generate universal concepts such as Helm's "confidence in the yield of the morrow," Woodburn's "immediate-return systems," and my own "experiential predictability" (Bicchieri 1990). What is a "standard of living" other than a relative measure of complexity? And is complexity not a means to rather than an alias for and a measure of adaptation? In absolute terms, complex cultures use systemic energy less efficiently than simpler ones; yet, in terms relative to contextual changes in space-population ratio, they are no less efficient.

Maybe it is time to stop bucking the *genre du jour*. In substance, I agree with Bird-David that "Sahlins's argument, duly updated and reconceptualized, does indeed hold." Our conceptual language has undergone and will continue to undergo critical revision as new particulars generated by a dynamic context become available. Of itself, without proper contextualization, the fieldwork and theory of today's "ecologically oriented specialists"

inspires no more or less confidence than did the groundbreaking achievements of the '60s.

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Sahlins's penchant for capturing an insight in a clever phrase, playing with it for a while, and then leaving the rest of us to ponder its true significance was never more clearly demonstrated than in the case of "the original affluent society." Bird-David's critique is long overdue and, given the concept's currency in contemporary thinking and teaching about foragers, most welcome.

To me, its most important point is that, if the concept of "affluence"—in Sahlins's sense of a low ratio of work time to leisure—has any applicability at all to hunter-gatherer societies, it is only to those with immediate-return systems. It does not apply to those with delayed-return systems, most emphatically not to those, such as the Amerindian societies of the Northwest Coast, that are often characterized as "complex." My only criticism is that she does not make this point forcefully enough.

Bird-David has done more than even Woodburn (1982) or Testart (1982) to convince me of the usefulness of the immediate/delayed-return distinction. The Inupiat Eskimos, among whom I have done most of my own research (Burch 1980, 1988), contrast sharply with her study populations on almost every feature she mentions. According to Bird-David, hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems (1) are not interested in possessions and do not go to a great deal of bother to obtain them, (2) have an undeveloped sense of property, (3) lack an interest in developing their technological equipment, (4) lack foresight, (5) fail to put by food surpluses, (6) have confidence in their environment, (7) request and harvest only what they see, not what they need, (8) practice demand sharing, (9) use very few magical means to improve their luck, (10) establish first right of access to something by seeing it first, and (11) regard themselves as living within a giving, sharing nonhuman environment. Not one of these generalizations applies to the more than two dozen Inupiat Eskimo societies I have studied.

The metaphor of the bank, which Bird-David invokes to characterize foragers' conception of their environment, *can* be applied to Eskimos, but it yields rather different results than when applied to the peoples she discusses. Instead of being served by friendly bankers, Eskimos dealt with nasty ones who continually had to be bribed before they would permit withdrawals and who moved the bank's assets to a different branch every few weeks. Since there was always a possibility that the institution would fail, Eskimos tried to withdraw more than they required for immediate needs in order to hide the surplus under a mattress. While possibly helpful as a heuristic device, this kind of metaphorical game does not strike me as a very powerful analytic tool.

Much more useful, it seems to me, would be a set of analytic parameters which could be used to determine the extent to which a foraging society can be considered "affluent." Suggested by Bird-David's paper (cf. Laughlin 1968) are time spent in (1) equipment manufacture, (2) rituals performed before, during, and after the hunt, (3) seasonal movement, (4) scanning, (5) information exchange, (6) hunting, (7) retrieving the harvest, (8) processing it, and (9) storing it in relation to the amount of time spent in leisure activities. In immediate-return ("affluent") systems, presumably, the figures for many of these—especially (1), (2), (8), and (9)—would be close to zero, while that for leisure would be high. In delayed-return systems, the figures would be higher for those parameters but lower for leisure. Another important factor would be the proportion of the population involved in each type of activity. If Sahlins's essays stimulate anthropologists to collect information on these points, they will have made a lasting contribution to the field. However, if we are ever fortunate enough to have quantifiable data relating to these parameters for a representative sample of foraging societies, we probably will want to consider them in relation to more important issues than relative levels of affluence.

Arcand (1981:41) has pointed out that, in a book supposedly about all hunter-gatherers, Service (1966) dealt only with "simple" (as opposed to "complex") hunter-gatherers. Now Bird-David has shown that, in essays also supposedly about all hunter-gatherers, Sahlins actually dealt only with those with immediate-return (as opposed to delayed-return) systems. It seems to me that much of the modern literature on foragers is similarly focused on simple, immediate-return systems. While that is not necessarily bad, it does mean that we must be cautious about extrapolating from it to models of hunter-gatherer societies in general.

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I agree with Bird-David that we should stop regarding Sahlins's essay "The Original Affluent Society" (and, I would add, any text or essay) as a "sacred text" to be passed down and left unexamined. However, it is astonishing to me that after criticizing Sahlins's essay for "soar[ing] beyond conventional scientific discourse," she also ignores conventional scientific discourse.

Having criticized Sahlins for generalizing about hunter-gatherers' work time on the basis of just three studies, she proceeds to generalize about the "cosmic" ideas of hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems on the basis also of just three (different) cases. She acts as if her three case-studies provided us with an appropriate scientific test, but even assuming that the cases are representative of some population of cases, three case-studies are not enough if there is just one

judgment or score for each. A scientific test requires (1) specification by the investigator of the population of cases to which the investigator wishes to generalize the test results, (2) a random sample from that population or at least a sample of cases that is arguably representative of the population and *not* of the investigator's own choosing, (3) a clear specification of the hypotheses to be tested, and (4) a spelling out of the measures and procedures that would allow another investigator to repeat the test.

Bird-David tells us that Sahlins's conclusions could not be tested further because it is difficult "to study 'work time' among time-illiterate peoples who scatter across rough terrain." But difficulty is not impossibility; time-allocation studies *have* been conducted in foraging societies, and the methodological techniques are applicable to all kinds of societies. (See Gross 1984 for a review of such studies and a discussion of how the concept of time in industrialized societies does not invalidate the study of time elsewhere; and cross-cultural comparisons can also be made, e.g., Minge-Klevana 1980 and Ember 1983.) The observers need to wear watches, not the observees!

Bird-David tells us that we cannot "explore the ecological dimension of these hunter-gatherers' cultural-economic system in their own terms" because there is a "disjuncture between the Western and the local model." Why would she write an article which purports to explain to "Westerners" (as well as others) how these hunter-gatherers think about their environments—and why should we read it—if she really believed that different models cannot be understood by others? Cognitive anthropologists and psychologists have developed many techniques for eliciting ideas and feelings from individuals. Why not try some of these techniques or develop other methods so that representatives of these societies can convey their ideas about the world to us?

I have no quarrel with clinical, thoughtful analyses of cases that may suggest new theory or hypotheses to be tested. Indeed, I think that Bird-David has presented us with some interesting hypotheses about how foragers with immediate-return systems may feel and think about their environments. But her analysis is no more appropriate than was Sahlins's analysis for concluding *anything* about what foragers are like. Social and cultural anthropologists, usually not trained in scientific methods, have an unfortunate penchant for generalizing inappropriately from one case. Three cases, purposively chosen, are not much better. There is a methodology for conducting tests of hypotheses that purport to be generalizations about society (or types of society); it is known as the methodology of cross-cultural research. Traditionally, cross-cultural researchers have relied on conventional ethnographies, but many such researchers have noted that their methods can be applied to other kinds of data such as time-allocation observations, census and demographic data, and even new types of ethnographic description. (For an up-to-date review and discussion of these various methods, see the special issue

of *Behavior Science Research* [Cross-cultural and comparative research 1991].)

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Bird-David's critique of Sahlins's idea of the "original affluent society" is very insightful and valuable. Even more important, however, is her attempt to promote cultural analysis of hunting-and-gathering economies by applying Gudeman's ideas of "primary metaphors" and "local economic models" to a small sample of foraging societies. The ecologically based studies that have predominated in studies of hunting-and-gathering economies since Sahlins's article appeared have taught us a great deal about the relationship between human populations and their environments, but they tend to treat cultural ideas—if they treat them at all—as mere afterthoughts by means of which people rationalize the actions that are forced upon them by environmental constraints. Yet all but the most marginal environments offer some alternatives and demand some choices: what things to regard as resources, what resources to pursue, how to get them, how to distribute them, etc. Bird-David shows how cultural conceptions and values can enter into those choices and thus shape the way a group adapts to its environment.

Bird-David's concept of the "cosmic sharing economy" proves very useful in illuminating the economic behavior of the foraging peoples discussed. Her insight that the Batek, like the Nayaka and Mbuti, regard the environment as part of the sharing network fruitfully brings together a number of Batek ideas and behaviors that I had previously thought of as lying in distinct areas of their culture, as components of their religion, social organization, and economy. It would be worth investigating whether this metaphor might apply to other groups or categories of foragers as well. Presumably other such culturally appropriate "primary metaphors" could be discerned for other foraging groups which would similarly enhance our understanding of their ways of life, including their "economic" or "adaptive" behaviors and ideas.

Less impressive, however, is Bird-David's metaphor of the environment as a bank. While people's attitudes toward and uses of banks in industrial societies may parallel those of foragers toward their environments in a few ways, there are numerous distracting dissimilarities as well. To mention just two: there is no ready analogy in foraging behavior to the making of deposits or investments in bank accounts, and bank accounts are individually owned. This metaphor is too alien to provide useful insights, and it is unnecessary. The metaphor of the "cosmic sharing economy" is just as much "our metaphor" (she recognizes that she is its author) and there-

fore intelligible to any educated English-speaker as is that of the "environment as a bank," and it is much closer to indigenous concepts.

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I agree with Bird-David that Sahlins's classic article is not a culturally oriented analysis of forager economic life and that forager studies need to address the ways in which economies are culturally constructed and represented. Her discussion of Sahlins is superb. She should be applauded as well for relating Gudeman's insightful and creative investigations of local cultural models of livelihood to forager studies. Forager specialists rarely look outside forager or ecology studies, and Gudeman's work offers a way to move beyond ecology to culture.

One of Gudeman's central positions is that we should not import Western models of the economy to understand others; instead, we have to comprehend the way in which people model their own economies. While Bird-David achieves this goal in her analysis of the "cosmic economy of sharing," she ends the paper inconsistently by proposing a specifically Western concept—that of the bank—to account for these hunter-gatherers' "engagement with the natural environment." She implies that sharing among foragers is somehow equivalent to the "bank." It is true that both "sharing" and the "bank" are concepts that culturally structure the economy, but "bank" imposes formalist expectations. It rationalizes the transmission of bodily fluids as "exchange," thereby making these fluids into "commodities." By appropriating the bank, Bird-David threatens to force cultural ideas and practices into an economic analysis and, more specifically, into a Western economic scheme. Moreover, model and metaphor appear confused; "nature is a bank" is variously called a metaphor, a model, and a metaphorical model. Gudeman makes a precise distinction between these two complex concepts (Gudeman and Rivera 1990:13; Gudeman 1986:37–43), and the failure to observe it makes the argument somewhat less forceful.

I continue to be struck by the persistence with which anthropologists embrace Turnbull's romantic characterizations of the Mbuti, and this paper is no exception. There are few or no narratives, analyses of mythology, or cultural descriptions based on knowledge of the Mbuti language to support the ways in which Turnbull represents Mbuti life and thought. For example, how do we know that the Mbuti feel "reverence" or "compassion" when they are slaughtering an animal? What are the Mbuti words to describe the "affection" given by the forest? How do we know that the forest is the "vital essence" of people's lives when the central word cited by Turnbull (and Bird-David) in the description of this essence is *pepo*, a Swahili word used in northeastern Zaire to mean "wind"? To my knowledge, no subse-

quent fieldwork among the Mbuti or Efe, including my own, has revealed indigenous conceptions of the forest as a soul or life force. Furthermore, as in this paper, the Mbuti are frequently appropriated as hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems without including in the analysis the Bila farmers with whom they live and without any discussion of the cultural constitution of the Mbuti and Bila economy. The Ituri Project's work with Efe foragers and Lese farmers, as well as the work stemming from Ichikawa's Kyoto group, has already provided many insights into Turnbull's problematic representations (e.g., Bailey and Peacock 1988, Grinker 1990, Terashima 1985).

These specific comments, however, do not reflect my opinion of the paper as a whole. This is an important work that will be viewed as a classic treatment of Sahlins's notion of original affluence.

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Bird-David provides a superb analysis of Sahlins's essay by sorting through its mix of rationalist assumptions and culturally sensitive observations. This is important, for it illustrates again—and the point needs endless reiteration if a revolution in economic anthropology is to occur—that we are all caught up in our own "long conversation" even when we think otherwise. Through her cultural analysis of Sahlins's conversation, Bird-David shows why "rationalists" and "culturalists" in the field of economic anthropology feel ambiguously pleased and uneasy with his argument and how Sahlins himself embraced and presented a "mixed conversation." But in fact, mixed and situated conversations are what anthropologists have continually found in real life, and only the rationalist's desire for purity, elegance, and simplicity has led some to think an alternative exists.

Bird-David not only writes elegantly of "immediate-return" societies but provides cross-cultural comparisons of their material metaphors, a task I also have attempted (1986). This, it seems to me, is one project for cultural economics. It is very different from seeking a law or theory—as in foraging theory or neoclassical economics—that will cover or apply to all cases. For the cultural economist, the comparisons or points of illumination will change as new information becomes available and as the "observer's" own position shifts. But far from what some critics may think, indeed as Bird-David and I try to demonstrate, a cultural analysis is not mired in particularism, which itself would imply that our knowledge of a different society was definitive and fixed and that societies were unchanging. Cultural economics is engaged in a complex and shifting conversation among societies and histories; it opens new vistas and comparisons, and, as Kuhn (1962) might argue, I take this to be one sign of an intellectually healthy field.

With cultural economics, new questions are posed. A cultural economist, for example, might engage Bird-David's article at the "technical" level. Do we agree or disagree with her interpretation of the ethnography that "giving" and "sharing" with the environment are equivalent? What is the difference between models in which the environment "is" a supernatural being and one in which it "is" ancestors? Should we employ our term "agents" for the ancestors and supernatural beings as if they were independent entities "within" nature? I do not engage the essay in this way, for that would require a very lengthy comment, but this is some of the stuff of cultural economics and one of the perspectives that it opens.

I do want to discuss, however, some important issues raised by Bird-David concerning the use of models. She distinguishes between my use of metaphors and models and that of Lakoff and Johnson and Ingold. There are dissimilarities, but I would locate them differently. Bird-David argues that Lakoff and Johnson are interested in the experiential sense of metaphors while I see them as linguistic devices. On my reading, however, Lakoff and Johnson are very much concerned with metaphors as cognitive instruments and with what they can tell us about mind from a linguistic and philosophical perspective. In contrast, my assumption is that humans are modelers, not that models "reflect" the mind, and I think this viewpoint is closer to the arguments of Vico, the pragmatists, Oakeshott, Rorty, and others than to cognitive science. Thus, while I think that metaphors are often verbal statements, I am interested in practices, and my own analyses—although drawing upon the verbal categories of a people—have persistently focused on the performative or action dimension, the pragmatics of metaphor, especially in relation to material activities. To use Bird-David's own example, the statement "a dog is a friend" is a verbal communication, but I am interested in how the statement itself is situated with respect to other performances involving dogs and in how relationships with dogs are like and unlike relations we have with other beings also labeled as friends. It is the activities and relationships that are drawn into metaphoric connections. Similarly, the environment can be a metaphor of the divinity, ancestors, Newtonian mechanics, the human body, or a mix of them all, and we need to look at how people interact with and selectively respond to the environment in light of their models. People use metaphors, both linguistically and nonlinguistically, to make a world of their own, including the world of material activities, exactly as Bird-David shows for the three groups she examines.

Because modeling itself is an activity, I do think that the models we discover through intensive research can be "tested" or "confirmed" in various ways, and this may answer one objection of the rationalist theorists who decry the "anecdotal" nature of this sort of work. How, for example (to mention cases that I have examined), do people model new occurrences, such as being offered a new seed, tools, or fertilizers? Are the predic-

tions we make from our knowledge of their models confirmed by practices not previously observed or in voice? Bird-David reports that the hunter-gatherers she examines request food and goods of anthropologists just as they do of their environment and of other members of their society. The anthropologists are being modeled as are the environment and other human beings.

Because I think that modeling is a social activity, however, I must resist Bird-David's attempt to provide a new metaphor—a metametaphor—that will cover the three ethnographic cases she presents as well as our own practical activities with savings banks. In the example that my colleague and I presented of the "forest as a savings account" in the highlands of Colombia, we took pains to describe our initial confusion and how we came to see the metaphor as being like and unlike our own notion of savings. We came to understand it by seeing how it was used by the people in a very large complex of material activities and how it fit and did not fit our own notions. Towards the ends of her essay, however, Bird-David seems to want a metalanguage or metanarrative that will cover all the instances she reports. This suggests a project of constructing more and more "translation metaphors" that will hook together more and more ethnographic findings. The unstated assumption is that the anthropologist's or analyst's model, through the certainty offered by accumulated knowledge and by reasoning, will be able to specify better what is really happening—that eventually we will have some very good translation metaphors that we can teach to our students and enshrine in libraries as anthropology's enduring contribution to social science. But does not this mode of analysis return us exactly to the universalist and objectivist projects of rationalism and utilitarianism and to the assumptions of the foraging and maximization theorists? I think rather that models are used in conversational communities for certain purposes, that models change, and that language and action are social constructs in communal contexts. Because models do not point to anything other than their uses, anthropologists are delightfully and painfully caught up in the activity of being interlocutors, conversation makers, translators, and the like, just as their own positions of inquiry are caught up in long, changing historical conversations.

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Bird-David investigates the cultural and metaphoric aspects of the hunting-and-gathering economy and the "original affluent society" formulated by Sahlin. While hunting-and-gathering is, like all human activities, multidimensional, she points out, it has so far been studied mainly from an ecological or economic point of view. She has therefore made an important contribution by

taking up hitherto neglected aspects. Particularly interesting is the idea that hunting-and-gathering can be considered as sharing between humans and an "animated" nature. Whereas in the Western view nature is an opposing system and deemed controllable, whether to be exploited or protected, in the hunter-gatherers' view humans and nature seem to coexist in a single system. I think that this difference deserves further investigation to clarify the cultural and ideological background for the conservation and sustainable use of nature—one of the contemporary issues for which an anthropological approach is required.

Some questions go unanswered, however, in Bird-David's attempt to describe the relationship between hunter-gatherers and nature as part of a cosmic system of sharing. Nature has important negative aspects. For example, while the forest provides the Mbuti with food and other useful resources, it is also the source of disease and other misfortunes. Mbuti believe that certain forest animals (called *kuweri*) can cause disease if eaten carelessly, and for this reason they avoid eating them, particularly when they are ritually weak (Ichikawa 1987). Moreover, while the forest may sometimes be called "father" or "mother" and described as a "womb," it is also conceived to be a place where dead ancestors roam (Schebesta 1936, Sawada 1990). Mbuti regard the forest with ambivalence; it is the place one comes from and the place one goes after death. Therefore, when they address the forest as "father," they are appealing to it for the benevolence generally expected from a parent rather than simply reiterating their relationship with it. Such manipulation of kinship terms is common among them as in other societies. I think that Mbuti ambivalence toward the forest gives us a richer image of nature than simply regarding it as a source of goodness only. The problem is how to incorporate the negative aspects of nature into the idea of a cosmic system of sharing between humans and nature.

Bird-David provides an analogy between the hunter-gatherer relationship with nature and the Western banking system, pointing out that both are based on "confidence" and that an economy based on confidence can collapse with its breakdown. She does not make it clear, however, under what conditions such confidence breaks down or what is meant by the "collapse" of the system. By analogy with the banking system, the collapse of a hunting-and-gathering economy would involve competitive overexploitation of resources, leading to the deterioration of the natural environment. It should be noted here that the competitive overexploitation is often promoted by mutual mistrust among people who have come into competition with one another over resources. As Bird-David points out, the cosmic system consists of relationships between humans and nature and among humans. Therefore, when we discuss the breakdown of trust in nature, the breakdown of the mutual trust in human society should also be examined. Regrettably, the interrelationship between these two parts of the system is not thoroughly discussed.

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This excellent article should be prescribed as an antidote for all anthropology courses for which "The Original Affluent Society" is required reading. I am so much in agreement with Bird-David's arguments that I shall limit my comments to one suggestion and one reservation, which is that her commitment to a "culturalist" account prevents her from bringing out the more radical implications of her own argument.

My suggestion concerns two terms which recur throughout Bird-David's presentation, as indeed they do in Sahlins's text, and which are surely as crucial to the whole argument as is the concept of sharing. These terms are "trust" and "confidence," and they are used to characterize the attitude that hunter-gatherers are said to have towards the environment and its present and future capacity to provide them with their means of subsistence. Sahlins uses the terms freely, as virtual synonyms (e.g., 1972:29, where they appear in consecutive sentences), and so does Bird-David. I suggest that they be distinguished, at least for purposes of analysis, and that the distinction will help us to put our finger on the most important respect in which Bird-David's portrayal of hunter-gatherer orientations towards the environment differs from that of Sahlins.

In making the distinction between confidence and trust, I follow the lead of Luhmann (1988). Confidence, he suggests, is what enables us to get by in a world full of unforeseen and unconsidered dangers. It presupposes no engagement, no active involvement on our part, with these potential sources of danger, so that when trouble does strike it is attributed to forces external to the field of our own relationships, forces which just happen to set the "outside world," under its own momentum, on a collision course with our expectations. This, I think, is a fair representation of the way in which Sahlins depicts the hunter-gatherer attitude to nature, conceived as a world "out there," external to the world of human relationships (society) and subject to ups and downs regardless of human actions and dispositions towards it. Nature goes its own way, and if it yields or fails to yield it is not because it has the hunter-gatherer in mind. And the hunter-gatherer has to assume that it will yield, for the alternative—in Luhmann's (1988:97) words—"is to withdraw expectations without having anything with which to replace them."

Trust, by contrast, presupposes an active, prior engagement with the agencies and entities of the environment on which we depend; it is an inherent quality of our relationships with them. To trust others is to act with them in mind, on the expectation that they will do likewise—responding in ways favourable to us—so long as we do nothing to curb their autonomy to act otherwise. This peculiar combination of dependency and autonomy is, I believe, the essence of hunter-gatherer shar-

ing, and by Bird-David's account—which could readily be corroborated with data from societies other than the ones she describes—it equally characterizes people's relationships with nonhuman constituents of the environment. These constituents, imbued with personal powers, are indeed supposed to act with the people in mind. So long as they are treated with respect and consideration, they may be expected to act benevolently. But by the same token, they have the power to withhold if any attempt is made to coerce more than they are prepared to provide. Coercion, the attempt to extract by force, represents a betrayal of the trust that underwrites the willingness to give.

The contrast I have drawn may be summarized as follows: Sahlins uncritically accepts the "Western" view of the environment as a world of nature outside of, and opposed to, the human world of society and its interests; moreover, he allows this view to inform his own characterization of hunter-gatherer attitudes towards the environment, epitomized in the notion of confidence. Bird-David correctly recognizes that for hunter-gatherers themselves the environment is not "nature" in this Western sense but rather the world as it is gathered within the ambit of an all-embracing nexus of personalized relationships whose quality is aptly conveyed by the notion of trust. This contrast, however, brings me to my reservation about Bird-David's argument. Despite her welcome suggestion that a proper recognition of the hunter-gatherer view "can help us loosen slightly the bonds of our own Western ways of viewing the world," the kind of "culture-sensitive" analysis that she offers—set up as it is in opposition to naturalistic, "ecological" models of hunter-gatherer life—actually has the opposite effect.

Hunter-gatherers do not, as Westerners are inclined to do, draw a Rubicon separating human beings from all non-human agencies, ascribing personhood exclusively to the former whilst relegating the latter to an inclusive category of things. For them there are not two worlds, of persons (society) and things (nature), but just one world—one environment—saturated with personal powers and embracing both human beings, the animals and plants on which they depend, and the landscape in which they live and move. In the culture-sensitive, anthropological account, however, what is taken to be *literally* true of relationships among humans is assumed to be only *metaphorically* true of dealings with the non-human environment. Thus it is said that sharing, an accurate description of what goes on between human members of a hunter-gatherer band, provides the people with a metaphor for expressing their relations with "nature." In the one case it belongs to the language of the objective account (of a social reality), in the other it becomes incorporated into the language of subjective representation, *superimposed* upon the objective reality of nature. The Western dichotomy between society and nature is thereby reproduced despite the hunter-gatherer's insistence on its dissolution. Nature, we say, does not *really* share with people (as people really share with one another in society). We know, from scientific ecology,

what nature is really like. Hunter-gatherers' representations may be appealing and congenial, but they have got it wrong.

I suggest that we start again from the opposite premise, that they have got it right—in other words, that the notion of trust correctly captures the quality of relations that hunter-gatherers have with constituents of their environment and that it is manifested just as well in transactions with other humans that we might describe as sharing as in transactions with non-human constituents that we might describe as hunting and gathering. What we need, then, is not a culture-sensitive account to replace a naturalistic ecology, for, as we have seen, the former—ostensibly couched in the language of metaphorical representations—actually presupposes the possibility of an alternative, literal account of the natural world that the latter purports to deliver. Rather, we need a new kind of ecological anthropology that would take as its starting point the active, perceptual engagement of human beings with the constituents of their world. And the first step in its establishment must be to dissolve the facile identification of "the environment" with "nature" as a world out there, given independently of human involvement. For hunter-gatherers as for the rest of us, life is given in engagement, not in disengagement, and it is in that very engagement that the real world at once ceases to be "nature" and becomes an environment for people.

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In her examination of Sahlins's defining essay, Bird-David raises many important questions. Among these is why most of anthropology, while appearing to accept the affluence hypothesis, proceeded to all but ignore it. Another, which I believe is related to the first, is whether affluence was the right starting place for examining hunter-gatherer ecology-economics.

I do not fully agree that "original affluence" has been ignored by anthropologists; students of socioecology have more than delved it (for example, Smith 1988). In fact, from 1970 on, many researchers have sought to demonstrate, by means of calories, work time, or various imputed value means, that hunting peoples were/are measurably "better off" than the notion of subsistence usually implies. The result was to show only that most hunters, even Eskimos (see Kemp 1971, Usher 1976, Lonner 1980), are not "poor" when calories or time are hypothetically translated into money.

Eliminating poverty from the hunter-gatherer model, however, was and is not a confirmation of affluence, especially if, as Sahlins suggests, leisure (usually notched in days and hours) is taken as our main yardstick. In these terms, when all the domestic and logistical tasks members of hunting societies must engage in are considered, only the actuality of the hunt might be

considered leisure, especially if we are to be consistent with perceptions of hunting in Western cultures.

This at least leads me to the discussion that followed Sahlins's presentation at the 1966 "Man the Hunter" conference, "Does Hunting Bring Happiness?" (Lee and DeVore 1968). On its face, the question appears fraught with greater interpretive danger than the matter of affluence, but I suggest, as in a way does Bird-David, that it is not if happiness is glossed as "security."

For many hunter-gatherers, the harvesting of food involves the social (in every sense of the word) appropriation of labour, technology, and knowledge. This is certainly true of North Baffin Island Inuit (Wenzel 1981, 1991). With Eskimos, the distribution and consumption of wild resources mirror the kinship and community context in which they are produced (see Damas 1972, Fienup-Riordan 1983, Nuttall 1991, Wenzel 1981). The result is a "communal" security founded on intense social connectivity which flows from animal to hunter to kin group to community. Even today Baffin Inuit, who live in a money-poor but socially rich environment, never lack food or shelter. Thus to me, Bird-David's well-made point about the "giving environment" translates at the societal level into an intense interest in each member's security.

There is much more in this paper that usefully contributes to a clearer understanding of the ecological-economic condition Sahlins was addressing. I would question, however, the aptness of Bird-David's "bank" metaphor for what hunter-gatherers do. While I agree that hunting includes within it "an insurance scheme" (hence, the appearance of overharvesting among many modern hunting groups), I do not see in her analysis clear support for the investment side of the analogy. At least among Eskimos (Fienup-Riordan 1983, Wenzel 1991), the capture of animals contributes to a renewal of the targeted resource but not, as I understand the Inuit view, an increase.

Reply

NURIT BIRD-DAVID

Tel-Aviv, Israel. 24 IX 91

As might be expected in this forum, the comments vary in perspective, focus, and tone. The commentators, moreover, read the paper in very different ways. I shall start, therefore, by making explicit what I have tried to do—how I read my paper—and then deal with the comments integratively in relation to each of the paper's three parts. The general objective was to introduce a cultural-economic perspective into hunter-gatherer analysis—not least in order to pay respect to the humanity of our subjects of study—and, as a corollary, to join the conversation about cultural economics itself. The main part of the paper introduced the model of "the cosmic economy of sharing"—a model which works for

a complex of related sub-arguments including the lack of separation between nature and society in the world of the hunter-gatherers concerned, the pervasiveness of the idea of sharing in their integrated world (in the human-to-human as in the human-to-nature realm), the connections through this primary metaphor between what we would distinguish as their economy, social organization, ritual, and religion, and the dialectic relation between their modelling and their hunting-gathering experiences. This part was preceded by a reexamination of "The Original Affluent Society," not only because that was long overdue but because I hoped it would help to convince students of hunter-gatherers, so much influenced by the ecological perspective, that the cultural project deserved serious attention. I showed that this project is vital for understanding Sahlins's insight and can trace its parentage to his landmark essay. The concluding part then attempted to reinitiate a conversation between ecological and cultural perspectives. Unfortunately, my intention in this last part has been misunderstood by most commentators, and I shall try to clarify it.

The first part is well received—by Burch, Grinker, Gudeman, and Ingold generously so—but Altman questions the need for "exhuming the corpse of Sahlins's seminal essay" at a different historical moment when other questions are more urgent.¹ Leaving aside duty (the essay was buried improperly) and need (its wronged spirit would have otherwise continued to haunt us), the essay reread can, I think, help us to answer 1990s questions. The very issue that Altman raises as an example is a case in point. I would say—as a general idea to be tested in particular ethnographic contexts—that contemporary hunter-gatherers express unlimited demands for shotguns, motor vehicles, etc., at least in part because they want and expect shares in what they see in their 1990s environment—because the "cosmic economy of sharing" influences their response to contemporary circumstances.²

Commentators who consider various aspects of the second part add clarity and topics to the conversation. I accept Ingold's distinction between trust and confidence and his suggestion that "trust" suits this conversation. I welcome Wenzel's report on the variation presented by Inuit, who construct their cosmos as a giving environment (see also Ingold's comment) but place greater emphasis on trust in people than do Mbuti, Nayaka, and Batek. I think this is connected with the fact that the

1. Altman and Wenzel add useful references on Sahlins's "abundance-with-cost" thesis.

2. I should add for the record two minor comments. First, in response to Wenzel, I wrote that the essay was ignored until the 1980s—not totally—and cited many 1980s references, including Smith's work. Second, in response to Ember, as will be clear on reading my relevant sentences in full, I did not mistake difficulty for impossibility, and in writing that Sahlins "soared beyond conventional scientific discourse" I referred specifically to his deliberate and, in retrospect, highly successful though costly attempt to draw together ethnography, theory, and the popular psychology of modern man.

host-guest relationship appears to be a primary metaphor in their case (e.g., Fienup-Riordan 1983, Bodenhorn 1989), while in my cases it is the parent-child relationship. Whereas trust is normally taken for granted in the latter, in the host-guest relationship it must be nurtured, and indeed Inuit take great care to cultivate it among themselves as well as with the spirits of animals. I thank Ichikawa for adding the "negative" side of the relationship with the environment (omitted in my paper for lack of space). The Nayaka are similar to the Mbuti³ also in this respect. For example, they hold that until the dead are integrated with the natural spirits—through a ritual that takes place every year or two—they are *piccacio* (ghosts) who roam in the forest and harm anyone they encounter. Although Ichikawa is concerned that the negative side presents a problem for the model, I think that it does not and, moreover, that his insightful discussion clearly shows how it can be incorporated into it. He extends the similarity I pointed to between the human-to-human sharing relationship—which, it is important to emphasise, is also not devoid of "negative" aspects—and the human-to-nature relationship by showing that in both of them kinship terms are used strategically and manipulatively to evoke and appeal for benevolence and active sharing. His point, shown for the Mbuti, applies to the Nayaka as well. For instance, most sentences in their shamanistic conversations with supernatural beings (requests, complaints, and small talk) contain the phrase: "you are our parents, we are your children, so . . ." We obviously need to continue to explore the many nuances of "sharing" in the cosmos/society of these hunter-gatherers. Other commentators (e.g., Abramson, in the first part of his comment, and Endicott) usefully sharpen my argument, especially concerning the holistic nature of the world of hunter-gatherers with immediate-return systems. Ember's comment calls for reiteration of what Gudeman explains in his comment (see also Gudeman 1986, Bird-David 1990)—that cultural economics offers another mode of cross-cultural comparison (separate from, not a substitute for, the one Ember describes) which not only opens new vistas for comparison but involves testing, confirmation, and prediction.

Gudeman elaborates on the theoretical framework of my effort and addresses specifically a point which may have not been clear enough. I owe him an apology if I misrepresented his work, which, of course, deals extensively with the performative dimension. The point I wanted to make was that it is not only the people who perform according to their metaphorical scripts, nor do they write the scripts alone. The "real" world also performs (to an extent that varies from case to case and is susceptible to investigation) and is a joint author (in an ongoing, spontaneous fashion). Again using my example

"a dog is a friend," which Gudeman adopts to such good effect to explain his position: when I return home, my dog jumps on me, licks me, wags its tail, and demands cuddling and strokes. In this respect—that in my experience it is pleased to see me—it *is* a friend (and I am interested in all other ways in which it is, e.g., protecting me from burglars). I model my dog as a friend, I perform accordingly, and so, to some extent, does the dog. I doubt that I would continue to regard it—in thought and action—as a friend if, instead, say, it were to bite me. Furthermore, my dog's performance is totally different from that of a Nayaka's dog—in relation to our respective performances towards and modelling of them. Although the Nayaka throws food scraps to his dog and it frequently follows him around, the dog—always ready to run away, tail between its legs—normally stays well clear of the Nayaka. If it gets near him, let alone touches him or even lies by the fire where people want to sit, the Nayaka will kick it hard and laugh scornfully. (At the same time, Nayaka adopt certain young wild animals found motherless in the forest, feed them with expressed mother's milk, and carry them next to their bodies like babies throughout the day.) Thus, the Nayaka's and my experiences of our dogs—indeed, the dogs themselves—are different, as are our models of and performance with regard to them. The differences reflect on the mutual constitution of the trinity of model, performance, and experience.

This brings me to the objections raised by Ingold and Abramson—that in dealing with metaphors my analysis (and culture-sensitive analysis more generally) implies that the hunter-gatherers "have got it wrong" and only "imagine" that nature is a sharing partner while "we know, from scientific ecology, what nature is really like." First, cultural economics also considers Western so-called objective views metaphorical, simply centered on different metaphors. For instance, the environment is a Newtonian-mechanical construction (see Gudeman 1986). Second, as in the example of the dog, the models are connected with real experiences—hence grounded in the real world which participates in the experiences; they are neither imaginary nor wrong. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, as I read it, implies that metaphorical models are widely used as cognitive instruments to grasp reality and guide action within it.

While the first two parts presented a perspective on research I had already done, the third part, invoking the "bank" model, looked forward and suggested avenues for follow-up work. In the nature of things, it was tentative; it raised rather than answered questions. This partly explains the critical response—but only partly. The main problem, I think, is that most commentators have missed the fact that while the second part was a moment in our conversation with hunter-gatherers, the third attempted to start a new—separate—conversation. Thus, I deliberately introduced two models, and the "inconsistency" between them—criticised by Grinker and Abramson—corresponded to my different purposes. I shall draw on Gudeman's criticism for terms with

3. Unfortunately, Grinker concerns himself with the problematic nature of Turnbull's work—important in itself—but does not move on to comment on the model in relation to his own rich case material.

which to attempt to clarify what this second conversation is about, for I take his position that modelling is a social activity and models are for use for certain purposes in conversational communities.

The conversational community in this case comprises both "culturalists" and "ecologists"—these inaccurate terms are used for brevity, the latter including ecologically oriented students of hunter-gatherers as well as the Western policy makers and executives who have considerable power over hunter-gatherers' destiny yet, naturally, think within the Western ecologically oriented scientific framework. The "bank" metaphor offers a starting point for the conversation—a raw material to be modelled in the course of it and altered accordingly. It is not intended as a metaphor to cover the three hunter-gatherer cases and Western banking systems or as a panacea for culture translation—though Gudeman perceptively detects a hint of these that needs to be dispelled. Endicott may be right that there is no need for this added metaphor, the "sharing" metaphor being sufficiently intelligible to Western English-speakers, but I was concerned that it would not speak as strongly to ecologically oriented professionals as the "bank" metaphor, which is closer to their terms.

The purpose of the modelling here is conversation about the "cultural" and the "ecological" aspects in relation to each other. As follows from the example "a dog is a friend," I think it is possible and important to explore metaphors of the environment both "culturally" and "ecologically." Specifically, I maintain that it is vital to study hunter-gatherers' performance with regard to their environment, their modelling of it, and the environment's corresponding performance in relation to each other. Ingold, I think, meets me at this point when he writes: "we need a new kind of ecological anthropology that would take as its starting point the active, perceptual engagement of human beings with the constituents of their world." The only difference that remains between us is his emphasis on "perception" and mine on "metaphorical models." However, I think that the latter provides a window on the former. Furthermore, Ingold could take advantage of this, because it will not be easy to apply his theory—studying "perception" in specific ethnographic contexts.

Ichikawa differs from the others in joining the second conversation, adding a topic to the ones suggested. He derives from the "bank" metaphor the proposition that competitive overexploitation of resources leading to collapse of the hunting-gathering economy is brought about by mutual mistrust among people as well as mistrust of the environment. He rightly suggests that the two dimensions of mistrust must be examined together. Wenzel also related to the "bank" model but, unfortunately, mixes idioms of the two conversations. The question is not whether in the Inuit view the capture of animals contributes to an increase or renewal of the targeted resources but—to the extent my argument applies to the Inuit—whether the performance of the environment in relation to that of the hunter-gatherers is

such that more resources become available when needed or, indeed, actually increase in volume (see similar slips in Abramson's comment). We must keep the two conversations clear and shift between them carefully.

Can it be that we are willing to engage in conversations with remote "others" but not with our close colleagues? That we accept that hunter-gatherers and ourselves have culture-specific ways of viewing the same world but not that culturally oriented and ecologically oriented scholars do as well? That we are prepared to find terms that come closer to hunter-gatherers' terms but not with respect to ecologically oriented scholars? I hope not. I remain convinced that culture-sensitive students of hunter-gatherers must try to engage in both of the conversations I have addressed.

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