

In “How Did We Become Humans?”, we explained how human beings evolved from earlier primates (ape-like animals). We explained that this happened through the process of “survival of the fittest”. This means that those animals that were most fit - most able to survive, maybe because they could run faster, or were stronger, or had a more usable hand - tended to live longer and, therefore, had more babies. Those babies tended to inherit this trait and passed it on. In the case of our ancestors, what came first was walking upright and the freeing up of the arms and hand, which led to tool making and... the larger brain (intelligence) to make greater use of these abilities.

But all of that is only the very, very beginning of the story.

All Animals Organize

All animals have ways of organizing, of working together. They organize to get food and to protect themselves. Many herbivores (animals that eat plants, including fruit, nuts, etc.) band together for protection. In a herd of antelope, for example, one of the herd may spot a predator - a lion, for example - before all the rest. That one goes on “alert”, all the rest notice almost instantly, and they prepare to flee. The lions on the other hand, hunt in a group (called a “pride” of lions); they work together to bring their prey down.

Mating Patterns

Different animals also have different mating patterns. Lions, for example, have one dominant male in their pride. He fathers all the offspring, and the less dominant males have to go off on their own. When that dominant male gets older, slower and weaker, then one of the younger ones fights him and if the younger one wins, he drives the older one off. (He will also kill the lion cubs from the previous male.)

Because even the earliest human beings had much more complex ways of making a living they also had much more complicated systems of communicating - language, in other words. And they also had more complicated ways of organizing in general, including mating patterns - producing offspring.

The early human beings were “hunter-gatherers” or “food gatherers” (as opposed to “food producers.”) In other words, they lived by hunting animals that were already out there and gathering plants and fruits, roots, nuts, berries that grew of their own. They mainly survived simply by taking what “nature” provided for them on its own. One thing that’s important to think about: Homo Sapiens (human beings) first walked the planet about 100,000 years ago. They evolved from other species that existed for over a million years earlier, and inherited a lot of those species’ qualities. For up until 10,000 years ago, human beings existed by hunting and gathering. How we were then, what we did, what we ate, how we related to each other — it was all very different from today.

There’s an important lesson in that: Many people today say that our present behavior is “natural”, it’s what we’re born with. But the fact that behaviors were so very different for over 90% of the history of our species proves that that’s not true. As we read about human society’s development, it’s important to keep that in mind.

“Food Gatherers”

All animals are “food gatherers”, and so were we for 90% of our history. We simply gathered or hunted



Image: The first peoples in North America hunting a giant armadillo. They wiped many species out.

Comment: *There never has been a hunting species that was nearly as successful as homo sapiens. Our ancestors spread out from Africa into Eurasia and into what is now Australia about 40,000 years ago. Shortly after that, 13 kinds of large animals disappeared, including giant kangaroos, giant tortoises and a rhino-sized wombat as well as a marsupial lion that preyed on them. People first entered North America about 13,000 years ago, and 33 kinds of large animals went extinct shortly after that. This included camels, giant beavers and several kinds of elephant and a kind of armadillo that was the size of a small truck, as well as the saber tooth tiger that preyed on these large animals. The few large animals that survived did so because of some special quality. For example, the bison migrated in unpredictable patterns, and also the Native Americans only moved out to the Great Plains (where lots of bison lived) after the Europeans forced them there.*

Ever wonder why Africa is the home to the most large game of any continent - wildebeests, rhino’s, giraffes, etc.? Well, think about this: Homo sapiens originated in Africa. We evolved over millions of years there, as these other animals were evolving. As we evolved, so did these other animals. They had time to adapt to the threat of this most successful hunter - homo sapiens. In other parts of the world, they were wiped out before they had time to evolve and adapt.

what nature provided on its own - what grew naturally or what animals naturally lived there. Since that stage in history was way before people learned to read and write, how do we know how people organized themselves back then? Well, some hunter gatherer societies survived as hunter-gatherers, untouched by modern society, into the early 20th century, as did some societies that had evolved just one step beyond and were very similar. Some aboriginal (original) peoples of Australia are one example as are the !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa. Also, there were outsiders who went and lived with the Iroquois Native Americans, people’s in the South Pacific and elsewhere in the 19th century and noted how they lived and related to each other.

One thing that they all had in common was that women and men were more or less equal. Unlike today,

men didn't in general give orders. That makes sense because in most hunter-gatherer societies, mostly the men did the hunting and the women gathered the plants (including berries, fruit, roots, etc.) That was for a simple reason: Most hunting required being very quiet. Human babies in that period often nursed up until two or three years old, so they had to stay with their mother. But babies make noise!

So the men mainly provided the meat (hunting) and the women the vegetables (gathering). But hunting was usually a hit-or-miss affair, often leaving the hunters with nothing. So while meat was special, most of what the people ate was vegetables. In other words, the women were just as important for the survival of the group as were the men, and the men had no special power over the women.

Most times, the hunter gatherers lived in small groups, and they were often on the move. Maybe, for example, when the animals they'd hunted moved away, or the plants they picked were pretty much gone in one area, they'd move to another. Or maybe they just moved depending on the season of the year. But moving wasn't a big deal, since they didn't have a lot of possessions and their "homes" were pretty simple affairs. And because of how they lived, they didn't see anybody as "owning" the land!

Life for Hunter-Gatherers

What was life like for the hunter-gatherers - that is, for people during 90% of the history of human beings?

One British philosopher of the 1600s, Thomas Hobbes, described what he thought life for hunter gatherers was like: they lived in *"a time of Warre (war), where every man is Enemy to every man.... men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them... In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building... no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."*

"Solitary (alone), poor, nasty, brutish and short."

That was how the life of hunter gatherers was pictured, and for hundreds of years, that was the idea. But remember this: This picture was drawn by a man from England exactly when some people (we'll discuss which people later) from that country were starting to travel around the world, conquering foreign peoples and killing many and exploiting others. In many cases, the peoples they were conquering were living as hunter-gatherers. So the question is: Is this view of their lives accurate? Or was it made up in order to justify conquering them?

This is not a matter of Africans, Native Americans, Europeans, or any other peoples. People all over the planet lived as hunter gatherers for most of human history, and they all had certain things in common.

First of all, hunter gatherers were very, very far from having "no knowledge of the face of the Earth." Hunters in the !Kung society were able to tell huge amounts from the spoor of the animals they hunted. ("Spoor" means what traces an animal leaves behind, including its tracks, its poop, maybe some hair that fell off, etc..) They could tell not only what kind of animal it

was, but its size, its health, what it had been eating, if it was injured — all kinds of things.

Hunter-gatherers also used different plants for medicine, including for birth control.

Or take another example: The people of the South Pacific Islands. They didn't live only by hunting and gathering; they also grew some crops, but their lives weren't that different from pure hunter gatherers. These people traveled hundreds of miles in dug-out canoes from one island to another, across open ocean and far from the sight of land, over days and days. How did they do that?

They navigated partly by the Sun and stars, but how about if it was cloudy? They knew the usual direction of the ocean swells. Not only that, but they also had learned how an island - even one out of sight - could change the shape and direction of the swells, so they could tell where even an out of sight island was. Then, they also understood the behavior of sea birds. Certain birds, for instance, flew away from "their" island in the morning and returned at night. In all these ways, these island people were able to navigate.

The early homo sapiens didn't learn all this by plan; it took tens of thousands of years to develop this knowledge. And this knowledge was passed down by talking and showing, not by books. But the main thing is this:

Remember how we saw that the thumb and tools "created" people? That means that our unique "means of production" - our way of making a living - in the end was the main thing that determined how we developed mentally. It's what created our brain power itself!

That is the most important thing in understanding all of the following history of our species. *The fact that for tens of thousands of years, people used stone tools (along with wood, "rope" made from plants and animal skins and the like) to carry out hunting and gathering determined almost everything else about how they lived, related to each other and organized their communities.*

Just like a sailor in a small sailboat on the open ocean, the hunter gatherers understood that they could not control the forces of nature; instead, they saw that they had to live "in harmony" with nature. But they also had to understand it - just like the !Kung or the South Pacific Islanders did.

Almost all reports of these societies show, by the way, that they lived very leisurely lives. They maybe "worked" hunting and gathering ten or twenty hours a week. The rest of the time they hung out, told stories, joked around, sang, played with the kids. (Pretty much the way lions live, by the way.)

Cooperation and Equality

Another thing: Almost all hunter-gatherer societies lived by cooperation and sharing, not competition and individualism. ("Individualism" means thinking about your own needs instead of the needs of your community as a whole.) One scientist described it like this: "The hunter-gatherer version of equality meant that each person was equally entitled to food, regardless of his or her ability to find or capture it; so food was shared. It meant that nobody had more wealth than anyone else; so all material goods were shared. It meant that nobody had the right to tell others what to do; so each person made his or her own decisions. It meant that even parents didn't have the right to order their

children around... It meant that group decisions had to be made by consensus (everybody agrees); hence no boss, "big man," or chief."¹

How did parents raise their children in hunter-gatherer societies?

According to some anthropologists, the answer is: "They didn't!" What can that possibly mean?

In later societies people "raised" crops; they intervened with nature to make certain kinds of plants grow or keep certain kinds of animals, keeping away other plants (weeds) and animals (predators or competitors for the forage of the domesticated animals). Hunter gatherers more or less lived with nature; they cooperated with nature. They didn't have any illusion that they could control or "conquer" nature. That must have been a major thing that determined their entire outlook on life. And it certainly showed in the relations of the adults with the children.

A psychologist named Peter Gray has written a lot about this.² (We mention him and what he's written so that you and your parents won't think we're just making things up.) He explains that up until the age of about four, children pretty much just follow along behind adults, so the adults don't really have to spend too much time keeping track of their kids. After around that age, kids pretty much want to hang out with other kids, and in hunter-gatherer societies they form "gangs" of kids of all



Children at play in a society where some of the old hunter-gatherer traditions still remain. Do they look like they need grown-ups watching over them constantly?

ages. Since the adults don't really compete with each other, since they live by cooperating and working with each other, since "success" of one person doesn't mean "failure" of another, that's how the kids see it.

The main way that "discipline" is "enforced" is by joking and teasing, not punishing and definitely not

spanking. "Playing" is the main way that children learn. Have you ever watched lion cubs or wolf puppies? Notice how they roll around with each other, run around sniffing things out? What they're doing is learning about their world and how to interact with it. Young children naturally learn in the same way - through the games they make up and the way they can explore the world around them. One big difference between us and other animals is that we take lots more years to mature into adults; we're children a lot longer. And for human children, living in nature as hunter-gatherers, the older kids teach the younger ones. They teach them what is safe and what is dangerous, how to hunt (by playing hunter), but most important of all how to get along with others.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201105/how-hunter-gatherers-maintained-their-egalitarian-ways>

² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/200907/play-makes-us-human-vi-hunter-gatherers-playful-parenting>

In all those societies, the children were the responsibility of all adults, not only the biological parents. The other side of this was how the "parents" related to each other. This might seem strange to us, but in those societies marriage was not between one man and one woman. They practiced what you could call group marriage - many women and men were married to each other. Gradually, it seems, who a woman or man could be married to was narrowed down. It seems that it was narrowed down so that there was less marriage between blood relatives. Some people think this was because people started to see that marriages between blood relatives produced babies who were less healthy. Maybe that was the reason; maybe there were other reasons. But the main point is this: "Marriage" in those societies was very different from how we think of it today. There is no one "natural" form of marriage.

Population Numbers

One thing that was a problem was population control. The estimates are that human population in the Paleolithic period was between 10,000 and one million on the entire planet. (Today, there are over six billion people.) Why so few then?

Today, huge sectors of the Earth are devoted to feeding and caring for humans alone. Think about farms, factories, entire cities. True, there are other plant and animal species living there, but all that land is mainly used to provide for the human species. During the Paleolithic period, human beings didn't so much manipulate the land for their needs as find their needs in the land (and water) as "Nature" provided it. Whether they wanted to or not, they shared the land with all other animals.

So a major issue was population control. This was carried out through not having sex ("abstinence") and in some cases through using certain plants that people had learned helped prevent pregnancy. Also, people had learned that women cannot become pregnant (aren't "fertile") during part of their menstrual cycle. But in addition to all this, they also used infanticide. That means killing babies.

All parents of mammals care for their young, especially the mothers. So having to kill one's baby must have been a pretty horrible thing. But they did it because they had to.

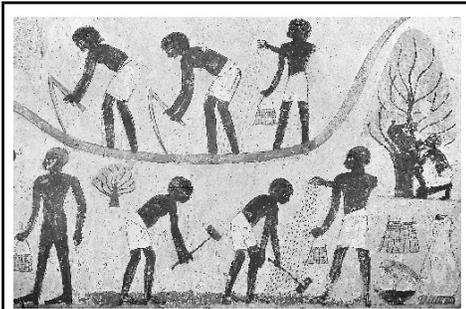
Overall, though, the lives of the hunter-gatherers was not so bad. In fact, when they turned to intensive agriculture, the lives of most people got a lot worse - they lived shorter lives, had to work a lot harder and longer, and were less healthy. We know by looking at the bones of those people. From those bones, scientists can tell that people were undernourished, smaller, and died younger. Their teeth - always a sign of health and nutrition - were worse.

Early Farming

So why on earth would people go from hunting and gathering - or food gathering - to farming, or food production?

To answer that, we have to start with how this happened — what the process was.

Basically, what farmers do is keep a certain kind of animal (chickens, cows, llamas, etc.) and keep other animals away. Those other animals might be predators like wolves or mountain lions or they might be an animal that competes with their animals for food, like deer. They also do something like that with crops. They might raise corn, or tomatoes or a crop to feed their cows, and at the



Egyptian picture of early agriculture. Look closely. Think about doing this all day. This was backbreaking work!

same time they keep competing plants - "weeds" - away and also animals like deer and also insects away.

Even in the hunter gatherer stage, people probably did something similar to a

smaller extent. They might have encouraged a certain kind of animal that they ate to survive and chased predators away. Or maybe there was a fruit or berry that they ate and they tried to keep away other animals that also ate it. But their main way of making a living was to simply take what nature provided by itself.

Grains

They also probably encouraged plants that could be grown for their use. The most important example is wheat:

The part of the wheat we eat - the grain - is really a seed. The earliest wheat had grain (seeds) that fell off the plant very easily when it was ripe. Just a little bit of wind or shaking, and the grain fell to the ground. The wheat plants that grew grains like that had seeds that sprouted quickest. It was the plant's form of survival of the fittest.

But think of the early hunter-gatherers who picked the wheat grains. The grains that fell to the ground were the hardest to gather; the ones that stayed on the stalk of the plant were the easiest to pick because they weren't lying on the ground, hidden among all the plants and in the dirt. So those were the main ones that people picked. Then, when they got those grains "home", some of them probably fell to the ground and some of them sprouted new wheat plants. But those new wheat plants had grown from grains that stuck to the stalk better, so guess what about those new plants: Their grains stuck to the stalk better. Over time, people learned that if they dropped a few grains in the ground, that after awhile, they'd have new wheat plants. Maybe they saw that those plants grew better if they dug out the other plants that grew around them - the "weeds" as we call them.

So up until 10,000 years ago, people lived mainly by hunting and gathering, with a little bit of cultivating crops and encouraging certain animals thrown in. Little enough that they didn't have to work very hard doing it.

But since they didn't have to work very hard hunting and gathering, why bother planting crops full time?

The disadvantage of hunting and gathering was that people had to share what nature provided with all sorts of other plants and animals. This meant they had to keep their own numbers low, as we explained. Another way of looking at it was that they had to have a lot of land to roam around on for their small groups.

End of Ice Age

The first group of people who went to only or mainly raising their own crops were some people in the

"Fertile Crescent", in what is now mainly in Iraq of West Asia, some 10,000 years ago. That was a time of an Ice Age, when lots of the world's water was locked up in ice in the polar ice caps. People not only lived in that Fertile Crescent, the valleys of today between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers; they lived on the land that is now below sea level in what's now the end of the Persian Gulf. This was an amazingly fertile land, full of grains people could eat and animals to hunt. Also, the weather was very mild. It must have been like the Garden of Eden in the Bible.

Then the Ice Age started to come to an end. The polar ice caps started to melt and the seas began to rise. Scientists guess the seas rose by over 600 feet. People were driven inland. More and more of them, packed closer and closer together. (Or what was "close together" for them.)

This must have happened in other parts of the world too, and thousands of people must have simply died of starvation. So why did food production on a wide scale first start in the Fertile Crescent?

According to one scientist (Jarred Diamond) there are 200,000 different plant species, but only a few thousand that humans can eat and of those few thousand only a few hundred can be grown as crops (from spinach to broccoli to quinoa, corn and wheat). In areas which are hot and dry in the summer, the plants that tend to grow best are called "annuals" - plants that die in the summer but leave a seed to sprout when it rains again. And these plants put a lot more energy into that seed than they do into the stalk (as opposed, for example, to a tree or collard greens).

The Fertile Crescent is such an area. Not only that, but it was abundant in the number one grain crop, the crop that produced more energy per acre than any other - wheat.



Fertile Crescent, also known as "Mesopotamia". Can you find this area on a map of today's world?

Wheat

Of all the grains that we grow (including rice, corn, quinoa and barley), wheat gives us the most calories per acre. In other words, it can feed more people per acre of land than can any other crop. So, where maybe people before had grown a little wheat here and there, between times of hunting the animals and gathering other plants, fruits and berries that all grew naturally, now there was an emergency. Before, people shared the foods with other animals. They didn't have to keep it all for themselves. Now, a large portion of the land had to be used to feed people, and people only (or almost only).

Scientists can tell from the remaining bones and teeth that these early farmers lived shorter lives, were less healthy, and many were deformed from the hard work they had to do. They went from a "Garden of Eden"

to having to live “from the sweat of their brow”. In fact, one scientist (Colin Tudge) believes that the Bible’s myth of the Garden of Eden comes exactly from that change in real life.

There were several other parts of the world where food production (vs. food gathering) developed independently, where it didn’t spread from somewhere else. The Nile region of what is now Egypt is one such area. So is the region around what is now Sudan. In both those areas, the number one food crop - wheat - could not grow, mainly because of the extreme heat and lack of rain in the summer. There, people developed “domesticating” animals first. That means taming animals so they can be raised and controlled by people. Most animals either can’t be domesticated or it’s not worth it for people to do so.

“Domestication” of Animals

What qualities does an animal need for people to be able to domesticate it?

One important one is that it can’t be too big, strong, fast or fierce. But maybe the most important is that it has to have a strong herd instinct and an instinct to strongly follow its herd leader. In domesticated animals like goats, sheep and cattle, the person largely replaces the animal’s natural herd leader.

In some parts of what is now Egypt as well as in parts of what is now Sudan, where people also developed food production on their own (instead of learning from other peoples), it seems that in some cases they started with keeping herds of animals (cattle and goats) instead of cultivating grain (the best plant to live off of). That was partly because most grains don’t grow well in that part of the world because it’s too hot and dry in the summer time.

Why did they change from food gathering to food production? Around 8000 BC, the climate in the upper Nile River area became drier. That forced the people living around that area to move closer together around the Nile itself. There was less space for them to move around, so they had to stay put. They had already developed herding animals (“domestication” of animals), just like in some other parts of the world, hunter gatherers did grow some crops while they gathered most of their food. But in that period in the Upper Nile area, people were then forced to turn to herding their cattle as the only (or almost only) means of making a living.

Human population

One big change from hunting and gathering (also known as food gathering) to farming or “food production”, was in family size: Before, having a lot of children was a real handicap. Since the band of people was constantly on the move, and since small children had to be carried, a woman could not have more than one small child at a time. Now, with agriculture, people were tied to the land so they didn’t move around as much in most cases. Also, more children meant more hands to work the land, so more land could be cultivated as the children grew just a little bit older. As the population grew in the food producing societies, they tended to spread out. This meant taking over other parts of the world.

The earliest kind of farming is called horticulture. These early farmers simply planted seeds in the ground. What came next was “agriculture”, when people started to use a plough to turn over the soil. Originally, ploughs were made of wood and they were pulled by people, not horses or oxen. You can imagine how backbreaking that

work was! All of this involved more and more work, but real work. Hard work. Sweat. And for less return than hunting and gathering. From looking at the bones and teeth of these early agriculturists, scientists can see that they had worse teeth, they were actually shorter (because they had worse nutrition) and they didn’t live as long.

Private Property

Another huge change was this: Think about hunter-gatherers. They moved around, using what the earth provided just as did other animals. When a type of plant was mostly picked, or a type of game animal had left, then these hunter-gatherers moved on. But early agriculturists spent their time preparing the soil for their crops. They also had to store their crops. And they built more permanent homes - often made of stone. In other words, they had an investment in their land. So, for the first time, land ownership came into being.

People owned land. That was a first.

But which people was it that owned the land? It was those who worked it. Because it was such hard work, and because the women mainly had to take care of the infants and couldn’t do that work while caring for them, this work mainly fell to the men.

So it was that it was the men who owned the land.

So for the first time, there was an important possession to pass on down to the next generation. But if you own something and want to pass it down to your children, you want to be sure they are, in fact, *your* children. Remember what we talked about about group marriage? This had to come to an end, because under it nobody knew (and nobody really cared) who the biological father was. And remember, in agricultural societies, it was the man who owned the land, so he was in control. For the first time, women became dependent on men.

Oppression of Women

So it was that men imposed or forced monogamy on women. The reality was that if a man had enough land and power he could have more than one wife, but the woman was forced (as much as possible) to have only one husband, so that he could be sure he was the father. This was the origin of the repression of women, which continues to this day. One great writer on this subject (named Frederick Engels) explained that this was “*the world historic defeat of the female sex.*” And it happened because people changed the way they made a living.

There some other important changes too.

In all early hunter-gatherer societies, not only were men and women equal, but the group as a whole was equal. Nobody went hungry if some had food. Nobody was more important or more powerful



Along with private property (owned by the men) came oppression of women.

than anybody else. True, there were elders who gave advice, but no privileged individuals could rule over everybody else. A large part of the reason for that was that there wasn't a "surplus"; people didn't build up a huge supply of meat or extra grain or build extra large houses. How could they when they were constantly on the move and had no way of transporting large amounts of property? And anyway, their very way of making a living - hunting or gathering together in groups - meant they cooperated, they worked together, and they didn't have individual ownership of the land.

The "Big Man"

But after people turned to agriculture, then each individual family had its own plot of land. And if they were successful, they were able to build up a surplus - an extra supply - of grain or a larger herd of cattle. But even then, some of the traditions of sharing remained. So, those who had extra shared with those who had less, often by throwing a big feast. These became the "big men" (and they were men, not women — remember what we explained?). And others respected them for how much they shared with the whole community.

But there were also others who had a surplus, and the "big men" became responsible for collecting that surplus and sharing it out with the community. And this was happening as people were moving away from collective work, more towards working as an individual (or a small family). While the traditions of sharing and being equal remained for awhile, they couldn't last forever because they didn't fit the new way of making a living. So it wasn't such a huge step from getting importance (what we call "prestige") from collecting the surplus and giving a feast to... collecting and keeping some of the surplus for yourself. In fact, is that very different from paying taxes?

There was something else: At that time, people still were living close to nature, they still had a feel for nature - weather, the tides of the oceans, how wild animals lived — that sort of thing. But they didn't *understand* nature. They didn't understand what made the tides, or what made an eclipse of the Sun. They didn't understand how life had evolved, how plants and animals (including human beings) had evolved. But our brain has developed to see patterns, to see beyond what's just right in front of us. (Remember how that happened?)

Also, it must have seemed to them that the forces of nature were powerful and scary sometimes. A huge storm, or a drought - not only couldn't they explain the cause, they were threatened by these events.

So what did people do? They developed ways of not only explaining these natural events, but also of trying to affect them. Feeling powerless is scary, after all. That was the origin of religion.

Priests

In food gathering societies, where everybody was equal, religion was a group event and probably involved the group making music, painting pictures on the wall of a cave, body painting, etc.

But in agricultural society, when there was a surplus, not everybody had to spend their time producing food, clothing and shelter. So gradually, some people specialized in "explaining" natural events and claiming they could affect the outcome. These were the earliest priests, and their rise was connected with the rise of the "big men."

Then there was another issue: If for some

reason you didn't have enough to eat but your local big man had a surplus stored in clay pots in his home, maybe you could get him to give you some, but not for free. (It wasn't like in the past where everybody worked and lived and shared together, don't forget!) Maybe the price was that you had to work on his land for a certain amount of time. Or maybe your kids had to. Or maybe he had his eye on your daughter and wanted a second (or third or fourth) and younger "wife" - a woman who he could not only sleep with but who would cook, sew and clean for him forever. (And don't forget, at that point the woman didn't have free choice anymore.) Or maybe you owed him enough that he wanted one of your sons to come work for him *forever*.

Then there was something else still: In the past, in the rare times that different groups of people fought, in the first place it wasn't really a war to the finish. In the second place, it was all the men (who weren't too young or old) of one group against all the men of the other. In agricultural societies, don't forget, there was a new pressure: Because a large family meant more hands to work the land, and because people were able to produce and store a surplus, the human population started to grow. But these early agricultural societies needed somewhere to expand to.

Where did they expand to? Why, naturally, onto the land used by their neighbors for hunting and gathering. And because the early agriculturalists were far greater in numbers, and also had probably developed better weapons, guess who ran who off?

Many hunter gatherers (food gatherers) learned food production from their neighbors. They probably learned in part just by watching. But even in those early times there was trade, so they learned from trading with the food producers. And those who didn't learn? They were simply wiped out by the food producers - the agriculturalists.

So we see:

- **Repression of women**
- **Production of a surplus**
- **Specialization of labor - not everybody did the same thing**
- **The rise of a privileged few**
- **Expansion of agricultural societies**

As for decision-making, here's how Frederick Engels describes it for the Native Americans (and it was more or less the same everywhere for hunter-gatherers): *"Everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kings, governors, prefects or judges; without prisons; without trials. All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole body of those concerned — the gens or the tribe or the individual gens themselves..... Those concerned regulated everything. There can be no poor and needy — the communistic household and the gens know their obligations towards the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal — including the women. There is as yet no room for slaves."*³

Engels also describes the heroic bravery of the hunter-gatherers when threatened, as in the Zulu people when the Europeans invaded. *"Armed only with pikes and spears and without firearms, they advanced, under a hail of bullets... right up to the bayonets of the English infantry... throwing them into disorder and even beating them back more than once."* In peace and in war, the

³ Frederick Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State"

collective, equal society proved how strong it could be.

These agricultural societies became more and more complex. It wasn't just a small group of people living, gathering and hunting, and hanging out together anymore. And another thing: There was always some kind of trade between groups of people, even when they were hunter gatherers. Maybe one group lived in an area where there were the rocks that were best for making an arrow head and another group lived where there were plants best for making baskets. So they traded.

Rise of Governments or the "State"

But in agricultural societies trade became much more of a way of life. The hunter gatherers were grouped together in clans or what were called "gens". That was their group, and every adult in the gens had equal rights; they lived together and made decisions together. But as agricultural societies rose up, the old gens started to break down. People in one gens moved out of the area of that gens.

A new way of making decisions had to develop, because the old gens hardly really existed anymore. A new way did develop. But it developed in a period when not everybody was equal anymore. Not only were women and men no longer equal, there were the wealthy and the poor, some who owned a lot of land and some who owned none or just a very little. There were some who owed their labor to others. So those who had more, those who were owed the labor of others, they made sure that they kept it.

That was how the modern government - what's called the "state" - first developed. In some cases - in parts of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe - this state arose on its own, as agriculture developed. In others - for instance in the conquest of parts of Africa and the Americas by European societies - it was imposed from outside. But in all cases, it meant the rule of the privileged few over the majority. And the privileged few were those who owned what was used to make a living, whether that was land or (later) factories and banks.

Exactly how this happened was not the same everywhere. In ancient Greece, for example, the war councils played a big role in the rise of the state. In Egypt, it was a little different. Egyptian agriculture was centered around the Nile River valley. This river flooded at a certain time every year. For agriculture, people needed to hold the floods back partly and also to have a system of irrigation. These were huge work projects, and somebody had to organize and coordinate them. It was through that that the early Egyptian state developed. But in all these cases, the privileged few made sure that their needs, their interests, were taken care of. They made sure that they kept their privileges and were able to live off the labor of the majority.

Why Fertile Crescent First?

One important question is this: The peoples who practiced agriculture spread that practice all around the world; agriculture was only developed independently in a few places - the "Fertile Crescent", three parts of Africa, parts of what is now Mexico and Guatemala, the highland valleys of Papua New Guinea, parts of Indochina and parts of China. Everywhere else, it was spread from these few areas. So why did it develop first in those areas, and why first in the Fertile Crescent, also known as Mesopotamia?

Lots of historians answer questions about why



Slavery in ancient Egypt (top) and Greece (bottom). The many did the work so that the few could live in luxury.

things happened in one part of the world the way they did by claiming that these people were different in some way. But that doesn't answer the question - "why were they different? Were they just born that way?" When we look at Mesopotamia - where agriculture developed before anywhere else, we can see the real reasons.

First, as we explained, the climate in Mesopotamia encouraged the growth of annual plants - plants that died off every year and left only a seed. These often are the grains, which provide food for humans. According to one scientist (Jared Diamond) of the 200,000 different plants, only a few thousand can be eaten by people, and we only get most nutrition from a few dozen of these. So part of it was pure luck - happening to live where some of these plants grew.

Second, there was the question of domesticating animals. That means, humans being able to control an animal species. We already explained what makes a species able to be domesticated. There are only a very few such species in the world, and several of them (goats and sheep especially) lived in that region.

Third, the region was naturally very rich - great growing climate, plenty of water (from the rivers), rich soil.

People the Same; Conditions Different

So, if the people of that region were "different", it was because the conditions in which they lived were different.

So we see the rise of agriculture led to repression of women, the rise of class differences - differences in wealth and power, differences in who

actually did the work producing and who lived off of that work - and also and the rise of the state. Frederick Engels sums it up like this:

“Base Greed”

“The lowest interests — base greed, brutal sensuality (lust), sordid avarice (dirty greed), selfish plunder of common possessions, — usher in the new, civilized society, class society; the most outrageous means — theft, rape, deceit and treachery - undermine and topple the old, classless, gentile society. And the new society, during all the 2500 years of its existence (almost 2700 years now), has never been anything but the development of the small minority at the expense of the exploited and oppressed great majority; and it is so today more than ever before.”

And that, friends, is the purpose for writing this. Because that needs to change. And you can't change what you don't understand. We hope that this will help young people understand our history so that they can change it.