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## LOUIS DUMONT AND THE ORIGINS OF INDIVIDUALISM<sup>1</sup>

There has long been a contradiction within French thought between two sets of values, which we may roughly term 'Ancien Regime' (hierarchy, holism) and 'Modern' (equality, individualism). This inner tension, played out in politics in the French Revolution, helps to explain the fruitful contribution of French philosophy and anthropology to dissecting the contrasts between these two ideologies. The obsession of eighteenth century French philosophers (particularly Rousseau) with these oppositions is well known, and among the greatest of nineteenth century treatments were those of Tocqueville, centred on the contrast of equality and hierarchy, and of Durkheim, on holism and individualism. Later, some of the same themes emerged in the work of Mauss and Levi-Strauss.

Louis Dumont's work lies in this great tradition.<sup>2</sup> One of his principal contributions is to remind us

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Editors of Cambridge Anthropology for inviting me to write a short review article on Dumont's **Essays on Individualism** and for their tolerance in accepting something much longer. I would also like to thank Dr Sarah Green for reading this paper and improving the argument in several respects. I have also discussed certain of its themes with Gerry Martin and Sarah Harrison and thank them for their kind help.

<sup>2</sup> In this review I shall be trying to consider ideas spread over nearly a thousand pages of published text and written over a period of thirty years. The corpus is large and complex and much of it is devoted to India. I have only dealt with a part of it here, principally that devoted to the European pole of Dumont's comparison. Even within this I have concentrated on certain themes concerning the origins of equality and individualism and ignored others. I have quoted at some length from Dumont's works since he has complained that Marriott and Khare "find no space for a reasonable outline of the book" (Dumont 1971:62; cf also 1987 where he fiercely attacks Beteille for misrepresenting his views). It thus seems wise to let him speak for himself as much as possible.

Even doing this, unfortunately, does not make his argument completely clear. As Needham has observed, Dumont's "style of pronouncement makes the argument difficult to follow with confidence...Where Dumont is at his most prolix, moreover, his precise meaning tends to become yet more obscure... and this

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of what eighteenth and nineteenth century French writers knew so well, but we have tended to forget, namely how rare is our contemporary assumption of basic liberty, equality and a sort of fraternity. The task he has set himself is a very large one, namely an exploration of the origins of modern civilization. In order to approach an understanding, three things are needed; an ability to ask the right questions, the deployment of a sufficiently powerful and flexible methodology, and scholarly knowledge that is both wide and deep. In this essay I will first look at the question Dumont asks and the method he advocates for answering it. I will then look at the nature of his answer.

## The question

Dumont's central problem is outlined in **Homo Hierarchicus**, first published in French in 1966. There Dumont argued that 'hierarchy', as in India, is natural, whereas 'equality', as in the West, is a recent and peculiar phenomenon. It is important to realize straight away that Dumont is using 'hierarchy' as a synonym for 'holism'. This is a rather unusual use of the word. Most of us might accept some kind of definition for hierarchy similar to the fourth meaning in the Oxford English Dictionary, namely "A body of persons or things ranked in grades, orders, or classes, one above another..." But this is not what Dumont means. His definition is taken from the work of Raymond Apthorpe. "A hierarchical relation is a relation between larger and smaller, or more precisely between **that which encompasses and that which is encompassed**" (1972: p.24).(2) Or again "Essentially, hierarchy is the **encompassing of the contrary**" (1986: 227). His definition centres on the relations between the part and the whole. With such a definition, it is easy to see how Dumont is able to treat the oppositions of hierarchy/equality and holism/individualism as overlapping. In this, he is part of that tradition which has seen Liberty and Equality (and Fraternity) as an indivisible Trinity.

Dumont argues that, in contrast to the hierarchy and holism of all other civilizations, our recent Western civilization is based on individualism. What is meant by this? "Our two cardinal ideals are called equality and liberty. They assume as their common principle...the idea of the human **individual**; humanity is made up of men, and each man is conceived as presenting, in spite of and over and above his particularity, the essence of humanity." (1972: 38) In other words, each individual, even when separated from the whole, is a complete moral being. This is the opposite of hierarchy, where the part only has meaning in relation to the whole.

Again it is important to realize that Dumont is making a distinction between two meanings of the word 'individual'. In **Homo Hierarchicus** (1972: 43) he distinguished them thus:

"(1) **The empirical agent, present in every society**, in virtue of which he is the main raw material for any sociology.

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makes it difficult to sum up his argument with much sureness that one is not misreading his thought" (Needham, 1987:103). Or as another reviewer sadly writes of **From Mandeville to Marx**, "By the end of the book the reader is left with an uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty regarding what the book is about" (Harpham 1978: 1375).

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(2) The rational being and **normative subject** of institutions;

this is peculiar to us, as is shown by the values of equality and liberty; it is an idea that we have, the idea of an ideal." Or, as he describes the distinction elsewhere: "1. the **empirical** subject of speech, thought and will, indivisible sample of the human species (which I call for analytical clarity the particular man, and which is found in all societies or cultures); and

2. the independent, autonomous and thus (essentially) nonsocial **moral** being, as found primarily in our modern (common sense) ideology of man and society" (1986: 62).

Thus, for example, he might argue that most Indians recognise 'individuals' in the first sense, but not the second.

Dumont states that these distinctions and the idea that the second meaning of the individual is 'modern' can be found in Durkheim's writing. "As Durkheim said, roughly, our own society obliges us to be free. As opposed to modern society, traditional societies, which know nothing of equality and liberty as values, which know nothing, in short, of the individual, have basically a collective idea of man..." (1972: 42).

Dumont expands the contrast between the 'individual' and the 'collective' civilizations. In "traditional" societies, "as in Plato's Republic, the stress is placed on the society as a whole, as collective Man; the ideal derives from the organization of society with respect to its ends (and not with respect to individual happiness); it is above all a matter of order, of hierarchy; each particular man in his place must contribute to the global order, and justice consists in ensuring that the proportion between social functions are adapted to the whole" (1972:44).

This is in stark contrast to 'modern' society, in which "the Human Being is regarded as the indivisible, 'elementary' man, both a biological being and a thinking subject. Each particular man in a sense incarnates the whole of mankind. He is the measure of all things (in a full and novel sense). The kingdom of ends coincides with each man's legitimate ends, and so the values are turned upside down. What is still called 'society' is the means, the life of each man is the end. Ontologically, the society no longer exists, it is no more than an irreducible datum, which must in no way thwart the demands of liberty and equality" (1970: 44).

Thus Dumont can argue that the "ideal of liberty and equality follows immediately from the conception of man as an individual. In effect, if the whole of humanity is deemed present in each man, then each man should be free and all men are equal" (1972: 46).

In **Homo Hierarchicus** Dumont gives some early hints as to his theories concerning the origins of individualism. He writes, "...this individualistic tendency, which became established, generalized and popularized from the eighteenth century to the age of romanticism and beyond, was **in fact** accompanied by...organic solidarity"(1972: 45). This was a recent revolution. "It is striking to find out how recent and belated is the development of the idea of equality and its implications. In the eighteenth century it played only a secondary role, except in the works of Helvetius and Morelly. Even in the nineteenth century, among the precursors or fathers of socialism in France, the relative place of equality and liberty is variable" (1972: 46). Dumont ends this work by stating that "From a certain moment in Western history, men saw themselves as individuals. It matters little that this did not

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occur all at once, although one may hope to trace the genesis of man as an individual starting from man as a collective being in the traditional type of society" (1972: 284-5).

In **From Mandeville to Marx** (significantly titled **Homo aequalis** in French) Dumont returns specifically to the problem of origins. In order to proceed further with this, he further refines what he means by 'individualistic' society in the second sense.

He writes that "In most societies, and in the first place in the ... 'traditional societies', the relations between men are more important, more highly valued, than the relations between men and things. This primacy is reversed in the modern type of society, in which relations between men are subordinate to relations between men and things" (1977: 5). This sounds familiar to readers of Marx and Simmel. The effect of capitalism is that instead of persons being related directly, all relations are mediated through private property, the market, money.

A second modern 'revolution', clearly linked to this, was in the attitude towards wealth and, more broadly, the degree to which the 'economic' was embedded in the 'political'. Dumont writes that "there emerged an autonomous and relatively unified category of wealth. It should be noted that it is only at this point that a clear distinction can be drawn between what we call 'political' and what we call 'economic'. This is a distinction that traditional societies do not admit" (1977: 6). Economics also "had to emancipate itself from morality" (1986: 110).

On the basis of this specification, he is able to conclude that "In the last decades, some of us have become increasingly aware that modern individualism, when seen against the background of the other great civilizations that the world has known, is an exceptional phenomenon." (1986: 23)

Up to the end of the nineteenth century this uniqueness of 'modern' values was obvious even within Europe. But as the 'Ancien Regime' became just a memory and peasants turned into Frenchmen, it became more and more difficult to realize that individualism and equality were unusual. Dumont's rediscovery seems to have come as a result of a combination of that inherited French tension between two sets of values, combined with his comparative methodology and experience of India.

## **The method**

Dumont stresses the necessity for comparison in order to put our culture in perspective. "To see our culture in its unity and specificity we must set it in perspective by contrasting it with other cultures. Only so can we gain an awareness of what otherwise goes without saying, the familiar and implicit basis of our common discourse" (1985: 94). Or again he argues that "the anthropological or comparative approach...allows us to see modern culture in its unity....Acquiring an external vantage point, setting our culture in perspective - and perhaps that alone - allows for a global view, which will not be an arbitrary one" (1986: 9).

In arguing that only comparison will put our own society in perspective and alert us to the peculiarity of what we regard as normal, Dumont is re-affirming one of the central messages of anthropology. As

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Robert Lowie put it, "All of us are born into a set of traditional institutions and social conventions that are accepted not only as natural but as the only conceivable response to social needs...Against this purblind provincialism there is no better antidote than the systematic study of alien civilizations" (1929: 12). Such a comparative approach is necessary because, as Marx affirmed, "Human history is like paleontology. Owing to a certain judicial blindness even the best intelligences absolutely fail to see the things which lie in front of their noses"(Marx 1964: 140), or, as David Hume, approvingly quoted by Dumont, puts it, "The views the most familiar to us are apt, for that very reason, to escape us" (1977: 19). Few would quibble with Dumont's stress on the need for a comparative framework.

Yet our understanding of Dumont's arguments is complicated by the fact that he is not only comparing two types of civilization, which he broadly labels holistic and individualistic, but he is simultaneously contrasting two methodologies, to which he gives the same names, also equating them with the anthropological and sociological approaches. Hence it is worth examining his position on methodology a little more closely.

Dumont argued that one consequence of the dominance of individualism in the West was that it infected the very disciplines of sociology and economics. In seeing this, Dumont follows the work of earlier analysts, for instance "as Mauss and especially Karl Polanyi have ascertained - modern civilization differs radically from other civilizations and cultures. The truth is that our culture is permeated by nominalism, which grants real existence only to individuals and not to relations, to element and not to sets of elements. Nominalism, in fact, is just another name for individualism, or rather one of its facets" (1986: 11)

Dumont elaborates the distinction between methodological holism and individualism in various places, including a section on the medieval distinction between 'societas' and 'universitas'. '**Societas** - and similar terms: association, **consociatio** - has here its strict meaning of partnership, and is evocative of a contract by which the individuals composing it have 'associated' themselves in a society. This trend of thought, fits the widespread tendency in modern social science, which takes society to consist of individuals prior to the groups or relationships that they constitute or 'make' by combination, more or less of their own accord" (1986: 74).

In contrast to this, the "word by which the old scholastics designated society, or corporations in general, **universitas**, 'whole', would much better fit the alternative view, which is our own, that society with its institutions, values, concepts, language, is sociologically prior to its particular members, the latter becoming human beings only through education into and modelling by a given society" (1986: 74).

Thus Dumont sees individualism not only as a form of ideology, but one which makes the comprehension of even individualistic societies more difficult. In order to understand ourselves, we must get outside our ideology, and anthropology with its holistic method holds the key. He argues that the surrounding ideology of our society is "fundamentally opposed - in my opinion, because it is individualistic - to the principle of anthropology and all sound or thorough sociology..." (1986: 204). Or again he writes that "modern scientific, and to a large extent philosophic, ideas, linked as they are with the modern system of values, are often ill-fitted for anthropological study and sociological comparison" (1986: 256).

This is related to one of the features of modernity, as defined above, that is the tendency to separate, artificially, that which is in fact joined together. The task of structural anthropology is summarized in the famous injunction, "only connect". Here Dumont draws, for instance, on Mauss who sees classification or separation of institutions as a product of thought, recognizing that "all those categories of religion, law and morals, economy, etc., are after all 'fixed by the historical state of the civilizations of which our science itself is the product'" (1986: 194).

We have already noted that Dumont saw the distinction between the political, economic and the moral as a central feature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century revolution. He elaborates this further in relation to Plato. "For Plato...there was no discord between the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, yet the Good was supreme...In contrast we moderns separate science, aesthetics, and morals" (1986: 236). Dumont elaborates this later, writing that "Individualism and the concomitant separation between man and nature have thus split the good, the true, and the beautiful and have produced a theoretically unbridgeable chasm between **is** and **ought to be**. This situation is our lot in the sense that it lies at the core of modern culture of civilization" (1986: 244). Thus "our problem is: how can we build a bridge between our modern ideology that separates values and 'facts' and other ideologies that embed values in their world view?" (1986: 247)

Given the surrounding ideology, it is very difficult not to split and separate. Yet anthropologists deal with civilizations which do not do so. How are we to overcome this cultural bias?

One approach is by using the structuralist method. The need for such a method is stressed by Dumont on several occasions. Dumont approvingly notes that in 1961 "Francis Hsu criticized some studies of the American character for their presenting a bare catalogue of traits or values without bothering about the relations prevailing between those items" (1986: 238). Or, again, he approvingly quotes Kluckhohn to the effect that "what appear superficially as incompatibilities are seen on closer examination to be functions of different frames of reference", on which Dumont comments that "the difference is between seeing things-in-themselves and seeing things-in-relation, i.e. within a 'frame of reference' (1986: 239,n.5). This leads him to make a plea for systematic structural comparison: "a solid and thorough comparison of values is possible only between two systems taken as wholes" (1986: 243).

Mary Douglas claims that when **Homo Hierarchicus** was first published it "was the first serious structural analysis of a particular society" (Dumont 1972: 15). This is one of its main claims to our interest. It is this methodology which promises to heal the wounds of methodological individualism when applied to western civilization. So what then was this structural method as Dumont envisaged it? It is described in a short section on 'The notion of structure' (1972: 76-80).

Dumont contrasts two approaches, the 'modern' or non-structuralist, and the 'traditional' or structuralist. "According to one approach, a system is conceived as made up of objects each with its own essence, and it is in virtue of this essence, together with a definite law of interaction, that they act on one another...This way of thinking, which separates the individual being from the relation, is essentially modern." In contrast to this is the other approach, in which "the 'elements' in themselves of which the

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system seems to be composed are disregarded, and only considered as the product of the network of relations; this network would then constitute the system" (1972: 77). Dumont wishes to base his analysis on the second approach. "We shall speak of structure exclusively in this case, when the interdependence of the elements of a system is so great that they disappear without residue if an inventory is made of the relations between them: a system of relations, in short, not a system of elements" (1972: 78). This latter approach is particularly suitable for the analysis of India, for there "we have the good fortune to find ourselves faced with universe which is structural to a very high degree" (1972: 78).

Dumont makes large claims for this method. "This introduction of the idea of structure is the major event of our times in social anthropology and sociology....After a long period dominated by a tendency which led to atomization, the essential problem for contemporary thought is to rediscover the meaning of wholes or systems, and structure provides the only logical form as yet available to this end " (1972: 78). This method is the one that he uses to analyze Indian civilization and which he later aims to apply in his study of the West.

The questions which Dumont poses, concerning the very nature of modern civilization and its origins, are important ones. His methodology, advocating the comparative and structural approach, looks promising. What then of his answer to his questions?

### **The answer**

In the work of some writers, notably Max Weber, we accept inconsistencies and contradictions as a price for the great span and complexity of the answer they are providing. Yet in the case of Louis Dumont, we find that the answer he gives to the central question he asks is so inconsistent and equivocal that we are puzzled that he did not see this himself and comment on it. What I mean can most easily be shown if we compare the answer given in two books, written over roughly the same period though published six years apart, parts of the first one being reprinted in the middle of the second.

Very roughly, the answer to the question in **From Mandeville to Marx** is that the change from 'Ancien Regime' to 'Modern', from hierarchy to equality, holism to individualism, occurred in the period between the middle of the seventeenth century and the middle of the eighteenth.

In this work, Dumont saw the central revolutionary shift in a similar way to Polanyi, in other words the separating out of economics. The problem now is the "carving out of a separate domain..**economics, the economy**" (1977: 33). He saw this as occurring fairly late. The "birth registration of the new category" is the publication of Adam Smith's **Wealth of Nations** in 1776 (1977: 33). In order for this 'separate domain' to emerge, economics had to be established as a 'system' with its own laws, free of religious, political and other constrictions. In India this 'freeing' of the economy from the political never occurred (1977: 34).

After a brief consideration of Quesnay, Dumont leaps backwards half a century to Locke, and particularly his **Two Treatises of Government**, written in 1679-81. Locke, for Dumont, represents the new and modern world: "holism is superseded and individualism reigns supreme" (1977: 47). For

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Dumont, "it is easy to see...that the 'political' treatises of Locke register the baptism of private property..." (1986: 10).

Dumont sees Locke as a revolutionary thinker, attacking the older and 'traditional' views of Filmer and others. "In contradistinction to Filmer's traditionalism, Locke's innovation stands crystal-clear before our eyes" (1977: 48). What is the new and revolutionary view? "As for men, there is among them no inherent difference, no hierarchy; they are all free and equal in God's eyes..." (1977: 49) Or, again, he writes, "I take, in effect, the polemics against Filmer as marking a transition, a watershed between holism in the past and individualism in the future...More precisely, the view is that Locke's exposition is highly symbolic of a clash between two ideologies that were predominant, the one in the past, the other in the future" (1977: 59). No longer is there subordination, encompassing. The individual and economics have been set free.

Dumont is probably right about Locke's 'modernity'. Yet in accepting Macpherson's interpretation in **The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism** as the basis for his analysis, Dumont is forced to distort history (1977:51-2). In fact, a more plausible view is that Locke was maintaining earlier English views against the 'revolutionary' Filmer, who was trying to bring in the Continental views of patriarchal and absolute government.

As for the origins of this 'modernity', Dumont can go no further back than Hobbes. He writes that "...when justice is derived from property, we are obviously at the antipodes of medieval thought. The conception of justice as arising, not from the idea of the whole and of ordered relationships within it, but rather from the individual in whatever aspect, is strikingly modern. This innovation stems from Hobbes and was to be accepted by Hume, so it deserves to be called British" (1977: 51-2).

As for why Hobbes should have invented such a revolutionary view, we are not told. Instead, the assertion of modernity and the striking size of the change are again emphasized. "Possession is not a historically transient accident of a permanent phenomenon called individualism; on the contrary, it is in the guise of possession of property that individualism raises its head, knocks down any remnant of social submission and ideal hierarchy in society, and installs itself on the throne thus made vacant...economics as a 'philosophical category' represents the acme of individualism and as such tends to be paramount in our universe" (1977: 53-4).

Yet even Locke had not fully inaugurated the unqualified supremacy of individualism. For this to occur, morality and economics needed to be separated and this Dumont largely attributes to the Netherlands writer, Bernard Mandeville who settled in London and re-published his early poem the **Grumbling Hive** in 1714, and further expanded it in 1723 as a book entitled **The Fable of the Bees; or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits**. The book put forward the argument that the individual was free, that society is constituted of self-seeking individuals, that economics has a morality of its own and has no need to be controlled by an external ethical system. According to Dumont, "he severed the moral norm, together with religion, from the sphere of actual life, thus no doubt paving the way for Kant" (1977: 77)

There is, Dumont argues, a continuity with Hobbes and Locke, but Mandeville has gone one stage

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further by establishing the "primacy of the relations to things over the relations between men..." This, Dumont claims, "is the decisive shift that distinguishes the modern civilisation from all others and that corresponds to the primacy of the economic view in our ideological universe..." (1977: 81).

For Dumont, Adam Smith is the summation and formalization of these trends. Although he based himself on Petty, Locke, Mandeville and others, he is still, as Marx had called him, the "Luther of political economy" (1977:84). "The birth of economics actually implies a shift in primacy ...from the relations between man to the relations between men and nature or rather between **man** (in the singular) and things" (1977: 104-5). According to Dumont, Smith elevates the individual; "we see here the elevation of the individual subject, of man as 'self-loving', labouring-and- exchanging, who through his toil, his interest, and his gain works for the common good, for the wealth of nations" (1977: 97).

Thus the rise of economics and the rise of individualism are, for Dumont, two sides of the same coin. In this process, the rise of private property is synonymous with individualism and economics. "I conclude that the rise of economics, i.e. the shift in value from one kind of relation to the other, and the full accession of the modern Individual...are solidary aspects of one and the same phenomenon...we are those who have with Locke, enthroned private property in the place of subordination...have turned our backs on the social whole..." (1977: 106).

As to why this separation out of the individual should have occurred, Dumont appears to assume that it was the inevitable result of certain economic and intellectual developments. It was the result of increasing wealth and the market, which substituted the relation of persons to things for the relation of persons to persons as the most important basis for life. It was also the result of intellectual developments, a growing 'rationality' and tendency to separate spheres. Dumont assumes it as inevitable, as his sub-title proclaims, 'The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology'.

This answer, locating the triumph of individualism in the eighteenth century, is repeated as the chapter 'Genesis,III' in his book **Essays on Individualism**. But the thesis is now placed beside two long essays entitled 'Genesis I' and 'Genesis II'. These tell a rather different story. They argue that the themes of individualism and equality have a much longer history.

At first, it looks as if Dumont is arguing that the roots of 'modernity' lie in Christianity. Given his specification of western Europe as the birth place of this new social formation, this is not implausible and indeed he makes some suggestive remarks along the same lines as those of Tocqueville and Weber.

Thus he writes that there "is no doubt about the fundamental conception of man that flowed from the teaching of Christ: as Troeltsch said, man is an **individual-in-relation-to-God**: for our purposes this means that man is in essence an outworldly individual." There is, Troeltsch says, 'absolute individualism and absolute universalism' in relation to God". Likewise, "For the moderns, under the influence of Christian and Stoic individualism, natural law, as opposed to positive law, does not involve social beings but individuals..." (1986: 27, 30,73).

Yet Dumont is also eager to stress that there is a wide gap between this early individualism and what he considers to be the revolutionary achievement of later centuries. "To state the thesis in

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approximate terms, I submit that something of modern individualism is present with the first Christians and in the surrounding world, but that it is not exactly individualism as we know it. Actually, the old form and the new are separated by a transformation so radical and so complex that it took at least seventeen centuries of Christian history to be completed..." (1986: 24).

This hesitancy as to whether Christianity really constitutes the key, may partly arise from the fact that Dumont must have been faced with the well known problem that Christianity, in itself, was not enough. There is there the problem of how Christianity was adapted and changed in Eastern Europe and Byzantium. There is also the well-known compromise between Christianity and 'Ancien Regime' tendencies in much of mainland Europe from the twelfth century, emphasized at the Counter-Reformation. Certain tendencies in Christianity are perfectly compatible with a world which Tocqueville had exquisitely anatomized as hierarchal and holistic.

Some such realization may have led Dumont to present a rather different interpretation, which is nowhere explicitly stated as such, but could be summarized as the Weberian argument that it was not Christianity as such, but a variant, namely Protestantism and Puritanism, which stood at the birth of the modern world. Thus we find Dumont writing that far from the later seventeenth century being the birth-place of the modern, the set of values and ideas of this kind had already been set in motion at the Reformation by Luther and Calvin.

Dumont writes that in Luther's work, "we are confronted with the overthrow of the holistic view, the sudden transition from the hierarchical to the individualistic universe...The root of the matter is perhaps to be found in a central sentiment: their quality as Christians makes all men equal and, so to speak, sets the whole of the human essence in each of them" (1986: 78-9). Dumont approvingly quotes Thomas Mann on Luther's role in separating politics from religion. "Out of the liberty and sovereignty of the Germans Luther made something accomplished by turning them inward and thus keeping them forever out of the sphere of political quarrels. Protestantism has deprived politics of its spiritual goad and has made it a practical matter." (1986: 144).

Reinforcing Luther was Calvin: "with Calvin...The field is absolutely unified. **The individual is now in the world, and the individualist value rules without restriction or limitation.** The in-worldly individual is before us. " Here Dumont acknowledges that this idea "is present in every page of Troeltsch's chapter on Calvin" (1986: 53).

Yet, having pushed the timing of the revolution to individualism back by over one hundred years, Dumont wavers again, for an examination of medieval philosophy, and particularly the work of the English philosopher William of Ockham, suggests that much of what Hobbes and Locke and their followers were saying was already present in the first half of the fourteenth century.

Dumont starts by claiming that "William of Ockham, the great Franciscan scholastic of the first half of the fourteenth century, must be mentioned as being the herald of the modern turn of mind" (1986: 63). He argues that Ockham dissolved Aquinas' concept of the primacy of the whole, and is "the founder of positivism and subjectivism in law, and all this, as will be clear, means a tremendous inroad of individualism" (1986: 63). In Occam's work "we witnessed the birth of the individual in

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philosophy and jurisprudence...when the notion of 'right' is attached, not to a natural and social order, but to the particular human being, he becomes an individual in the modern sense of the word" (1986: 65). Dumont continues that Occam's "intention was to restrict the juridical sphere, but he thereby made it independent and, his individualism and positivism playing their part, more absolute and compulsive than it had ever been" (1986: 65,n.8) Dumont concludes that the great transformation has, implicitly at least, been made: Ockham "does presage the notion of popular sovereignty and the political contract. In general, and on the social level proper, it is clear that the commonwealth has evaporated, the vacuum having been filled with the freedom of the individual...Implicitly we have left the **Gemeinschaft** for a **Gesellschaft**" (1986: 66).

Now it might be possible to reconcile these contradictory arguments by saying that Dumont was arguing that different strands of 'modernity' developed at different times; that religious individualism developed first, then political individualism, then economic individualism. Yet he never clearly states this and indeed it goes against the grain of his holistic method, which posits that different parts of a society are closely linked. With such a holistic axiom, the changes should not have been disconnected and separated by hundreds of years. Or again, it might be that Dumont separated attitude and ideology from the political and economic institutions and suggested that both had to change before modern individualism emerged. This might allow them to change at different times. Yet this again, is an uncomfortable argument for a structural and holistic theorist.

Or again we could attribute the contradictions in the argument to Dumont's deepening historical knowledge. Whereas in **Homo Hierarchicus** and **From Mandeville to Marx**, Dumont followed the conventional wisdom and particularly the views of Karl Polanyi, with his dating of the 'Great Transformation' in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as Dumont read more into Reformation, Medieval and Early Christian history, he began to see much more continuity. This seems to be the solution Beteille favours when trying to reconcile what he also sees as a basic contradiction.

Beteille points out that "The more closely one examines the old order in the West the less plausible the argument appears that it knew nothing of equality as a value" (1983: 43). This is something that led to difficulties for Dumont. "For the more closely he examines the Western past, the less sharp appears its contrast with the Western present. In his recent study of ideology in the West we are told that 'individualism was a characteristic of Christian thought from the start'; a rather far cry from the assertion in **Homo Hierarchicus** that traditional societies know **nothing** of the individual" (Beteille 1983: 47).

Yet the interpretation which suggests that Dumont changes his views on the basis of increasing knowledge does not fit with the chronology of his writing, for while **Mandeville to Marx** was written in the years to 1974, the themes of 'Genesis,I' was originally worked out in 1975 and the piece about William of Ockham was first published in 1965.

Rather than interpreting this set of contradictions as evidence that Dumont seems to have been holding two sets of ideas in parallel in his mind without noting their inconsistency, it seems likely that he may have been making that very distinction between ideology (mind) and society/economy (matter) which he elsewhere rightly condemns. (thank to S.G) Whichever is the more accurate explanation, there is a tension and contradiction in his thought.

## Dumont on Marx

Approximately one third of **From Mandeville to Marx** is devoted to Marx. He is clearly important in Dumont's comparative work. Yet the inconsistencies and ambivalences in Dumont's thought may help to explain why his treatment of his most important author is so odd.

One aspect of this peculiarity is Dumont's irritation with Marx. This partly arises from the fact that Dumont may have believed that Marx went through a similar set of doubts as himself. Having established a clear framework whereby capitalism and feudalism were very different, just as Dumont's 'modern' and 'traditional' were very different, and having established a nice clear 'watershed' in the sixteenth century, Marx's later research and writing began to break down this classification. Like Dumont, he began to find that the roots of the modern were much more ancient than he had supposed. Indeed, he began to discard his own earlier message, by arguing that rather than being opposed, feudalism and capitalism were based on a deep structural similarity, which separated them off from 'classical' societies.

Dumont's irritation was compounded by the realization that if Marx was right in his later arguments, then the half of Dumont's thesis which followed Polanyi in assuming that the 'Great Transformation' occurred after the English Civil War, was wrong. Marx had to be shown to be mistaken. Dumont's task may have been made more difficult in that, implicitly, he accepts much of the revisionist thesis.

In his last years Marx spent some time "working on pre-bourgeois agricultural societies". According to Dumont, this led him to a horrible blunder. Marx began to see too much continuity between pre-capitalist and capitalist formations. Feudalism, for instance, showed signs of those features which, according to Dumont, were not to be invented until the seventeenth century at the earliest. Dumont quotes Marx as follows: "The domination of private property begins altogether with (feudal) land possession, it is its basis...(and finally)...it was necessary that this appearance should be suppressed; that property in land, being the root of private property, should be engulfed completely in the movement of private property and should become a commodity" (1977: 183).

Now Dumont is embarrassed by this revised view which, if correct, would undermine his argument. For Dumont accepts the 'great transformation' from a 'traditional', 'feudal', 'communal', 'hierarchical', 'holistic' society to a 'modern', 'egalitarian', 'individualistic' society took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He therefore tries to sweep away Marx's later thoughts as a mistaken aberration. "This is reductionism; it is the assertion that continuity is more important than discontinuity. The assertion is emphatic, hurried, and harsh, because it is weak" (1977:183).

Dumont is aware of the potentially devastating effects of Marx's revised view. Marx is arguing that feudal property in land was not political, it was economic, it was "the root of private property." Dumont has to refute this. "The trouble is that the relation thus posited is simply not true. 'Private property' here means private property in the modern, bourgeois, capitalist sense; one can hardly speak of property in land in any precise way in feudal times...The assertion of continuity, wiping out or

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belittling the fine insights of Marx, is arbitrary and wilful. It covers up a yawning chasm. The truth of the matter is that 'private property' is separated from feudal 'property', so called, by a revolution in thought and in deed, and Marx knows it pretty well..." (1977: 184). Dumont cannot leave it at that, and stresses again that Marx must have been mistaken. "I insist on this point because it is of the utmost importance regarding the Marxian and Marxist broad conceptions of history. For reasons that are not far to seek, a discontinuity that is obvious to us, and that was already quite notable for Marx himself, between prebourgeois and bourgeois society is submerged, leading to the facile generalisations of essentially bourgeois concepts to the rest of history" (1977: 184).

Thus what Dumont totally rejects is Marx's late arguments where he was on the same side as Maine and Weber, in arguing that the 'watershed' does not lie in the transition from feudal to capitalist (parallel to that between 'holistic' to 'individualistic') in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but rather that the divergence had begun long before in 'feudalism' itself.

Equally curious is the fact that Dumont appears totally to misinterpret Marx's basic methodological position. Dumont states that he proposes to test the thesis that "Marx is essentially individualist". This is contrary to the "accepted view that Marx was one of the founders of sociology" (1977: 113). Dumont spends a number of pages trying to support this view, concluding that "all that we have seen until now shows Marx adopting a predominantly individualistic view of man - I mean a view according to which humanity is embodied in each particular human being" (1977: 128).

Several reviewers and critics have objected to this interpretation. For instance, Ryan writes, "In calling Marx an 'individualist', he presumes a distinction which Marx...wished to deny" (1978: 201). Basically the same point is made by Morris who describes Dumont's interpretation as "perversely misleading" (1991: 73).

Since this is such an important issue, let us look a little more closely at what Marx himself wrote. His basic premise would appear to be that human individuals are not, in their essence or 'natural' (i.e. pre-capitalist) state self-contained and isolated 'individuals'. Self-contained 'individuals' are how we encounter people when we see them in capitalist society, he argues, but an analysis of history shows that they were originally (and should be, hence the tension) **social** beings: "the essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in any particular individual. The real nature of man is the totality of social relations" (1961: 83) As McLellan notes, Marx speaks of the original, unalienated, human being as "total" or "all-sided" (1975: 36).

Marx returns again and again to the theme that individuals are not separate and autonomous, and hence that a society is not merely a collection of separate individuals. "Society is not merely an aggregate of individuals; it is the sum of the relations in which these individuals stand to one another" (1961: 110), or again "It is above all necessary to avoid postulating 'society' once more as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual is a **social being**." (1961: 110,91).

Dumont quotes this three times in one paragraph. Twice he substitutes a 'the' for an 'a' before 'social being', and once quotes it as 'a social being'. This curious ambivalence in translation prepares us for Dumont's argument that when Marx writes that "the individual is the social being" he does not just mean

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that, but also that "In each particular man is found the human totality". This gloss by Dumont, allows him to continue "In short, it is a matter of the Individual, in our sense of the term." (1977: 131). Is that really what Marx meant?

An alternative interpretation would be that he meant is that 'natural' man, before the alienation of capitalism, is precisely **not** an individual. He (or she) is not a self-contained individual but a point or node in a network of social relations which spread out from himself. For example, Marx contrasts men and animals and reduces the difference to the fact that "the animal has not **relations** with anything, has no relations at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation" (1961: 86). Or again, he praised Fuerbach as follows: the great achievement of Fuerbach is "to have founded **genuine materialism** and **positive science** by making the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of his theory" (1961: 85). 'Natural' man, Marx believed, was blended in with other men; individual identities were only a recent phenomenon, a product of a particular (bourgeois-capitalist) mode of production: "Man only becomes an individual by means of the historical process. He appears originally as a generic being, a tribal being, a herd animal" (1964: 36, see also 96).

In the earlier modes of production (or socio-economic formations) the individual is therefore still one with his physical environment and with his fellow men: "among hunting peoples, or in the agriculture of Indian communities" there is "common ownership of the means of production...the individual has not yet severed the navel-string which attached him to the tribe or community..." (1961: 130) The essence of man is the "sum of productive forces, capital, and social forms of intercourse..." (1961: 71). The separation off of this natural relationship is the result of the historical process; the complete stripping away of all ties, either to the natural world or to other human beings is the final achievement of the capitalist form of production. The way in which labour is regarded in modern economic systems, Marx argued, "presupposes the separation of labour from its original intertwinement with its objective conditions..." (1973: 515), such conditions being the land, sea and so on. In modern bourgeois society the individual does not retain the part of himself which his labour creates, the use value; he only produces so that he may exchange, "the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence...the whole negation of his 'natural' existence is already implied..." (1973: 248). He is not conceived of as **merely** an individual worker, an exchanger of his labour, a view of him which Marx rejects as merely an impoverished vision created by the capitalist ideology. (1961: 176,9).

Now the curious interpretation of Marx as an individualist reveals a good deal about the extreme nature of Dumont's thought. If Marx looks like an individualistic thinker from where Dumont stands, we gain some picture of how far towards the holistic end of the continuum the author of **Homo Hierarchicus** must be.

### **The reason why**

If it is granted that while he raises many interesting questions, Dumont's attempt is ultimately a failure, a knot of inconsistent answers and half-truths, we are prompted to ask why this should be the case.

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One problem lies in the original specification of the question. Despite his attack on dual classifications, to which Needham has responded (1987: ch.7), Dumont's work is ironically an excellent example of that binary turn of thought which Jack Goody analysed in relation to Levi-Strauss (1977: 4-8). This type of simple oppositional thinking has been inherited from a strand in nineteenth century sociology with its contrasts of status and contract, **gemeinschaft** and **gesellschaft**, mechanical and organic solidarity.

In this case Dumont links his binary oppositions of sets of values to binary oppositions in space and time. In essence, his story is of the West opposed to the Rest, and the Present opposed to the Past. He took as axiomatic that the opposing sets of values were divided in space. America and Western Europe were the location of what we might call the 'Modern' set, the rest of the world civilizations were the 'Ancien Regime' set. "It should be obvious that England, France, and Germany, among others, have held, from say, the seventeenth century, a common ideology." (1977: 8). This, he argues, is an ideology which is moving towards the 'modern' or 'individualistic', in contrast to the rest of the world.

In failing to distinguish differences within Western Europe, Dumont completely overlooks the enormous gulf which, in the 'West', separated England, Holland and parts of Scandinavia from the rest of Europe by the seventeenth century. His questions would have been much more fruitful if he had remembered his master Tocqueville's central insight, namely that Europe itself was riven by that very opposition between the two types of civilization - with most of Continental Europe as 'Ancien', at least to 1790, and England, America (and Holland) as 'Modern'(Macfarlane 1978: 166-8). Dumont's emphasis on English (and Scottish) philosophers tacitly accepts this, but differences within Europe could and should have been explored.

Equally seriously, he lumps together the whole of 'Asia' as if the differences were insignificant. Needham notes that Dumont is rather vague about this: "There is no concise definition or illustration of the nonmodern, but Dumont seems to have in mind traditional India and such societies as those of Melanesia" (Needham 1987: 105). Yet Dumont does occasionally explicitly reveal his belief in a deep structural similarity, at least in contrast with the West, among Asian civilizations. "Regarding India and China...I am not asserting that India and China are not profoundly dissimilar. They are similar only in comparison to us. There is no doubt that traditional Chinese, Japanese, and Indian ideologies are holistic while ours is individualistic" (1977: 8-9).

Such an approach may simplify the problem, but it tends to play down the very considerable differences of morphology between India, say, and China and the even greater and fundamental differences between Japan on the one hand and India and China on the other. As Beteille comments on this particular passage, "It may be that with most practitioners of the craft the real as opposed to the stated objective of comparative sociology is to demonstrate the uniqueness of Western civilization. Other civilizations are then sketched out as a painter might sketch out a background, to bring out with better effect what lies on the foreground. Treating other civilizations in this way does violence to their history and their living character" (1983: 48). By a curious mirror effect, by simplifying 'the Rest', this also simplifies 'the West'.

Secondly, Dumont tends to take as axiomatic a binary opposition in time. Up to the middle of

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the seventeenth century, the world was characterized by 'Ancien Regime' values, then, with the work of Locke, Mandeville and Adam Smith, and new world was born establishing our 'modern' values. Early Christians, William of Ockham and others were odd islands in a sea of holism.

This kind of binary thinking is very tempting, but it is a method of 'contrast', rather than the true comparative method which, if deployed properly, should open up many different possibilities. If, for instance, Dumont had employed Weber's methodology, with his two sets of values as 'ideal types', rather than grounding them in particular civilizations, he would have been able to contemplate much more differentiation.

Indeed, the lumping is worse than this, for in a number of formulations it is assumed that before 'Modernity' all agrarian civilizations both in the West and the Rest, were more or less identical in the central feature of hierarchy. He writes that "among the great civilizations the world has known, the holistic type of society has been overwhelmingly predominant; indeed, it looks as if it had been the rule, the only exception being our modern civilization and its individualistic type of society" (1977: 4). Hence Dumont can phrase his central problem as to how "starting from the common type of holistic societies, a new type has evolved that basically contradicts the common conception" (1985: 94). This sounds like Sir Henry Maine in the middle of the nineteenth century: "Starting, as from one terminus of history, from a condition of society in which all the relations of Persons are summed up in the relations of Family, we seem to have steadily moved towards a phase of social order in which all these relations arise from the free agreement of Individuals" (Maine 1861: 169).

By failing to differentiate time and space, except by simple dichotomies, Dumont loses some of the finest insights of the nineteenth century masters. Tocqueville and later Marx and Weber realized that certain core features of north west European ideology and social structure were very ancient, going back well into the Middle Ages and probably dating from that curious amalgam of Greek, Roman and German civilization. If we make the binary division co-terminus with industrialism and the expansion of the eighteenth century, as do Polanyi and Dumont, we lose this earlier insight and the strength of the long continuities in western culture..

Thus we could see part of the failure as a result of a less than complete use of the comparative method; the comparisons are too stark and limited, contrasts rather than true comparisons. Furthermore, Dumont forgets his own insight, namely that any social formation usually contains its own antithesis, something he had illustrated so well with the World Renouncer in Hinduism. He drew attention on several occasions to this dialectical tension, writing for instance that "the very operation of individualistic values, which has let loose a complex dialectic resulting in combinations where they blend subtly with their opposites..." (1986: 17) As Beteille points out, "The attraction of Tocqueville's work lies in his refusal to be a prisoner of his own dichotomy. While he dwells at great length on the opposite natures of aristocratic and democratic societies, he leaves room for considering the contradictions within each type of society" (1983: 41).

It may well be that this failure to follow through his idea of internal contradictions may also lead to a flawed picture of India itself. It is worth noting the reservations of several experts. Nur Yalman wrote in a generally enthusiastic review that "However, even though de Tocqueville is convincing when he writes

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of 'individualism' in America, Dumont does not seem to carry us along with the same conviction on the lack of individualism or the reasons for this in India" (1969: 125). Beteille comments: "Dumont is obliged to soften his contrast between the old and the new orders in the West by his concern for Western history. But there is no comparable concern for Indian history that might show that the Indian tradition also is neither undifferentiated nor unchanging. History is indispensable in understanding the West, but it can be dispensed with in understanding India, since all phases of Indian history are dominated by the same unchanging structure" (1983: 47) Marriott has written a long review article which contains numerous serious criticisms of many aspects of Dumont's work on India (Marriott, 1969)). It is tempting to conclude with Beteille that "Despite their surface appeal, the more deeply we examine them, the more it appears that **homo hierarchicus** as well as **homo equalis** are paste-board characters...a major civilization, such as the Indian or the Western, is too rich and too complex to be adequately portrayed by the one to the exclusion of the other" (Beteille: 35).

Furthermore, the binary opposition has another largely unexamined assumption which needs to be questioned, namely a belief that equality and individualism are necessarily linked. This is something which the experience of the nineteenth century led Tocqueville to believe. It was not only Tocqueville, however. Beteille has pointed out that the "assumption of a relationship between individualism and equality has been since the 19th century a part of the collective wisdom of a large section of the Western intelligentsia" (1986: 122).

Dumont's assumption of an automatic link between holism and hierarchy on the one hand, and individualism and equality on the other, can most simply be seen by the titles and contents of two of his major works. 'Homo hierarchicus' is largely about holism, which arises from the fact that, as we have seen, his definition of the word 'hierarchy' joins together the idea of ranking and encompassing (holism). On the other side, a book titled in French 'Homo Aequalis', turns out to be almost entirely about individualism, as if equality and individualism were synonyms. It is because of this elision that he can very often be found assuming the presence of two pairs of linked ideas. For instance, his very definition of the word individualism implies equality. "For us, every man is, in principle, an embodiment of humanity at large, and as such he is equal to every other man, and free. This is what I call 'individualism'" (1977: 4). Thus when individualism emerges, it not only dislodges holism, but also hierarchy: "individualism raises its head, knocks down any remnant of social submission and ideal hierarchy in society..." (1977: 54). In discussing the impact of Luther, we are told that "It is clear that all these features hold together: we are confronted with the overthrow of the holistic view, the sudden transition from the hierarchical to the individualistic universe" (1986:78).

It is on the basis of such remarks that most readers have believed that Dumont has linked individualism to equality, both by his definitions and his argument. Yet it is clear that this association is arbitrary. For instance, Yalman suggests that egalitarianism is possible without entailing individualism. He writes that the "profound egalitarianism of Islam is certainly a feature of Islamic social relations (especially in the Middle East), but could one argue that there is greater 'individualism' (however defined) in the Islamic Middle East than in Hindu India? I think not". He suggests that "The problem may in fact lie in de Tocqueville's equation between egalitarianism and individualism. For what de Tocqueville saw in America was a special kind of egalitarianism already linked to individualism" (1969: 125). Ahmed makes the same point, writing that "Islam presents an interesting if somewhat

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contradictory picture: although there is minimum premium placed on the individual, the highest value is placed on equality" (in Beteille 1986: 128).

Beteille argues the converse, namely that one can have individualism without egalitarianism. "It has been a commonplace since Tocqueville's time to connect equality with individualism. But, while it is commonly held that individualism entails equality, the opposite argument can also be plausibly made. Individualism, when combined with a high value on achievement, creates and legitimizes a structure of unequal rewards" (1983: 9). In a subsequent detailed article, he gives further evidence that individualism and equality are separate and superable in the West, and that we cannot proceed far "so long as we adhere to the dogma of the inseparability of equality and individualism". (1986: 124 & passim). This is an article which Srinivas believes "effectively demolishes Dumont's thesis that these two values which characterize modern Western Europe are indissolubly linked and that individualism entails equality." (in Beteille 1986 : 130).

Dumont's rejoinder to this is curious. He quotes a long passage of **From Mandeville to Marx**, attacks Beteille in various ways, states that no single quotation linking individualism and equality has been given and so on. Yet what is significant is that he neither confirms nor denies the link. We are still left in doubt. This seems to reflect a real dilemma. The link is so deeply built into Dumont's definitions and structures of comparison, that to deny it would make nonsense of most of his work. On the other hand, the link is so patently false that to re-affirm it would be unconvincing. So we have an exercise in damage limitation, of the general nature of "I never said it and you cannot prove that I said it, but I am not going to say that I do not believe it." It is a frequent dilemma. Either the necessary association is defended, which would be interesting but clearly untrue. Or it would be abandoned, which would be true but uninteresting. This is discussed in a debate between Dumont and Beteille (1987).

The other major methodological innovation which Dumont claimed to have made was to apply the structural method to the history of large-scale civilizations. By considering caste in India as a set of relationships, rather than as a set of ranked elements, he was able to make a significant break-through in understanding. Yet when we turn to his work on the West, we find that a major defect in his analysis stems from a failure to apply the structural method which he himself advocates. Despite his insistence that he will overcome the poverty of methodological individualism and treat the problem in a holistic way, considering the inter-relations of things by applying a French structuralist approach, this is precisely what he fails to do.

As we have seen, Dumont argues that one of the central tendencies of modern individualistic ideology is artificially separate out institutions and spheres. Dumont wishes to regain that total vision which inspired the great nineteenth century thinkers and the "histoire sociale totale" of the Annales school and the great functionalist school of anthropologists.

Yet what would this mean in practice, when applied to a civilization such as Europe over the last thousand years? Minimally, what it would entail is that when considering any one feature in the past, for instance the thought of Locke or Adam Smith or Mandeville, one should see how it relates to other features of the society. It should lead to a much more general analysis of the ways in which economics rests on politics, religion influences economics, kinship underpins or liberates ideology

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and so on. Only by seeing the overlap and connectedness of apparently discrete fields, by an analysis of all facets of a past civilization and the central values which permeate them, would we achieve the kind of structural analysis which Dumont advocates.

It is therefore something of a surprise to discover that in all of Dumont's work on Western civilization there is hardly any discussion of these inter-relations. We find scarcely a mention of economic events and technological developments, of political forces, of religious movements, of changing kinship patterns. His work is almost purely devoted to one specific field, namely the history of ideas as exemplified in the selected writings of a few individuals dotted through history - Aquinas, Ockham, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Smith and Marx. This is intellectual history of a particularly limited kind. It does not even undertake the weaving together of the mutual influences, let alone the contextual work to set the thinkers within their setting. This is a point made in reviews by Gellner, Marriott and Beteille (Gellner, 1978; Marriott 1969; Dumont and Beteille 1987: 676).

Given the enormity of Dumont's theme - the rise of 'modern' civilization in the West - one can sympathize with his restrictions. To have carried out a truly holistic or structural history of the West would have required vast historical erudition, probably beyond the scope of a research team, let alone one man. What is curious is not that Dumont does not begin on the task, failing to suggest connections and links between spheres, but that he never seems to have realized that he was **not** applying a structuralist approach.

That Dumont was capable of making a start in this direction is shown by his work on India. It is sad that he did not attempt to apply the same method to his counter-example. Both Gellner and Beteille in their reviews of Dumont notice that while Dumont makes a serious attempt to understand the inter-connectedness of India, when he approaches the Western case he fails to provide more than a hint of how different institutions were inter-related. It is implied that this is because Dumont does not really try to do so. It is possible, however, that there is another explanation. Is it, in fact, because the structuralist method is inadequate when applied to western individualistic societies and that Dumont implicitly recognized this? Is this why historians have found great benefit in using functionalist and structural-functionalist methods in studying the history of western society, but that structuralism has had almost no impact on the historical analysis of modern and early modern America and western Europe?

Whatever the reason for the absence of any structural analysis of the western case, the result is that, apart from pointing up the need for such an attempt, his work hardly advances our understanding. In a sense Dumont has done what Levi-Strauss does for kinship; set up two models, only one of which he has filled in at all. With Levi-Strauss we have a description of elementary systems - and many promises of a work that was never produced on complex systems. With Dumont, the promise was made in **Homo Hierarchicus** that he would look at **Homo Aequalis**. But except in a sketchy and preliminary way, this has not been done.

This defect is made more apparent if we ask the question, if Dumont is right in specifying the question, namely that individualism and egalitarianism are peculiar both in space and time, recent and western, why did they occur? Apart from some hesitant remarks about the influence of Christianity which derive

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directly from Tocqueville, Weber and Troeltsch, Dumont does not even start on an answer. It is true that the very considerable historical writing by others devoted to considering various aspects of this problem has not provided a satisfactory answer. Yet it at least addresses the question. Dumont seems to assume that showing that ideas develop explains why they develop. Or it may be that he here reveals one of the hidden weaknesses of the structural method, its inability to deal with cause and effect, particularly in relation to change.

## NOTES

In this review I shall be trying to consider ideas spread over nearly a thousand pages of published text and written over a period of thirty years. The corpus is large and complex and much of it is devoted to India. I have only dealt with a part of it here, principally that devoted to the European pole of Dumont's comparison. Even within this I have concentrated on certain themes concerning the origins of equality and individualism and ignored others. I have quoted at some length from Dumont's works since he has complained that Marriott and Khare "find no space for a reasonable outline of the book" (Dumont 1971:62; cf also 1987 where he fiercely attacks Beteille for misrepresenting his views). It thus seems wise to let him speak for himself as much as possible.

Even doing this, unfortunately, does not make his argument completely clear. As Needham has observed, Dumont's "style of pronouncement makes the argument difficult to follow with confidence...Where Dumont is at his most prolix, moreover, his precise meaning tends to become yet more obscure... and this makes it difficult to sum up his argument with much sureness that one is not misreading his thought" (Needham, 1987:103). Or as another reviewer sadly writes of **From Mandeville to Marx**, "By the end of the book the reader is left with an uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty regarding what the book is about" (Harpham 1978: 1375).

2. All italics in quotations are those of the original author. The wording in some of the quotations is sometimes curious, but it has been checked; hence I have not used the annoying (sic) where comments by proof-readers have indicated that readers might be puzzled.

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