The Role Of Cooperation In Ancient Societies Essay, Research Paper

Worlds of History by Kevin Reilly

Response to: From Hominids to Human Beings, From Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman, Women and the Agricultural Revolution, From Hammurabi?s Code, From the Upanishads: Karma and Reincarnation, and From the Upanishads: Brahman and Atman

Societies of today are very different from the first civilizations. Pre-historic cultures depended on the cooperation of its people to live. Today, however, everyone is dependent on money. Even though the main focus of each story was distinctly different, they all had a similar view on society. They all felt that cooperation was essential to the survival of their community.

From Hominids to Human Beings revealed how the people of pre-historic civilizations interacted. Pre-historic man was a forager, a hunter-gatherer. They traveled in bands of about twenty-five people and used only transient camps. ?The band, not the nuclear family was the principal social unit.? (Matossian, pg 13). Every member of the band worked together to obtain food. The adults taught the children to be responsive to others needs and share the food with the group. Frans de Waal, a researcher at the Yerkes Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia, traced this behavior back to chimpanzees. ?Chimpanzee groups consist of caring, sharing individuals who form self-policing networks? (pg 13). Despite this fact, chimps share food only when it is to their advantage and cheat whenever they can get away with it. When the cheaters are identified, food is withheld in the next windfall.

Nisa, from From Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman, feels extremely jealous of her newborn brother, Kumsa, and often makes him cry. Nisa felt she wasn?t being paid enough attention to and deprived her brother of milk by nursing. Nisa leaves to live with her grandmother after being berated several times for stealing. She thought that was what her mother wanted, but when she returned her parents told her they wanted her to be with them. ?Yes, even your mother wanted you and missed you.? (Shostak, pg 28).

Later in the story, Nisa?s father arranges a marriage. At that time women were married when they were still young girls. As a result, they were often scared of their husbands and a woman would sleep between the newly married couple. A woman named Nukha layed between Nisa and Bo to show her that she had nothing to be afraid of. Nukha and Bo would bump in Nisa while making love, but Nisa didn?t say anything. She eluded conflict and snuck back to her parents hut. After her parents found out about Nukha and Bo, Nisa stayed with her parents.

In Women and the Agricultural Revolution, women encouraged cooperation by gathering food for the people of their band while the men went out to hunt. Cooperation was necessary for the survival of the band. Each member of the band had a specific responsibility and was expected to carry them out, because the other members were counting on them. ?At harvest time everyone, including the children, would help bring in the grain. The women also continued to gather fruit and nuts, again with the help of the children. The children watched the sheep and goats, but the women did the milking and cheese making.? (Boulding, page 37).

From Hammurabi?s Code is a set of laws of ancient Babylon. Laws are created to facilitate order and cooperation. These laws yields consequeces for anyone who breaks the laws. The theft laws promote cooperation, because most of them have a punishment of death. For example, ?If a man has broken into a house he shall be killed before the breach and buried there.? ( pg 69). The assualt laws reproduce the ?eye for an eye? axiom. ?If a man has knocked out the eye of a patrician, his eye shall be knocked out? (pg 70). Knowing the consequences of your actions would make you more willing to cooperate.

The main idea of From the Upanishads: Karma and Reincarnation is cause and effect. ?Karma meant that the fruits of any thought or actions would inevitably be fulfilled. Good karma would be enhanced; bad karma would lead to more bad karma? (Reilly, pg 94-95). People would lean toward ?doing good? with the hopes of being reborn in a higher life, because the ?doer of good becomes good? (Reilly, pg 95).

?those who are of pleasant conduct here ? the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb; either the womb of a Brahman, or the womb of a Kshatriya, or the womb of a Vaishya. But those who are of stinking conduct here ? the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either a womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcaste? (Reilly, pg 96). People of that time believed in reincarnation and as a result would be more willing to cooperate.

From the Upanishads: Brahman and Atman deals primarily with the religious beliefs of the Upanishads. Religious people are less likely to commit crime and cause trouble, because it goes against their god or gods. These people believed that they could become one with Brahman and wouldn?t do anything that would endanger his or her changes of becoming one with the universal Brahman. ?To him I shall come when I go beyond this life. And to him will come he who has faith and doubts not? (Reilly, pg 97). ?Great is the Gayatri, the most sacred verse of the Vedas; but how much greater is the Infinity of Brahman! A quarter of his being is this whole vast universe: the other three quarters are his heaven of Immortality? (Reilly, pg 96).

It is evident from these readings that cooperation played an important role in the development of civilization as we know it, and will continue to do so.