

## Systems of Social Control:

### An outline of the development of mass social systems from an evolutionary perspective

I) The basic social system of the human species is the tribe which evolved over the 60 to 100,000 year period of physically modern human existence until sometime after the end of the last ice age about 9,000 years ago. The process of urbanization appears to have begun only 6 to 7,000 years Before Present.

II) The current social system could be characterized as the urban horde whose primary relations are mediated by property, ideology and the bureaucratic state/corporation. To fully understand this change and its consequences it is useful to ask what changes to individual psychology were required to sustain this new "alien" social formation.

III) The records of the ancient theocracies show that a body of beings generally known as "the gods" were both ubiquitous and predominant in the governance and conduct of social life as well as often constituting causes and mediators of natural events. Until recently no comprehensive explanation has been offered for the ubiquity and predominance as well as the origins of these entities - apart from the usual assumptions that it was all "pack of lies" by the rulers to control the masses - or an extended metaphor.

Julian Jaynes in his ground breaking book (listed below) *The Origin of Consciousness...* brings the psychologist's perspective to the problem and, in a new examination of the evidence left by the ancient civilizations, ties the states of mind of the ancients to the currently observed conditions of schizophrenia, hypnosis, etc. However, he goes further and treats this "functional schizophrenia" - a state that he terms the "**bicameral mind**" - as the primal condition of human mentality. He then goes on to try to show that the first emergence of the "self" or analog "I" - what we generally refer to as self consciousness takes place in the after-math of the break down of the ancient theocracies circa. 1500 - 1200 BCE.

However, the **failure** of the expanding European colonial powers to find this condition of bicamerality (that is being regularly directed in action by the voices of beings that only they can hear) in the tribal peoples of North American, Australia, etc. makes this thesis highly problematic. What is posited in Jaynes' thesis is that an extreme "right brain dominance" was the primordial condition of human mentality that has been followed (over the course of 5000 years or so) by the extreme "left brain dominance" evident in modern culture. The logic of natural selection would point toward an **original balance** between a left brain based linear cause and effect "self" and a right brain based totalizing, creative, super-self or "super natural" i.e. "the gods", including ones personal gods or daemons. This balance seems to have been the condition of the hunter-gatherers encountered in later historical times. (See the addendum to this outline)

IV) **The main contention in this outline** is that it is probably much more productive to view this bicamerality as the first of two special individual psychic adaptations to the new circumstances of settled agricultural life, urbanization and the **social control of the state**. That is to say, the state requires a kind of psychic implant in the individual mind/brain of the citizen in order to function at all. In all of the historical record there is no instance of a hunter-gatherer culture willingly joining civilization. They have all been coerced with varying degrees of severity or simply wiped out. They tend to regard what we call civilization as a giant prison and the mind states that go with it as a strange aberration.

IVa) It is also the contention here that individuals living in settled agricultural and urban society have always required special psychic adaptations to stay willingly in the prison of civilization and function effectively in this essentially alien context. It is the further contention here that we have gone through 3 basic systems of social control and their concomitant psychic adaptations.

1. The ancient god ruled (bicameral) kingdoms - approx. 4000 BCE to 1200 BCE.
2. The oracles and auguries - the shadows of the gods - overseeing the re-emerging "self" - 1200 BCE to 400 CE.
3. The dominance of the modern religion/ideologies - the collective "selves" - 400 CE to present. We seem now to be nearing the end of phase three. (This time line applies only to the Middle Eastern - European branches of civilization until recent times.)

Below is a very brief outline of these phases of social control.

### Phase I.

1) The permanent transition from tribal wanderers to agriculturalism and urbanism with the triumph of the administrative structure of collective agriculture and the city centre in the hydraulic social concentrations (Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Indus, Wang Ho). Although cities came and went on the plains of central Asia, the **river basin cultures** and the attendant cities of the near east and probably China, circa 4500 - 2500 BCE have shown the greatest stability. What we see here are extremely fertile river basins surrounded by hostile territory that seem to have been the incubators of the first permanent stable hierarchical, bureaucratic states.

2) The original individual psychic foundations of the state – the gods - a “functional schizophrenia”.

3) The break in the record of ancient history and the disappearance of the gods in the upheavals circa 1500 BCE. The evidence indicates both natural disaster as well as a breakdown of the mentality which sustained these cultures.

### Phase II.

4) The anchoring and extension of the new "godless" **self** in property, temporal power and “conscious” craftiness shown by Jaynes in the transition from the mind set of the Iliad to that of the Odyssey. (He contrasts the story of the wily self conscious Odysseus with that of central character of Iliad – the almost totally god driven “raging bull” – Achilles. He goes on to examine similar transitions in Mesopotamia and the Old Testament.)

5) Through this time the foundations of the intermediate state range from brute force and terror (Assyria); to the oracles (Delphi) and the auguries (I Ching, reading of the entrails and tortoise shells etc.); to the beginnings of ideology (in Judah from King Josiah’s monotheism circa 620 BCE to the special adaptations required for the group survival of the followers of Yahweh during the Babylonian exile – the prophets and the prophecies. During and after the Babylonian exile we saw the development of the first purely virtual reality – the future. The reward for adherence was to be found in the future – the end of time and the coming of the messiah. In other words ‘salvation’ was to be found only a belief or ‘in your head’.

### Phase III.

6) The origin and evolution of ideology (the collective “selves”) - from the first pure virtual reality (the future) in the Babylonian Exile, to religious exclusionism (“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”), to the state of permanent war (the battle of good vs. evil), to religiously inspired sexual repression. (The ancient tradition of ceasing or minimizing sex in times of war evolves into a permanent virtue in keeping with the now permanent state of war. The supreme value, from the point of view of social controls, of this suppression/repression is that it makes every individual “wrong” in the eyes of god and society and therefore vulnerable to external control.)

7) The separation of the new system of social control (ideology) from its Jewish ethnic ties, in the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

8) The current triumph of the money/market “gods” after the failure of Marxism as an ideology, to replace the older Judeo-Christian-Muslim systems. Fear of poverty and death replace fear of damnation and hellfire as negative motivators and the medical profession largely replaces the priesthood as the spiritual guides and social gate-keepers. (Of course, Medical Doctors were not necessarily psychologically equipped for this role but they’ve been doing it anyway. Probably the main reason for the high pay for what is really a technical specialty.)

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It should always be remembered that these conditions are not the product of conscious design or malevolence. The **evolutionary perspective** suffices to understand how these different social systems develop, collapse and replace each other.

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**a provisional definition of ideology:**

» It is a **narrative** of a collective “self” that rests upon a **unified body** of **emotionally charged** symbols, concepts and images that is produced by the interactions between members of the group defined by that narrative. Such interactions are based on the sense of immediate recognition of each other as part of “us” - the group defined by the story. This narrative is usually internalized to the extent that it induces these individuals to ignore much of their own immediate reality and focus on **virtual realities** (essentially future and past) within the dominant all inclusive narrative framework or group **myth**. This internalization sustains individual adherence to the group in question.

The narrative is only partially told in public and expanded in individual consciousness. Usually the more pre-existing popular ideologies it is able to subsume and articulate into itself the larger and more powerful the group and its leaders become – especially in times of acute social stress. (Both Hitler and Stalin sought consciously to capture and integrate German and Russian nationalist ideology respectively.)

It is more than a **collective belief system**. It is a story of an “us” set against a “them”. The belief system is a product of the narrative.

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The key elements of ideology (the current system of social control) evolved out of the struggle to maintain the coherence of a small and militarily weak people (the Jews or the followers of Yahweh) that hovered on the edge of extinction as a social group in the increasingly hostile international environment of the first millennium BCE. Here the weakness of the state under King Josiah and after, circa 620 BCE, is compensated for by the vision of this people (the followers of Yahweh) as the chosen people of an all powerful, all seeing and all punishing god. Josiah for the first time commits all the people of the nation to the sole worship of Yahweh according to a newly discovered “Book of the Covenant”. (II Kings, Ch. 22 – 24) It needs to be remembered that this religious exclusivity is new and unique in the ancient world.

With the reversals of the Babylonian conquest and exile that followed this period came the need to explain these inevitable reversals in political/temporal fortunes in the light of this special relationship with an all powerful god. The whole people is inducted into a permanent state of war that comes to involve all peoples and all of creation and all time. The reversals can be seen as **punishment** for the failure to follow Yahweh with sufficient rigor. But that failure itself comes to be seen as the work of a hidden and intimate enemy (The satan, a simple messenger of God in the Old Testament, becomes the fallen archangel and arch evil “Satan”, the devil). The wars of a nation become part of a cosmic conflict of the forces of good (the Jews and Yahweh) and the forces of evil (Satan and all "the nations").

What we do is now couched in the context of the forever war - Good vs. Evil, God vs. Satan, the upholders of the Bible vs. the Papacy, labour vs. capital, the extended US vs. the extended THEM. This process is accompanied, for the first time in history, by the involvement of all members of a given society in the affairs of the state and nation by the psychic internalization of this endless war. It is no longer only a matter for the nobility and priesthood. In this context even the **idea of democracy** takes on significance as another more efficient means of maintaining popular involvement in the “forever war” - the war of us against them.

A vital part of the arsenal of ideology is the production of the apocalyptic vision (the prophecies) first seen during the Babylonian exile. In the epoch of the prophecies, the final **reward** for adherence is displaced to the future and the end of time. The “end of time” is itself a startling invention but its functionality within the system of ideology is clear, the goal is clear but forever just out of reach. Therefore the struggle must always continue.

Below are a couple of parallel examples of the basic process of the apocalyptic vision or the grand story.

1) the coming of the messiah - or

1a) ‘the’ revolution (The Russian revolution of 1917 for instance, was not the one that many Marxists were looking for. At the time, some revolutionaries rejected it completely and others tried to make the best of it.)

2) the judging of the "quick and the dead" - or

2a) the dictatorship of the proletariat

- 3) the coming of the kingdom of god with the raising of the righteous to sit on the right hand of god - or
- 3a) the coming of socialism and "a paradise on this earth"

These are just the bare outlines of two characteristic sets of apocalyptic visions that have evolved to bind and motivate large numbers of people in adverse circumstances. But it is clear from the historical record that all systems of mass social control are inherently unstable. Until we understand the fundamental character of the current system of social control (ideology) and its pervasiveness we will be hard pressed to find less destructive and stupefying alternatives for the maintenance of the social cohesion of the mass society that is now essential to the survival of the species.

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**Science, a provisional definition:**

Science, as a practice, is the telling of a story about how things got this way and not otherwise.

It is a story of the play of cause and effect in the world.

The plot is made of two elements:

- 1) concepts and/or entities and
- 2) the effective propagation of influences.

This practice is based on the assumption that all existence is the effect of prior causes and that all causes are knowable. There is the further assumption that causes may only be extrapolated from rigorous examination of physical evidence and, where possible, the conduct of experiments to verify hypotheses about causes.

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**Partial reading list:**

- a) *The Origin of Consciousness: In the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* - Julian Jaynes
- b) *Sensed Presences and Mystical States* - Michael Persinger [http://laurentian.ca/neurosci/\\_research/mystical.htm](http://laurentian.ca/neurosci/_research/mystical.htm)
- c) Some familiarity with Wittfogal's work on the hydraulic "despotisms"
- d) *The Origin of Satan* - Elaine Pagels
- e) *False Testament: Archaeology Refutes the Bible's Claim to History* - Daniel Lazare  
[http://www.worldagesarchive.com/Reference\\_Links/False\\_Testament\\_\(Harpers\).htm](http://www.worldagesarchive.com/Reference_Links/False_Testament_(Harpers).htm)
- f) *Is God an Accident?* - by Paul Bloom (Dec 2005 Atlantic Monthly)  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/prem/200512/god-accident>
- g) *When Jesus became God* - Rubenstein
- h) *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay* – Williams and Friell
- i) *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* - Ernesto Laclau

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## Addendum:

This addendum seems to necessary in view of the continuing lack of familiarity with Jaynes' core ideas, even among those who are scientifically trained and have read his main work, *The Origin of Consciousness...*. What is important about The Origin is the effort that Jaynes makes at the beginning of the inquiry to define consciousness as well as laying out what it is NOT. It is startling to read authoritative works in modern psychology that fail to do this – define precisely what we are studying. At the same time they ignore the most comprehensive effort to date to do this.

I'll try to summarize what is done in the early chapters of the book. From the old “mind-body” problem, he moves to “...the problem of the origin of mind, or more specifically the origin of consciousness in evolution.” He then deals with the various previous theoretical attempts at the problem – often known in psychology as the “hard question”.

### **Property of matter.**

“We are not trying to explain how we interact with the environment, but the particular experience that we have in introspecting.” That is the experience of ‘seeing’ into our interior ‘space’.

### **Learning.**

Every sentient being learns but most would not attribute consciousness as we normally think of it to a flat worm.

### **Metaphysical imposition.**

i.e. spirit beyond matter

Of course natural science cannot go there. To do science at all in this area we are forced to work with the known and knowable causes and effects to be found in the material that the evidence history, anthropology, linguistics and modern psychological studies provide.

### **Helpless Spectator**

That is, that it has no impact on behaviour but of course that doesn't tell us what it is or how and when it evolved.

### **Emergent Evolution**

What ever that means.

### **Behaviourism**

Deny that it exists.

And finally:

The activity of the **Reticular Activating System** which although it seems to govern events like sleeping and waking etc. is one of the oldest parts of the nervous system and leaves us no further ahead in examining a development as recent the evolution of consciousness.

So, now to what it does not do and what it is NOT?

not a copy of experience

not necessary for concepts

not necessary for learning

not necessary for thinking (in the sense of judging which of two objects is heavier for instance)

not necessary for reason (in the sense of new insights in a problem or situation)

not reactivity

not found in perception

not in skills (in fact it inhibits performance)

not needed for speaking (although we can be conscious of speaking while we are speaking but usually with some difficulty)

So – according to Jaynes - we are confronted with the possibility of peoples who were highly accomplished but were not conscious **at all**.

However it seems more likely that they were **seldom** engaged in the activity of consciousness.

But before going to that question we need to look at what he says are its **features**. First it is **an activity not an object**, container or a structure of some kind. It is likely to be a direct product of human language. Once nouns have been invented and things and people have names they can be “thought” about when they are not present. This is a radical departure from most previous thought on the subject. Now to the specific features:

**1) Spatialization:**

When we “think” about the things in our lives or the things we have done we situate them in a “space” that only we ourselves can visualize. One peculiarity about this aspect of consciousness is that time is always spatialized. For example, if asked to think of the last hundred years, we tend to “see” numbers or objects lined up side by side or in a line trailing off into a distance;

**2) Exerption:**

In consciousness (our interior space) we never think about or visualize the whole object, only those features which stand out for us.) ;

**3) The Analogue “I”:**

We see this “space” from out of an analogue of our real world behavioural selves and work through it as the main actor in this imaginary space;

**4) The Metaphor “Me”:**

We can catch glimpses of “ourselves” (the analogue “I” from outside ourselves in this interior “space”. This more common in dreams;

**5) Narratization:**

We are constantly imagining ourselves performing within this “space” that is telling stories with ourselves as the main character in this “theatre” of consciousness. Very frequently when we see a new person or object that interests us we start to weave a story (in some cases a theory) around it. In fact story telling seems to be the central part of this activity;

**6) Conciliation:**

The automatic tendency to make new stimuli and objects compatible, in consciousness, with each other and with previous experience. That is upon seeing a completely new object we automatically associate it with some we already know. This activity seems to extend language and thereby our interior space, by a process of metaphor.

We can only “see” these points by introspecting – by being conscious of being conscious – but it is important to recognize how extraordinary these internal goings on, that we take so for granted, really are. In passing it is instructive to compare the forgoing with a definition of consciousness offered in “A Dictionary of Psychology” Sec. Edition from Oxford University Press 2006

The state of being conscious, the normal mental condition of the waking state of humans, characterized by the experience of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, awareness of the **external world** (*emphasis added: That’s a fascinating expression when we think about it. The truly mysterious “internal world” is so taken for granted that the author has to make specific reference to what should go without saying.*), and often in humans (but not necessarily in animals) self-awareness. (There is no attempt to explain what the “self” is of course.)

In other words “consciousness” is being awake. No wonder psychology is often not taken seriously. It has great difficulty defining what it is psychologists are studying.

\*Now to the question of ancient or pre-civilised people being **seldom** conscious rather than **never** conscious i.e. was always purely bicameral. This is the core of the disagreement expressed in this paper with Jaynes.

Below is a passage from a book called “Primitive Mentality” by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl of the Sorbonne in 1923. We could of course replace “Primitive” with tribal or hunter’s mentality and be more accurate. But in any case it is highly illustrative of the role of consciousness in hunter-gatherer societies i.e. all pre-civilised societies.

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## Primitive Mentality by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Sorbonne 1923

.... page 22

The missionary Crantz says the same of the Greenlanders: "Their whole stock of ingenuity is exerted in the employments necessary to their existence, and whatever is not inseparably connected with those employments, forms no subject of their reflection. We may therefore describe their character as consisting of simplicity without stupidity, and good sense uncultivated by the exercise of reason." 1

Let us rather put it thus — "uncultivated in following a chain of reasoning which is in the slightest degree abstract." For it is not to be doubted that the Greenlanders, when following the avocations necessary to their existence, do reason, and that they employ means which are sometimes complicated, in order to arrive at the ends they are seeking. But these mental processes are not independent of the material objects which induce them, and they come to an end as soon as their aim has been attained. They are never exercised on their own account, and that is why they do not seem to us to rise to the level of what we properly

1 D. Crantz: The History of Greenland, i. p. 135 (1767).

### INTRODUCTION

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term "thought." A modern observer who has lived among the Esquimaux of the North, has drawn attention to this fact. "All their ideas," says he, "centre round the whale fishery, hunting, and eating. For anything beyond that, thought, to them, is generally a synonym for boredom or annoyance.

‘What are you thinking about?’

I said one day, when out hunting with an Esquimau who appeared to be deep in thought. My question made him laugh.

‘Oh, you white people, you are always thinking so much!

**We Esquimaux think only of our stores of food; shall we have enough meat for the long winter or not? If the meat is enough, we have no need to think about anything else.**

As for me, I have more food than I really need!’

**I realized that I had offended him in attributing any ‘thoughts’ to him."**

.....(emphasis added)

Human survival in the high arctic requires, ingenuity, sophisticated technology’s (for hunters) and above all planning. This capacity to “see ahead” through the long winter and compare the current situation with past years is probably one of the key things that make it possible to modern humans to live in places that would normally have been off limits to all previous hominids. Planning and projecting is the functional core of consciousness (thinking). Certain kinds of questions would form the objects of conscious activity in this situation. ‘Has the weather changed in an unusual way?’ ‘Should we move to another hunting ground?’ ‘Which one would be most suitable to this situation?’ ‘I can “see” that we don’t have as much meat as we did this time last year. Some people are going to starve if we don’t do something about it.’ And so the questions and hard thinking would go. Such questions and the associated “thinking” “seeing” would be associated with considerable stress. For them “thinking” (consciousness) would be an occasional if quite unpleasant necessity. But what is crucial in this process is the ability to select, often quite distant memories, and compare them with current situations. Other animals appear to be locked into the present – as, in all likelihood, were pre-language hominids.

The other kind of occasion when “thinking” would probably have been necessary would be when large numbers of strangers were in the immediate proximity on a permanent basis. Because of course, it is known that humans, large numbers of humans, are potentially the most dangerous things around. It was probably in this context that the bicameral mind (the gods) intervened to relieve the stress and get things done so to speak. (After all there were pyramids and ziggurats to build. ☺) But more seriously the limited fertile land of the river valleys situated in hostile, often desert surroundings, had to be made to produce for an expanding population that could not simply get up and leave those fertile river valleys for the surrounding deserts.

For us who have been steeped, almost from birth, in the endless questioning, planning, remembering and self defending of civilized existence it is difficult to conceive of the mind state of those who do not “think” any more than they absolutely have to and usually do not need to. Yet for us much of this activity, being conscious, is also associated with stress and hence the continuing quest for voices, gods (in the sky and in the flesh), religious beliefs, ideologies, etc. that will relieve some of that stress and give us the sense of certainty about our lives and a feeling of authorization that most (usually subconsciously) crave.

Finally there is the question of origins in an evolutionary process. Jaynes poses a theory of the development of human language and makes some comments on it's nature relative to other forms of intra-species communication and it's central role in consciousness. It is now known that all animals from bacteria on up have – sometimes very sophisticated – methods of intra-species communication. Yet it should also be clear that human language is radically different from all others that we have so far encountered. So the question is, what's the core of this difference and is that relevant to the problem of consciousness.

It seems that many social animals are capable of nuanced communications about the situation of food, threats, etc. in the world as well as positions in their particular societies. But human beings are now often lost in “another world” - the world of thought or mental images.

To cut a longer story short, what human language has that others don't seem to are nouns, names and detachable attributes or sentence parts. So that by recombining these detachable sentence parts (adjectives, verbs, nouns, etc.), instead of simply being able to talk about elephants a water hole, language extends itself so that we can talk about pink elephants with very long ears that can fly through air flapping those ears.

What human language thus provides is not simply communication but a new system of perception. Language allows not just for communication but for endless creation. The application of names makes it possible to “think” about things that are not “there” and to create “things” that never were. In this vein, the application of the privileged name “I” to our thought streams and memories creates a “self”. The application of other privileged names like “us” and “we” can be used to refer not just to those physically present but to almost any putative group of people.

This is only the barest outline of Jaynes ideas but hopefully readers can get a feeling for the nature of the activities that create “selves” and faiths, churches, nations, classes, parties, societies, etc.