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The Theory of Mother Right and Its Relevance for Social Psychology¹

Bachofen's *Mother Right*, first published in 1861, shared a remarkable destiny with two other scholarly publications that appeared about the same time: Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* (both in 1859). All three works dealt with specialized scholarly disciplines, but they brought forth reactions from scholars and laymen far beyond the narrow confines of their own speciality.

As far as Marx and Darwin are concerned, this fact is obvious and calls for no further comment. The case of Bachofen is more complicated, for several reasons. First of all, the problem of matriarchy seems to have far less to do with matters that were vital to the maintenance of bourgeois society. Second, enthusiastic approval of the matriarchy theory came from two camps that were radically opposed to each other both ideologically and politically. Bachofen was first discovered and extolled by the Socialist camp—by Marx, Engels, Bebel, and others. Then, after decades of relative obscurity, he was again discovered and extolled by such anti-Socialist philosophers as Klages and Bäumler.

Over against these two extremes stood the official scholarship of the day, forming practically a solid front of rejection or outright ignorance—even among such representatives of the Socialist viewpoint as Heinrich Cunow. In recent years, however, the problem of matriarchy has played an ever-increasing role in scholarly discussions. Some agree with the matriarchal view, some reject it; almost all reveal the emotional involvement with the subject.

It is important to understand why the problem of matriarchy arouses such strong emotional reactions and how it is linked up with vital social interests. We also wish to uncover the underlying reasons why the matriarchy theory won sympathy from both the revolutionary and anti-revolutionary camps. We can then see the relevance of this problem for the study of present-day social structures and their transformations.

One common element in the opposing attitudes to matriarchy is their common distance from bourgeois-democratic society. Such distance is obviously necessary if one wants to investigate and understand a social structure through the testimony of myths, symbols, legal institutions, etc.—certainly, if this society differs radically from bourgeois society not only in specific aspects but in its basic psycho-social traits. Bachofen himself saw this quite clearly. As he says in the Introduction:

An understanding of matriarchal phenomena can be achieved only on one condition. The scholar must be able to renounce entirely the ideas of his own time, the beliefs with which these have filled his spirit, and transfer himself to the midpoint of a completely

different world of thought....The scholar who takes the attitudes of later generations as his starting point will evidently be turned away from an understanding of the earliest time.²

Bachofen's prerequisite was certainly evident in those who rejected their age—whether they looked back to the past as a lost paradise or looked forward hopefully to a better future. But criticism of the present was about the only thing that the two opposing adherents of the matriarchy theory did share. The sharp antagonism between the two groups on every other basic issue suggests that a variety of heterogeneous elements must have been at hand in both the matriarchy theory itself and the subject it dealt with. One group could focus on one aspect of the theory as the decisive element, the other group could focus on another aspect; in this way both could find reasons to advocate the theory.

Conservative authors like Bäumler looked backward to the past for their social ideals. What then were the reasons for their particular sympathy for the matriarchy theory?

Engels gives one answer by pointing to—and criticizing—Bachofen's attitude in favor of religion which Bachofen expresses himself clearly:

There is only one mighty lever of all civilizations, and that is religion. Every rise and every decline of human existence springs from a movement that originates in this supreme sphere. (*Ibid.*, p. 85.)

This attitude is certainly not typical of Bachofen alone. But it is of fundamental importance for his theory, which assumes a close connection between women and religious sentiment:

If especially matriarchate must bear this hieratic imprint, it is because of the essential feminine nature, that profound sense of the divine presence which, merging with the feeling of love, lends woman, and particularly the mother, a religious devotion that is most active in the most barbarous times. (*Ibid.*)

Bachofen thus sees religious aptitude as the distinctive "disposition" of the female, and religion as a specific trait of matriarchy. Nor does Bachofen regard religion simply as a form of cultic worship and consciousness. One of his most brilliant thoughts is his view that a given structure of the human psyche is related to a specific religion—although he turns the relationship upside down and derives the psychic structure from the religion. The Romantic aspect of Bachofen's theory shows up even more clearly in his attitude towards the past: he directs his love and attention, in large measure, to the remotest past of mankind, which he idealizes. Even more significant, he sees respect for the dead as one of the most basic—and admirable—traits of matriarchal cultures. In his treatment of the Lycian matriarchy, he notes that "the whole life-style of a nation can be seen in its attitude towards the world of the dead. Worship of the dead is inseparable from respect for one's ancestors, and the latter is inseparable from love for tradition and a past-oriented outlook." (*Ibid.*, p. 92.)

Deeply rooted in the maternal-tellurian mystery cults he finds "an emphatic accentuation

of the dark, deadly side of nature's life," which is characteristic of the matriarchal outlook. Bäumler clearly points out the difference between the Romantic and the revolutionary outlook in this respect:

If a person wants to understand myths, he must have a deep feeling for the power of the past. In like manner, if a person wants to understand revolutions and revolutionaries, he must have a profound awareness of the future and its potential.

To understand the exact nature of this outlook, a person must clearly see that it is not the only possible conception of history. From a deep feeling for the future one may fashion another conception of history—one that involves active, masculine effort, conscious activity, and revolutionary ideals. In the latter framework, man stands free and unshackled in the present and creates the future out of nothing. In the former framework, man is enfolded in the whole "cycle of birth," in the transmission of blood-descent and time-honored customs; he is a member of some "Whole" that loses itself in the unknown recesses of the past...The dead will be there, if the living so resolve. They are not dead and gone forever from the earth. All one's ancestors still exist. They continue to advise and act in the community of their descendants.³

In Bachofen's conception of the matriarchal psychic structure and the chthonic religion related to it, the decisive feature is the attitude of matriarchal society toward nature, its orientation toward material things as opposed to intellectual and spiritual realities.

Matriarchy is bound up with matter and a religious stage of development that acknowledges only corporeal life...

The triumph of paternity brings with it the liberation of the spirit from the manifestations of nature, a sublimation of human existence over the laws of material life. While the principle of motherhood is common to all spheres of tellurian life, man, by the preponderant position he accords to the begetting potency, emerges from this relationship and becomes conscious of his higher calling. Spiritual life rises over corporeal existence, and the relationship with the lower spheres of existence is restricted to the physical aspect. Maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals; the paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. Here he breaks through the bonds of tellurism and lifts his eyes to the higher regions of the cosmos.⁴

Two traits, therefore, characterize the relationship of matriarchal society to nature: passive surrender to nature; and recognition of natural and biological values, as opposed to intellectual ones. Like the mother, nature is the center of matriarchal culture; and mankind ever remains a helpless child in the face of nature.

In the former [i.e., matriarchal culture] we have confinement to matter, in the latter [i.e., patriarchal culture] we have intellectual and spiritual development. In the former we have unconscious lawfulness; in the latter, individualism. In the former we find abandonment

to nature; in the latter we find exaltation above nature, a breaking of the old barriers, and the painful strivings of Promethean life replacing the constant rest, peaceful pleasure and eternal infantilism in an aging body. The mother's free giving is the exalted hope of the Demeter mystery, which is perceived in the fate of the grain-seed. Hellenic man, on the contrary, wants to win everything, even the most exalted heights, on his own. In struggle he becomes aware of his fatherly nature, and raises himself above Paternalism to which he had once completely belonged, and struggles towards his own divinization. No longer does he look for the spring of immortality in the child-bearing woman; now he looks for it in the male-creative principle, on which he bestows the divinity that was once accorded only to motherhood.⁵

The value system of matriarchal culture fits in with this passive surrender to mother, nature, and earth and to their central role. Only the natural and biological are worthwhile; the spiritual, cultural, and rational are worthless. Bachofen developed this line of thought most clearly and completely in his concept of justice. In contrast with bourgeois natural law, where "nature" is patriarchal society turned into an absolute, matriarchal natural law is characterized by the dominance of instinctual, natural, blood-based values. In matriarchal law there is no logical, reasonable balancing of guilt and atonement; it is dominated by the "natural" principle of the talion, of returning like for like.

This exclusive respect for the bonds of blood in matriarchal "natural law" is shown most impressively by Bachofen in his interpretation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. For the sake of her lover Aegisthus, Clytemnestra slew her husband Agamemnon on his return from the Trojan War. Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, avenged this marital murder by slaying his mother. The Erinyes (or Furies), the ancient maternal goddesses who are now overthrown, pursue Orestes for his deed; on the other hand, he is defended by the new divinities of victorious patriarchy, Apollo and Athena, who sprang from the head of Zeus rather than from a mother's womb. What is the essential conflict here? For matriarchal law, there is only one crime: the violation of the blood bond. The Erinyes do not pursue the faithless wife because "she was not related by blood to the man she slew." Infidelity, however foul, does not concern the Erinyes. But when a person violates the ties of blood, no reasoned balancing of justifiable or excusable motivation can spare the doer from the merciless severity of the natural *lex talionis*.

Gynecocracy is "the realm of love and the blood-bond as opposed to the male-apolloian realm of consciously deliberated action."⁶ Its categories are "tradition, generation, and living interconnectedness through blood and procreations." (*Ibid.*, p. CXIX.) These categories are used in a concrete sense in Bachofen's work. They are removed from the realm of philosophical speculation and elevated to the realm of scholarly investigation into empirical, ethnological documents, thereby investing the latter with new weight. The vague concepts of nature and the "natural" way of life are replaced by the concrete image of the mother and an empirically demonstrable matricentric legal system.

Bachofen did not simply share the Romanticist's past-oriented and nature-centered

outlook. He adopted one of the most fertile ideas of Romanticism as central to his work and developed it far beyond what it had meant in Romantic philosophy. This idea was the distinction between masculine and feminine, which were seen as two qualities that were radically different both in organic nature and in the psychic, spiritual, and intellectual realms. With this conception, the Romantics (and a few representatives of German Idealism) stood in sharp opposition to popular ideas that had espoused in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—especially in France.

The central point of the earlier theories was summed up in the phrase: “Souls have no sex.” A whole series of books had examined the man-woman relationship, and the conclusion was always the same. Male and female did not represent qualities that were distinctively imbedded in the intellect and psyche. Whatever psychic differences were to be found between men and women were to be explained simply and solely in terms of their different training and education. It was this factor that made men and women different, even as it made one group different from another in social life.

This earlier notion about the fundamental sameness of the sexes was closely tied up with a political demand, which, made with varying degrees of intensity, played an important role in the era of bourgeois revolution. The demand was the emancipation of woman, her intellectual, social, and political equality. It is easy enough to see how theory and political cause dovetailed in this case. The theory that woman and man were identical formed the basis for demanding her political equality. But whether it was expressed or only implied, woman’s equality meant that she, in her very essence, was the same as man in bourgeois society. Emancipation did not mean, therefore, that she was free to develop her specific, as yet unknown, traits and potentialities; on the contrary, she was being emancipated in order to become a bourgeois man. The “human” emancipation of woman really meant her emancipation to become a bourgeois male.

Along with a reactionary political development, there was a change in the theory of the relationship between the sexes and of the “nature” of man and woman. In 1793 women’s clubs were shut down in Paris. The theory of basic psychic identity was replaced by the notion that there was a fundamental and unalterable “natural” difference between the sexes.

With the later Romantics, the conception of the fundamental difference between maleness and femaleness was further elaborated by references to historical, sociological, linguistic, mythological, and physiological problems. In contrast to German Idealism and early Romanticism, the meaning of the word “woman” seems to have undergone a change. Whereas formerly “woman” signified her quality as lover, and union with her the experience of authentic “humanness,” it came more and more to mean “mother,” and the bond with her a return to “nature” and harmonious life in nature’s womb.

The Enlightenment had denied sexual differences in the psyche, proclaiming the equality of the sexes, and equating human being with the bourgeois male. This theory was an expression of its efforts to grant social freedom and equality to women. Once bourgeois society had consolidated its gains, and retreated from its progressive political positions, it no longer needed the notion of equality between the sexes. Now it needed a theory propounding

the natural differences between the sexes, in order to have a theoretical basis for the demand for the social inequality of men and women. But while the new theory went deeper psychologically, its fine words about the dignity of woman, etc., merely served to maintain woman in her dependent position as man's servant.

I shall try to indicate later why and how a class society is so closely tied up with male rule over the family. But it should already be clear that any theory propounding the universal significance of sex differences would appeal very strongly to the champions of male, hierarchical class rule. Herein lies one of the important reasons why Bachofen won sympathy from the conservative camp. But it should be pointed out that Bachofen himself largely overcame the potential reactionary interpretation of his theory by exploring the principle the differences between sexes in a radical way and by discovering earlier social and cultural structures in which woman's superiority and authority were evident.

One essential feature of the Romantic conception is that the difference between the sexes is not viewed as something that is socially conditioned or had gradually developed in history; it was supposed to be a biological fact that will never change. Relatively little effort has been made to establish the real nature of masculine and feminine qualities. Some regarded the character of the bourgeois woman as an expression of her "essence." Others pursued a superficial approach to difference between male and female: Fichte, for example, believed that the whole difference was based on their "natural" difference in behavior in the sex act.

The later Romantics equated "woman" with "mother," but they also turned away from vague conclusions and began to undertake empirical investigations of the motherly principle in historical and biological reality. In so doing, they added extraordinary depth to the mother-concept. Especially Bachofen himself, although to some extent sticking to the notion of the "naturalness" of the differences between the sexes, he also arrived at important new insights. One was that woman's nature developed from her real "practice" in life—her early care of the helpless infant, necessitated by the biological situation.

This fact, along with several others already mentioned, should suggest that Bachofen was hardly a full-fledged romantic, as Klages and Bäumler would have us believe. As we shall see, the "blessed" matriarchal society of Bachofen contains many traits that reveal a close kinship with the ideals of socialism. For example, concern for man's material welfare and earthly happiness is presented as one of the central ideas of matriarchal society. On other points, too, the reality of matriarchal society as described by Bachofen is closely akin to Socialist ideals and goals and directly opposed to Romantic and reactionary aims. According to Bachofen, matriarchal society was a primeval democracy where sexuality is free of Christian depreciation, where maternal love and compassion are the dominant moral principles, where injury to one's fellowman is the gravest sin, and where private property does not yet exist. As Kelles Krauz points out,⁷ he characterizes matriarchal society by alluding to the old legend of the sumptuous fruit tree and the miraculous spring: both dried up when men converted them into private property.

Frequently, though by no means always, Bachofen reveals himself to be a dialectic thinker. Note this remark: "In order to be comprehensible, the Demetrian gynococracy demands the

assumption of an earlier, cruder state of affairs that would have been directly opposed to the basic principles of the Demetrian way of life; the latter arose in a struggle against this earlier situation. Thus the historical reality of matriarchy is a testimony of the historical reality of hetaerism.”⁸ Bachofen’s philosophy is akin to that of Hegel in many respects:

The advance from the maternal conception of mankind to a paternal conception was the most important turning point in the history of the relationship between the sexes...In the accentuation of paternity we have the deliverance of the human spirit from the phenomena of nature; in the successful implementation of paternity we have the elevation of human existence above the laws of corporeal life. (*Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.)

For Bachofen, the supreme goal of man’s destiny is “the elevation of earthly existence to the purity of the divine father-principle.” (*Ibid.*, p. 57.) He sees the victory of the paternal-spiritual principle over the maternal-material principle realized historically in the victory of Rome over the Orient—particularly over Carthage and Jerusalem:

It was a Roman thought that spurred Europeans to put their stamp on the whole earth. The thought was simply this: that only the free rule of the spirit, not any physical law, determines the fate of peoples. (*Ibid.*, p. 571.)

There is obviously a sharp contradiction between the Bachofen who admires gynocratic democracy and the aristocratic Bachofen of Basel who opposed the political emancipation of woman and who said: “By force of circumstances, democracy always paves the way for tyranny; my ideal is a republic ruled, not by the many, but by the best citizens.”⁹ It is a contradiction that crops up on several different planes. On the philosophical plane, it is the believing Protestant and Idealist over against the Romantic; and the dialectic philosopher over against the naturalistic metaphysician. On the social and political plane, it is the anti-Democrat over against the admirer of a Communist-democratic social structure. On the moral plane, it is the proponent of Protestant-Bourgeois morality over against the advocate of a society where sexual freedom reigned instead of monogamous marriage.

Unlike Klages and Bäumler, Bachofen makes no effort to harmonize these contradictions. The fact that he lets them stand is one reason why he won such wide approval from those Socialists who sought, not reform, but a thoroughgoing change of society’s social and psychic structure.

The fact that Bachofen embodied such contradictions and scarcely tried to hide them is essentially due to the psychological and economic conditions of his personal existence. The breadth of his human and intellectual range is considerable, but his predilection for matriarchy apparently stemmed from his intense fixation on his own mother: he did not marry until he was forty, after the death of his mother. Moreover, his inheritance of ten million dollars permitted him to remain aloof from certain bourgeois ideals, and such aloofness was a necessity for any admirer of matriarchy. On the other hand, this patrician of Basel was so thoroughly rooted in his entrenched patriarchal tradition that he could not help

but remain loyal to the traditional Protestant-bourgeois ideals. Neo-Romantics, such as Schuler, Klages, and Bäumler, saw only the Bachofen who propounded irrationalism, surrender to nature, and the exclusive rule of naturalist values based on the blood bond and earthly ties. They solved the problem of Bachofen's contradictions by adopting a one-sided interpretation of him.¹⁰

The Socialists, too, recognized the "mystic" side of Bachofen, but they directed their attention and sympathy to Bachofen the ethnologist and psychologist—i.e., to that part of his work that accounts for his importance in the history of scholarship.

It was Friedrich Engels, more than anyone else, who made Bachofen's work known in the nineteenth century. In his *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels asserts that the history of the family dates from Bachofen's mother right. Naturally, he criticizes Bachofen's idealist position, which derives social relationships from religion, but says:

None of this, however, detracts from his ground-breaking work. He was the first to replace an unknown primeval state with a state of sexual intercourse unbound by rules. He did this by pointing out that ancient classical literature gives us many indications that monogamy was preceded by a prior state among the Greeks and Asians. In this prior state, not only did men have sexual relations with more than one woman, but women also had sexual relations with more than one man, without infringing against the mores. Furthermore, he has shown us that the line of descent originally was traced only through the female line, from mother to mother, and that the exclusive validity of the female line of descent continued for a long time—even into the eras of monogamy when the knowledge of paternity was well established. This original position of the mother, in which she was the only sure parent of the child, ensured to mothers (and hence to women) a higher social status than they have ever had since then. Bachofen, to be sure, does not spell out these theses so explicitly, because his mystical outlook prevented him from doing so. But he did establish them, and this was a revolutionary step in 1861.

Sixteen years later the American ethnologist, Lewis H. Morgan, demonstrated the existence of a matriarchal social structure in a very different area; and he used methods that were quite different from those of Bachofen. His book, *Ancient Society*, was thoroughly studied by Marx and Engels, and served as the basis for Engels' work on the family. Commenting on the matriarchal *gens* discovered by Morgan, Engels remarked that it had "the same significance for prehistory that Darwin's theory of evolution had for biology and that Marx's theory of surplus work had for political economy." There could be no higher praise from Engels, who went on to say: "The matriarchal *yens* has become the central point around which the whole science turns. We now know where to look, what to look for, and how to organize and group our findings."

It was not only Engels who was impressed by the discovery of matriarchy Marx left behind a whole series of critical notes, which Engels utilized in his work. Bebel grounded his

socialist best-seller, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Woman and Socialism), on the theory of matriarchate. Similarly, Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, wrote about the "awesome role of priestess and guardian of the mysteries that woman had in the primitive community"¹¹ and her attaining this role again in a future society. Kelles-Krauz asserted that Bachofen dug under the bourgeois renaissance and unearthed the precious seeds of a new revolutionary renaissance: the renaissance of the Communist spirit. (*Ibid.*, p. 524.)

What accounts for the Socialists' favorable attitude toward the matriarchal theory? The first thing, as we noted earlier in connection with the Romantics, was their emotional and ideological distance from bourgeois society. Bachofen had pointed out the relativity of existing societal relationships. He had underlined the fact that monogamous marriage was not an eternal "natural" institution at all. Such a view could only be welcomed by a theory and political activity that advocated a fundamental change of the existing social structure. In Bachofen's own political position, this was a problematic aspect of his theory:

The exclusivity of the marital bond seems so indispensable, so intimately tied up with the nobility of human nature and its lofty vocation, that most people regard it as the original state of affairs. The assertion that there were deeper, unfettered relations between the sexes is regarded as a dismally erroneous or useless speculation on the beginnings of human existence; so it is stuffed off as a bad dream. Who wouldn't like to adopt the common view, to spare our species from the painful memory of its shameful early days? But the evidence of history prevents us from giving in to the promptings of pride and egotism, from doubting the painfully slow progress of man towards higher marital morality.¹²

Aside from the fact that the theory of matriarchy underlined the relativity of the bourgeois social structure, its very special content could not but win the sympathy of Marxists. First of all it had discovered a period when woman had been the authority and focal point of society, rather than the slave of man and an object for barter; this lent important support to the struggle for woman's political and social emancipation. The great battle of the eighteenth century had to be picked up afresh by those who were fighting for a classless society.

In terms of its psycho-social foundations, the patriarchal social structure is closely bound up with the class character of present-day society. This society is based, to an important degree, on specific psychic attitudes that are partially rooted in unconscious drives; and these psychic attitudes effectively complement the external coerciveness of the governmental apparatus. The patriarchal family is one of the most important loci for producing the psychic attitudes that operate to maintain the stability of class society.¹³

Let me focus on the most important aspect. We are dealing here with an emotional complex that might well be called the "patricentric" complex. Characteristically, it includes the following elements: affective dependence on fatherly authority, involving a mixture of anxiety, love and hate; identification with paternal authority vis-à-vis weaker ones; a strong and strict super-ego whose principle is that duty is more important than happiness; guilt feelings, reproduced over and over again by the discrepancy between the demands of the super-ego and those of reality, whose effect is to keep people docile to authority. It is this psycho-social condition that explains why the family is almost universally regarded as the

foundation (or at least one of the important supports) of society; it also explains why any theoretical assault on the family, such as Bachofen's theory, would necessarily win the support of Socialist writers.

Of particular importance for our problem is the picture which Bachofen as well as Morgan give of the social, psychic, moral, and political relationships characteristic of matriarchy. But while Bachofen looks back nostalgically toward this earlier societal stage and regards it as having gone forever, Morgan talks about a higher stage of civilization that is yet to come: "It will be a recurrence, but on a higher level, of the freedom, equality and brotherhood characteristic of the ancient *gens*." Bachofen himself graphically describes these traits of freedom, equality, and brotherhood that were to be found in matriarchal society, whose governing principles are not anxiety and submissiveness, but love and compassion:¹⁴

Bachofen's favorable reception among socialists was also helped by the decisive role of concern for man's material happiness on earth played in matriarchal society. Even though on the theoretical level, this naturalistic materialism, rooted in the mother's energy dedicated to the betterment of man's material life, is basically different from dialectic materialism, but it contains an acceptable social hedonism that explains why it was so well received by the proponents of socialism.

Some general remarks seem to be in order concerning the principle of a complete lack of sexual restrictions, which Bachofen attributes to early gynocratic society. It would certainly be erroneous to maintain that restrictions in the sexual sphere are to be explained purely in terms of the existence and nature of class society, and that a classless society would necessarily restore the unlimited sexual relations described by Bachofen. On the other hand, we must say that a morality which deprecates and devalues sexual pleasure does perform an important role in maintaining a class society and that any attack on this morality, such as Bachofen's theory certainly was, would be a further reason for his favorable reception among the Socialists.

Sexuality offers one of the most elementary and powerful opportunities for satisfaction and happiness. If it were permitted to the full extent required for the productive development of the human personality, rather than limited by the need to maintain control over the masses, the fulfillment of this important opportunity for happiness would necessarily lead to intensified demands for satisfaction and happiness in other areas of life. Since the satisfaction of these further demands would have to be achieved through material means, these demands of themselves would lead to the breakup of the existing social order. Closely allied to this is another social function of restrictions on sexual satisfaction. Insofar as sexual pleasure as such is declared to be something sinful, while sexual desires remain perpetually operative in every human being, moral prohibitions always become a source of production for guilt feelings, which are often unconscious, or transferred to different matters.

These guilt feelings are of great social importance. They account for the fact that suffering is experienced as just punishment for one's own guilt, rather than blamed on the defects of the social organization. They eventually cause emotional intimidation, limiting people's intellectual—and especially their critical—capacities, while developing an emotional

attachment to the representatives of social morality.

Let me add one final pertinent viewpoint. The clinical investigations of psychoanalytic individual psychology have been able to give us some indications that the suppression or acceptance of sexual satisfaction has important consequences for man's drives and character structure.¹⁵ The development of the "genital character" is conditioned by the absence of sexual restraints, which impede the optimal development of a person. Among the qualities undoubtedly belonging to the genital character is psychic and intellectual independence, whose social relevance needs no further emphasis. On the other hand, the suppression of genital sexuality leads to the development or intensification of such instinctual tendencies as the anal, the sadistic and the latent homosexual, which are of decisive importance for the instinctual basis of present-day society.

Whatever the present status of matriarchy research, however, it seems certain that there are societal structures which can be called matricentric. And if we are to understand the social structures of the present day and their transformations, attention should be given to the present and future findings of this research.

The libidinal strivings of human beings are among the social "productive forces" in society. By virtue of their flexibility and changeability, they can adapt themselves considerably to the existing economic and social situation of the group—though there are limits to this adaptability. The psychic structure shared by the members of a social group represents an indispensable support for the maintenance of social stability. This structure, of course, is a support for stability only so long as the contradictions between the psychic structure and economic conditions do not go beyond a certain threshold; if this threshold is passed, the psychic forces tend to change or dissolve the existing order; it is important, though, to remember that the psychic structures of different classes can be radically different or even opposed to each other, depending on their function in the social process.

Although the individual is psychically different from the members of his own group, because of his individual constitution and personal life experiences—particularly those of early childhood—a large sector of his psychic structure is the product of adaptation to the situation of his class and the whole society in which he lives. Our knowledge about the factors determining the psychic structure of a given class or society, and hence about the psychic "productive forces" that are operative in a given society, is far less advanced than our knowledge about economic and social structures. One of the reasons for this is that the student of these problems is himself molded by the psychic structure typical for his society; accordingly, he comprehends only that which is like him. He easily makes the mistake of regarding his own psychic structure, or that of his society, as "human nature." He can readily overlook the fact that, under different social conditions, quite different drive structures have been and can be operative as productive forces.

The study of "matricentric" cultures is important for the social sciences. Because it brings to light psychic structures that are wholly different from those observed in our society; at the same time, it throws new light on the "patricentric" principle.

The patricentric complex is a psychic structure in which one's relationship to the father (or

his psychological equivalents) is the central relationship. In his concept of the (positive) Oedipus complex, Freud uncovered one of the decisive features of this structure—although he overestimated its universality because he lacked the necessary distance from his own society. The sexual impulses of the male infant, which are directed to his mother as the first and most important female “love-object,” cause him to regard his father as a rival. This constellation acquires its characteristic significance from the further fact that in the patriarchal family the father simultaneously functions as the authority who governs the child’s life. Quite apart from the physiological impossibility of the fulfillment of the child’s wishes, the father’s dual role has another affect that Freud pointed out: the child’s desire to take the place of his father leads him to identify with his father to some degree. The child introjects the father, insofar as the latter is the representative of moral dictates, and this introjection is a powerful source for the formation of conscience. But since this process is only partially successful, the child’s rivalry with the father leads to the development of an ambivalent emotional attitude. On the one hand, the child wants to be loved by his father; on the other hand, he more or less openly rebels against him.

However, the patricentric complex is also shaped by the psychic processes going on in the father himself. For one thing, he is jealous of his son. This is partly due to the fact that his lifeline is on the wane by comparison with that of his son. But an even more important cause of this jealousy is socially conditioned: it stems from the fact that the child’s life situation is relatively free of social obligations. It is clear that this jealousy is greater where the weight of paternal responsibilities is heavier.

Still more important in determining the father’s attitude toward his son are social and economic factors. Depending on economic circumstances, the son is either the heir to his father’s estate or the future provider for his father in sickness and old age. He represents a sort of capital investment. From an economic viewpoint, the sums invested in his education and professional training are quite akin to those contributed toward accident insurance and old-age pensions.

Moreover, the son plays an important role insofar as the father’s social prestige is concerned. His contributions to society and the concomitant social recognition can increase his father’s prestige; his social failure can diminish or even destroy his father’s prestige. (An economically or socially successful marriage by the son plays an equivalent role.)

Because of the son’s social and economic function, the goal of his education is ordinarily not his personal happiness—i.e., the maximum development of his own personality; it is rather his maximum usefulness in contributing to the father’s economic or social needs. Frequently, therefore, we find an objective conflict between the son’s happiness and his usefulness; but this conflict is usually not consciously noticed by the father, since the ideology of his society leads him to see both goals as identical. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the father frequently identifies himself with his son: he expects his son not only to be socially useful, but also to fulfill his own unsatisfied wishes and fantasies.

These social functions of the son play a decisive role in the quality of the father’s love: he

loves his son on the condition that the son fulfill the expectations that are centered around him. If this is not the case, the father's love can end, or even turn to disdain or hate.¹⁶

The conditional nature of paternal love typically leads to two results: (1) loss of the psychic security that comes from the knowledge that one is loved unconditionally; (2) intensification of the role of conscience—i.e., the person develops an outlook in which the fulfillment of duty becomes the central concern of life, because only that can provide some minimum guarantee of being loved. But even maximal fulfillment of the demands of conscience will not prevent guilt feelings from arising, because the person's performance will always fall short of the ideals set before him.

By contrast, a mother's love for the child is typically¹⁷ of a wholly different character. This is due, first and foremost, to the fact that it is completely unconditional in the first few years of life. Mother's care of the helpless infant is not dependent on any moral or social obligations to be carried out by the child; there is not even an obligation to return her love. The unconditional nature of motherly love is a biological necessity which may also foster a propensity for unconditional love in the woman's emotional disposition. The certainty that mother's (or her psychological equivalent's) love is not dependent on any conditions means that the fulfillment of moral dictates plays a much smaller role, since it is not the condition for being loved.

The traits just described differ sharply from the image of the mother that is cherished in present-day patricentric society. Basically, this society only knows about courage and heroism on the part of the man (in whom these qualities are really tinged with a large dose of narcissism). The image of the mother, on the other hand, has been a distorted one of sentimentality and weakness. In place of unconditional motherly love, which embraces not only one's own children but all children and all human beings, we find the specifically bourgeois sentiment of possessiveness injected into the mother image.

This change in the mother image represents a socially conditioned distortion of the mother-child relationship. A further consequence of this distortion—and also an expression of the Oedipus complex—is the attitude in which the desire to be loved by the mother is replaced by the desire to protect her and place her on a pedestal. No longer does the mother have the function of protecting; now she is to be protected and kept "pure." This reaction formation (distorting the original relationship to one's mother) is also extended to other mother symbols, such as country, nation, and the soil; and it plays an important role in the extremely patricentric ideologies of the present day. Mother and her psychological equivalents have not disappeared in these ideologies, but they have changed their function from protecting figures to figures in need of protection.

Summing up, we can say that the patricentric individual—and society—is characterised by a complex of traits in which the following are predominant: a strict super-ego, guilt feelings, docile love for paternal authority, desire and pleasure at dominating weaker people, acceptance of suffering as a punishment for one's own guilt, and a damaged capacity for happiness. The matricentric complex, by contrast, is characterised by a feeling of optimistic trust in mother's unconditional love, far fewer guilt feelings, a far weaker super-ego, and a

greater capacity for pleasure and happiness. Along with these traits there also develops the ideal of motherly compassion and love for the weak and others in need of help.¹⁸

While both types may well be found in any given society—depending primarily on the child’s family constellation—it does seem that, as an average type, each is characteristic for a particular type of society. The patricentric type is probably dominant in bourgeois-Protestant society, while the matricentric type would play a relatively major role in the Middle Ages and in southern European society today. This leads us to Weber’s treatment of the connection between bourgeois capitalism and the Protestant work ethos, in contrast to the connection between Catholicism and the work ethos of Catholic countries.

Whatever objections may be raised against specific theses of Weber, the fact of such a connection is now an assured part of scholarly knowledge. Weber himself treated the problem on the conscious and ideological level. But a complete understanding of the interrelationship can only be achieved by an analysis of the drive that serves as the basis for bourgeois-capitalism and the Protestant spirit.

While Catholicism also exhibits many patricentric traits—God the Father, hierarchy of male priests, etc.—the important role of the matricentric complex in it cannot be denied. The Virgin Mary and the Church herself psychologically represent the great Mother who shelters all her children in her bosom. Indeed, certain maternal traits are ascribed to God himself—though not in a conscious way. The individual “son of the Church” can be sure of Mother Church’s love, so long as he remains her child or returns to her bosom. This child relationship is effected sacramentally. To be sure, moral dictates play a major role. But a complicated mechanism operates to insure that these dictates retain their necessary social weight while, at the same time, the individual believer can have the certainty of being loved without reference to the moral sphere. Catholicism produces guilt feelings in no small measure; at the same time, however it provides the means for freeing oneself from these feelings. The price one must pay is affective attachment to the Church and her servants.

Protestantism, on the other hand, has done a thorough job of expurgating the matricentric traits of Christianity. Mother substitutes, such as the Virgin Mary or the Church, have disappeared, as have maternal traits in God. At the center of Luther’s¹⁹ theology we find doubt or despair that sinful man can have any certainty of being loved. And there is only one remedy: faith.²⁰ In Calvinism and many other Protestant sects, this remedy proves to be insufficient. It is complemented in a decisive way by the role assigned to the fulfillment of one’s duty (“innerworldly asceticism”), and by the necessity for “success” in secular life as the only proof of God’s favor and grace.²¹

The rise of Protestantism is conditioned by the same social and economic factors that made possible the rise of the “spirit” of capitalism. And, like every religion, Protestantism has the function of continually reproducing and strengthening the drive structure that is necessary for a particular society. The patricentric complex—in which fulfillment of duty and success are the major driving forces of life, while pleasure and happiness play a secondary role—represents one of the most powerful productive forces behind the enormous economic and cultural efforts of capitalism. Until the capitalist era, people (e.g., slaves) had to be compelled

by physical force to dedicate every ounce of energy to economically useful work. Through the influence of the patricentric complex, people began to show the same total dedication of their own “free will,” because the external compunction was now internalized. The internalization was effected most completely among the ruling classes of bourgeois society, who were the authentic representatives of the specifically bourgeois work ethos. In contrast to external force, however, the internalization process led to a different result: Fulfilling the dictates of conscience offered a satisfaction that contributed greatly to the solidification of the patricentric structure.²²

This satisfaction, however, was quite limited, because fulfillment of duty and economic success were poor substitutes for traits now lost: the capacity to enjoy life, and the inner security derived from knowing that one is loved unconditionally. Moreover, the spirit of *homo homini lupus* led to personal isolation and an incapacity for love—a heavy psychic burden on the psyche, which tended to undermine the patricentric structure, even though the decisive factors operating to undermine the structure were rooted in economic changes.

While patricentric structure had been the psychic driving force behind the economic achievements of bourgeois-Protestant society, at the same time it produced the conditions that would destroy the patricentric structure and lead to a renaissance of a matricentric one. The growth of man’s productive capacity made it possible, for the first time in history, to visualize the realization of a social order that previously had only found expression in fairy tales and myths, an order where all men would be provided with the material means necessary for their real happiness, with relatively little expenditure of individual effort in actual labor, where men’s energies would be expended primarily in developing their human potential rather than in creating the economic goods that are absolutely necessary for the existence of a civilization.

The most progressive philosophers of the French enlightenment outgrew the emotional and ideological complex of the patricentric structure. But the real, full-fledged representative of the new matricentric tendencies proved to be the class whose motive for total dedication to work was prompted basically by economic considerations rather than by an internalized compunction: the working class. This same emotional structure provided one of the conditions for the effective influence of Marxist socialism on the working class—insofar as its influence depended on the specific nature of their drive structure.

The psychic basis²³ of the Marxist social program was predominantly the matricentric complex. Marxism is the idea that if the productive capabilities of the economy were organized rationally, every person would be provided with a sufficient supply of the goods he needed—no matter what his role in the production process was; furthermore, all this could be done with far less work on the part of each individual than had been necessary up to now, and finally, every human being has an unconditional right to happiness in life, and this happiness basically resides in the “harmonious unfolding of one’s personality”—all these ideas were the rational, scientific expression of ideas that could only be expressed in fantasy under earlier economic conditions: Mother Earth gives all her children what they need, without regard for their merits.

It is this connection between matricentric tendencies and Socialist ideas that explains why the “materialist-democratic” character of matriachal societies led Socialist authors to express such warm sympathy for the theory of matriarchy.

¹ “The Theory of Mother Right and Its Relevance for Social Psychology”, was first published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Hirschfeld-Leipzig, 1934.

² J. J. Bachofen, *op. cit.*, p. 81, 82.

³ Cited in J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient and Okzident*, ed. Manfred Schroeder, Munich, 1926, pp. CXII, CXVIII.

⁴ J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

⁵ J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁶ Bäumler, as cited in J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident*, *op. cit.*, p. CCXXXIII.

⁷ Kelles-Krauz, *Neue Zeit*, 1901-1902, I 522.

⁸ J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁹ Kelles-Krauz, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

¹⁰ Klages, who regards rational thought (*Geist*) as the destroyer of “soul” handles the problem by regarding Bachofen’s naturalistic metaphysics as the essential kernel of his thought, and viewing Bachofen’s Protestant idealism as secondary and incidental. Bäumler, who attacks Klages’s interpretation, truncates Bachofen’s thought even more severely. While Klages at least sees the anti-Protestant and anti-Idealist Bachofen, Bäumler argues from his basically patricentric outlook and regards as incidental the most important part of Bachofen’s work: his historical and psychological statements about matriarchal society. He sees importance only in Bachofen’s naturalist metaphysics, and dismisses the depiction of woman as the center and connecting link of the most ancient civil organization as a false assumption. To Bäumler it is also very doubtful that monogamy should not be found at the very start of human history. For him, matriarchy as a social reality is quite incidental:

Chthonic religion continues to be of decisive importance for an understanding of primitive and pre-history, even if it turns out that there never was any Indo-European matriarchy. Bachofen’s explanation is wholly independent of ethnological and linguistic findings in its most basic aspects, for the bases of his explanation do not rest upon hypotheses of a sociological or historical nature...The bases of Bachofen’s philosophy of history lie in his metaphysics. The profundity of this metaphysics is the main point. His errors in the area of the philosophy of culture [i.e., his sociological and historical errors] are easily set right. A scholarly work on the beginnings of the human race, which was totally free of error, would leave nothing to be corrected; but it would provide nothing worth noticing either. (J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident*, *op. cit.*, p. CCLXXX.)

Bachofen “went too far” with his theory when he attributed to woman the first advance of the human race. This, notes Bäumler, is a “false hypothesis.” The important thing is not the mother as a real socially and psychologically important phenomenon, but the religious category of “mother,” with which Bachofen has enriched the conscious awareness of mankind and the philosophy of history in particular. We are not surprised when Bäumler condemns as typically “Oriental” the affirmation and approval of sexuality, which Bachofen regards as an essential trait of matriarchy, and when he explains Bachofen’s openness to sexual matters in such terms as his own personal “purity.”

¹¹ Cited by Kelles-Krauz, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹² J. J. Bachofen, *Der Mythos von Orient und Okzident*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹³ See Chapter IX [The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology].

¹⁴ The relationship which stands at the origin of all culture, of every virtue, of every nobler aspect of existence, is that between mother and child, it operates in a world of violence as the divine principle of love, of union, of peace. Raising her young, the woman learns earlier than the man to extend her loving care beyond the limits of the ego to another creature, and to direct whatever gift of invention she possesses to the preservation and improvement of this other’s existence. Woman at this stage is the repository of all culture, of all benevolence, of all devotion, of all concern for the living and grief for the dead. Yet the love that arises from motherhood is not only more intense, but also more universal.... Whereas the paternal principle is inherently restrictive, the maternal principle is universal; the paternal principle implies limitation to definite groups, but the maternal principle, like the life of nature, knows no barriers. The idea of motherhood produces a sense of universal fraternity among all men, which dies with the development of paternity. The family based on father right is a closed individual organism, whereas the matriarchal family bears the typically universal character that stands at the beginning of all development and distinguishes material life from higher spiritual life. Every woman’s womb, the mortal image of the earth mother Demeter, will give brothers and sisters to the children of every other woman; the homeland will know only brothers and sisters until the day when the development of the paternal system dissolves the undifferentiated unity of the mass and introduces a principle of articulation.

The matriarchal cultures present many expressions and even juridical formulations of this aspect of the maternal principle. It is the basis of the universal freedom and equality so frequent among matriarchal peoples, of their hospitality, and of their aversion to restrictions of all sorts....And in it is rooted the admirable sense of kinship and sympatheia (fellow feeling) which knows no barriers or dividing lines and embraces all members of a nation alike. Matriarchal states were particularly famed for their freedom from intestine strife and conflict....The matriarchal peoples—and this is no less characteristic—assigned special culpability to the physical injury of one’s fellow men or even of animals....An air of tender humanity, discernible even in the facial expression of Egyptian statuary, permeates the culture of the matriarchal world. (J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right*, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81.)

¹⁵ See Chapter IX [The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology].

¹⁶ This also accounts for the fact that the “favorite son”—the one who best fulfills his father’s expectations—is a characteristic phenomenon in a patricentric culture.

¹⁷ Obviously, I am talking here about paternal or maternal love in an ideal sense. The love of a particular father or mother will fall far short of this ideal presentation—for a wide variety of reasons.

¹⁸ The patricentric type is related to the “anal character” and the “compulsive character” in psychoanalytic terminology, while the matricentric type is related to the “oral character.” However, the latter is wholly different from the “oral-sadistic” character type. The oral-sadistic person, who has a parasitic quality wants only to take and is unwilling to give. He reacts with rage when his wishes are denied, not with grief as the matricentric type does.

However, there is a basic difference between the typology based on pregenital character structures and the matricentric and patricentric typology. The former signifies a pregenital fixation to the oral or anal level, and it is basically opposed to the mature, “genital character.” The latter conceived in terms of the dominant object relationship, does not stand in basic opposition to the genital character. The matricentric type *can be* an oral character; in that case the person is more or less passive, dependent and in need of the help of others. But the matricentric type can also be a “genital” character: i.e., psychically mature, active, not neurotic or arrested.

The typology chosen here disregards the question of the degree of maturity, and focuses on one aspect of the contents of the character structure. A complete presentation would, of course, have to deal with the differences between genital and pregenital character within both the matricentric and the patricentric type respectively. Here we cannot enter into a full discussion of the various psychoanalytic categories (see W. Reich. *Charakteranalyse*, Vienna, 1933). I do believe, however, that a typology based on objectrelationships, rather than on “erogenous zones” or on clinical symptomatology, offers fruitful possibilities for social research. Also, we cannot discuss here the interesting problem of the relationship between our suggested types and Kretschmer’s schizothymic and cyclothymic, Jaensch’s integrated and disintegrated, and Jung’s introverted and extroverted.

¹⁹ Psychologically speaking, Luther was an extremely patricentric type. An ambivalent attitude toward the father pervades his life. It manifests itself in the fact that he always focused on two father figures at the same time: one whom he loves, the other one whom he hates and disdains. He has no understanding at all for the notion of enjoying life, or for a culture in which such pleasure plays a central role; thus he himself is one of the great haters. He is related to the compulsive-neurotic, homosexual type; but that does not mean to say that he himself was a compulsive-neurotic or a homosexual in the clinical sense.

²⁰ The full significance of the thesis “justification through faith alone” can only be explained in terms of compulsive-neurotic thought mechanisms and their accompanying doubts. We cannot go into greater detail here.

Today I would make a significant addition to this interpretation. Precisely because of Luther’s ambivalence (to the father figure, hate against his father and the authorities of the Catholic Church, and friendliness toward the secular princes, accompanied by hate against

the rebellious peasants) he yearned for the unconditional love from mother. Only in it could he feel the security of being loved. As we have seen, motherly love is given, or not, but it cannot be acquired by pleasing her or other “good works.” For Luther it seems God’s grace represented motherly love which could not be attained by good works, but only by an act of faith that one was the recipient of God’s grace. Behind the conscious facade of a strictly patricentric religion, the unconscious yearning for mother’s love “returned,” in Luther’s theology. (Cf. Freud’s “return of the repressed.”) But while in Catholic theology there was also a need for mother’s love, represented by the motherly aspects of the Church, Luther on the contrary could not expect father’s love because of his own rebelliousness, so that motherly love was necessarily his only chance of being loved at all. Since she was the contrary of a warm, loving mother, this hope was a desperate one and sustained only by Luther’s feeling of being powerless, worthless, in other words, an infant thrown on his mother’s mercy. Yet by removing the mother symbols from religion he opened the way for a radically patriarchal society.

²¹ In terms of our present problems, the Jewish religion has quite a complicated character. It clearly bears the stamp of a reaction against the matricentric religions of the Near East. Its concepts of God, like that of Protestantism, contains only fatherly-male traits.

On the other hand, the image of the great mother has not been wiped out; it is retained in the notion of the holy land, flowing “with milk and honey.” Here the decisive thought of the Jewish religion is this: We have sinned, and God has driven us out of our land as a punishment; but he will return us to that land when we have suffered enough. This land visualized in the Prophetic literature as one which has all the qualities of the fertile, never frustrating soil, has taken on the role of the Great Mother of matriarchal religions.

In the Messianic concept and the faith in the return to the Holy Land (characterized by painless childbirth, and the cessation of the necessity of work), the idea of an unconditionally loving mother was preserved.

²² When I talk about work and work ethos here, I am referring to a specific, concrete historical phenomenon: the bourgeois notion of work. Work certainly has many other psychic functions that are not considered here. It is an expression of social responsibility and a chance for creative activity. There is a work ethos in which these aspects are the dominant ones.

²³ It should be obvious that these psychological considerations deal only with psychic productive forces; they do not explain socialism as a psychological phenomenon, nor do they seek to replace rational discussion of its theories with a psychological interpretation.