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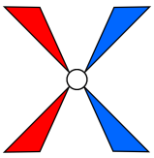

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of this sort pretends that societies are indistinguishable from crowds. That is not how things are. And indeed the main task of the social anthropologist is to demonstrate just how fundamental is the difference between a social group and an unstructured crowd. All actual human societies, as we can now observe them, whether they be large or small, complex or simple, are **hierarchically ordered**. The division of labour is always reflected in differentiation of **status**. Admittedly, ethnography presents us with a few (but very few) examples of **value systems** in which **inequality** of **status** is viewed as a moral evil; but these cases are so exceptional that they probably always represent transient states of society. The followers of a charismatically inspired prophet may, for a while, feel and act as if they were all equally members of God's elect, but if the community is to survive, the "routinization of charisma", to use Weber's term, always recreates a **hierarchically ordered social structure**. In the vast majority of cases **hierarchical inequality** is taken for granted as part of the natural order of things. And this is hardly surprising, for without **hierarchy** there can be no legitimacy, and without legitimacy there can be no enduring **social order**. In a society in which egalitarian notions are taken seriously each individual sees himself as being personally directly inspired by the ultimate divine source of morality. My actions are their own justification. I recognize no human moral authority outside my existential self. There is no allocation of legitimacy to others. Human authority is then an evil in itself and the social relations which constitute the fabric of society are constantly being dissolved. Hence all egalitarian doctrine is fundamentally millenarian, revolutionary and transitional. Despite the claims of the late Chairman Mao the notion of "permanent revolution" is a contradiction in terms. We know very little about the world history of such ideas and their dialectical development, but we do know a good deal about how things have gone in the main literate civilizations over the past four thousand years. We know that, in general, the literati became the bureaucratic agents of the established political order and that they always took it for granted that **hierarchy** is part of the natural order of things. The periodic appearance of literate philosophers who preach the **equality of man** is thus itself a kind of paradox. As has often been noted, such individuals very seldom practise what they preach. The concept of **political freedom**, which is now so frequently bandied around by the coiners of political slogans, was, so far as we know, first developed in Athens in the fourth century BC where at least **two-thirds of the population** had

the status of chattel slaves

. Egalitarian Rousseau lived out his life as **the spoilt plaything** of eccentric aristocrats. Jefferson, whose eloquence on the theme of natural **equality** is constantly reiterated and was even written into the American Declaration of

	Independence, remained **a slave owner** to the end of his life. Marx spent his last thirty years in very comfortable **middle-class circumstances** in Highgate and was an employer of **domestic servants**. What I am getting at is that, in these historical cases, **egalitarian** ideas were tied in with the presumption that the proposition **"all men are born equal"** can be glossed **"all men (who are people like us) are born equal"**. **Equality** does not extend to **natural slaves** or to those who are rated as infantile because of their seemingly intrinsic intellectual limitations. The eighteenth-century revolutionaries in America and France coined some splendid slogans about "government by the people for the people", "no taxation without representation", "one man; one vote" and so on, but after some disastrous preliminary experiments with mob rule, they quickly settled for compromise; only the existing owners of property should be qualified to vote! To some extent it may be that things are now different, but then it could be that parliamentary democracy is no longer a truly viable form of political organization. **Equality** of voting rights certainly does not result in **equality** of power or the disappearance of hierarchy in government. Indeed, in Marxist regimes, despite a certain genuflexion to egalitarian slogans, democracy has become, quite blatantly, a brand name for despotic rule by a self-appointed oligarchy. Prior to the eighteenth century the Europeans seem to have handled the ethnographic aspects of these dilemmas without much difficulty. In the early years of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial expansion the Church militant got itself into some considerable moral tangles, but these did not prove insuperable. The medieval Church had laid down categorical rules about the impropriety of Christians enslaving other Christians but these rules were waived when it became a matter of enslaving black Africans. In their overseas colonies the Portuguese and the Spanish alike took vigorous steps to convert the local inhabitants to Christianity. To that extent at least they recognized, from the start, that these "others" were "men"; but they were only second-class men. As early as the middle of the fifteenth century, as part of a political deal with the King of Congo, the Portuguese actually managed to ordain a black African bishop. But the official church hierarchy strongly disapproved. No other African became a bishop until well on into the twentieth century! "In general, from 1450 onwards, non-European Christians were taught theology to a level at which they might