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EQUALITY, HIERARCHY AND TEMPERAMENT

ROBERT PARKIN

IN addition to his wide-ranging scholarly interests, Andrew Duff-Cooper had a lively concern for the values of equality and liberty that have always informed the best anthropology. This was no mere lip-service by the intellectual in him: it shaped both the way he chose to live and the regard he showed for others in his personal relationships. He was, of course, too much of a scholar to allow these values to intrude crassly into his academic writings. None the less, when it came to the Balinese of Lombok, whom he lived with and studied for many years, he was ever keen to stress that, for them, equality was ultimately paramount. Although social divisions, hierarchies and categorical distinctions could certainly be found in their life and thought, they considered these things to be ultimately superficial and insignificant when compared with the common and collective humanity they all shared. Furthermore, their sense of equality was not linked to ideals of individualism and self-sufficiency, as in the West, but to ones of interdependence and mutual support (see, for example, Duff-Cooper 1985: 159, 161). He perhaps felt it especially necessary to drive the point home in view of the fact that the Balinese are counted among those Indonesian societies that have adopted some semblance of Indian caste society into their scheme of values.

Caste, as is well known, entails a very microscopic form of hierarchy, one which Louis Dumont (e.g. 1986) has regularly opposed to the individualism and egalitarianism of the West. These Western values often appear in a somewhat unfavourable light in Dumont's work, and this, together with his insistence on the unavoidability of hierarchy, has led many to wonder where his own sympathies really lie. Writing in 1985 for *Contexts and Levels* (Barnes, de Coppet and Parkin

(eds.) 1985), a collection of essays devoted mainly to ethnographic tests of Dumont's very specific view of hierarchy, Duff-Cooper entered the lists of the sceptics, a stand that was developed further in some of his subsequent essays (e.g. 1988, 1990). He was, of course, not alone in his strictures against this aspect of Dumont's work, but some of his arguments raise points of special interest that are worth exploring further. Moreover, the general debate over the nature of hierarchy cannot simply be of narrow academic concern in a world still beset with the greatest difficulties in implementing the values of equality and liberty that have come to be seen as so necessary for its survival. If anthropology hopes to make a contribution here, it must first get straight the terms of its own discourse. Duff-Cooper greatly savoured such arguments, and he was more honest and forthright than most in discussing them—one of the reasons why he will be so greatly missed. I believe he would have appreciated those that follow here, though without being able to agree with them entirely. I therefore have no hesitation in dedicating this essay to his memory.

It is well known that Dumont's view of hierarchy is more than simply a matter of social stratification, though this is obviously included (see his 1986: chs. 8 and 9, for particularly succinct statements). Rather, it entails the asymmetry, the difference in value, that necessarily, in Dumont's view, accompanies any differentiation—male–female, for example, or right–left, or white–black. This means that true equality depends crucially on the refusal to recognize difference. This approach is theoretically more elaborate than the conventional one that treats such oppositions as simply asymmetric, which Dumont associates especially with Needham (e.g. his (ed.) 1973). There has no doubt been much mutual misunderstanding of the two positions, but for Dumont the latter approach is inadequate because differentiation is initially seen as symmetric, the asymmetry being added on only subsequently. In fact, he says, differentiation and valuing form a single operation, not a two-stage process. Furthermore, the poles are not simply asymmetric in value but otherwise comparable. Together they form a universe of discourse of a sort that is normally represented by the superior pole alone, and this pole 'encompasses its contrary'. The result is what Dumont refers to as a 'hierarchical opposition'.

One of the handiest examples is 'man–woman' in the English language: 'man' is opposed to 'woman', of course, but it can also stand for both in contexts where the meaning refers to the whole of humanity, in which case it 'encompasses' the term 'woman'. Here, humanity stands for the whole to which both terms refer in different ways, this being another important aspect of the Dumontian approach. Evans-Pritchard's work on the Nuer provides another example, one that involves right and left. The spear held by the right hand at the calling out of ox names is an extension of that hand and as such represents the whole person, and even the

clan to which he belongs. Right is also opposed to left, of course, but it is not a simple opposition—right is both part (opposed to left) and whole (including left) (see Dumont 1986: 228–9). Perhaps the best-known and most discussed example in Dumont's inventory is the opposition between Brahman and Kshatriya in India, in which the Brahman stands for the whole ideology but submits to the Kshatriya (representative of the royal function, and therefore of power) in certain situations that are, however, themselves subordinate overall (see especially Dumont 1972). Indeed, in certain contexts, or in Dumontian terms 'levels' of the ideology the subordinate pole regularly but temporarily becomes superordinate. In fact, it is only at such levels that the subordinate pole is even able to manifest itself.[1]

Dumont has not been left in isolation regarding this innovation. A significant if now fragmented group of his supporters in Paris has sought to develop these ideas in various ways, especially in turning hierarchical opposition into a dynamic device in the analysis of ritual. Their work can, of course, like almost any other, be criticized on epistemological grounds. What has particularly drawn criticism, however, is their—and Dumont's—insistence that this view of hierarchy applies to any and every asymmetric dyad, without exception. A number of the papers in *Contexts and Levels* took issue with this (Forth 1985: 114–15; Duff-Cooper 1985: 155, 163; Howell 1985: 169). Signe Howell, for example, could find little use for Dumont's ideas in her fieldwork among the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia, a society in which, she says, dyadic asymmetry manifests itself but rarely. *Contra* Dumont, the recognition of difference does not necessarily entail attributing a value, and therefore equality necessarily results. Indeed, equality is the dominant difference in value here, although in crises, such as those caused by crossing categorical boundaries (eating two sorts of meat at the same meal, for example), some oppositions become value-laden, i.e. hierarchy is emphasized so as to return to order. Of course, a Dumontian would be quick to find another hierarchical opposition here, one in which equality is opposed to hierarchy and is the encompassing pole.

Duff-Cooper takes a broadly similar line to Howell's in his paper in the same volume. The essence of his comments (especially 1985: 155) is that while Dumont, in seeing caste as a strictly Indian phenomenon, concedes no more than 'quasi-caste' to the Balinese and Javanese, his own obsession with hierarchy none the less leads him to deny them, and anyone else outside the West, any true sense of equality. Duff-Copper ends his paper by suggesting (ibid.: 163) that among the Balinese, as among the Chewong, equality is stressed as a value much as hierarchy is in Dumont's India. In a later unpublished paper, he again takes issue with the idea of the necessity of hierarchy and asymmetry against not only Dumont, but also James Boon, David Parkin and Leo Howe (Duff-Cooper no date: 3-4). He repeatedly stresses that whatever the differences of age, gender, genealogical

1. These subordinate levels do not involve encompassment, so the reversal between levels is not a simple one. Levels are not, for the Dumontian, the same as contexts, but that cannot be gone into here. See Tcherkézoff (forthcoming) on both these points.

proximity or even estate (*warna*) among the Balinese, all people in the village or kin group are fundamentally the same: 'for most practical purposes...none of these distinctions are of importance...though they may once have been.... They are there to be drawn on if the need to differentiate arises' (ibid.: 12). The ideal of equality is often expressed among the Balinese through an idiom of brotherhood: 'disparity in people's actual ages...may again simply be registered as difference, and "fraternity" hold among people of very disparate ages' (ibid.: 27). And further, 'it is not that these differences are muted and dampened: they do not exist among the entities that constitute these sets of "brothers"' (ibid.: 14); 'the members of such sets...are differentiated one from another as little as possible' (ibid.: 15). More generally, 'cultural differences will probably largely remain: it would be absurd to try to eliminate these. But they should be what "we" call Manichean differences, in which opposites or differences are equally valued...all are different but not differentially evaluated' (ibid.: 27).[2]

Such statements remind one of the disclaimers that the English of all classes are inclined to make, to the effect that class does not matter in the last resort, disclaimers in which the denial points directly to its own contradiction. These are often produced to steer away the naïve and over-inquisitive foreigner from his ready assumption that English society is hopelessly class-ridden. Of course, as in most debates the truth lies somewhere in between. Power in England has not been the exclusive preserve of the monarchy or aristocracy for a long time, yet the legal distinctions still remain, are ceremonially marked in certain contexts and are sometimes even of practical importance. Perhaps more significantly today, despite the egalitarian veneer provided by universal suffrage, most effective political and economic power continues to remain in the hands of an identifiable middle class, admittedly a class that co-opts quite freely from both above and below, but a class none the less.

Historians have long been aware of the problem posed by protests against reality being disguised as or mistaken for representations of it. We might imagine an activist's statement to the effect that all men are equal, regardless of the colour of their skin, being taken by a future historian as evidence for the equality of races in, say, South Africa under apartheid.[3] But there is also the danger of the anthropologist taking the statements of his or her informants as the sole reality:

2. Copies of this paper are among those deposited, at the author's request, at the Institute of Cultural and Social Studies, University of Leiden, and at the University of Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia. Similar comments appear in a still more recent paper (Duff-Copper 1993), which appeared too recently for detailed discussion here.

3. Compare Bernard Lewis (1971: 103) on the 'illogical assumption that the reprobation of prejudice in a society proves its absence. In fact, of course, it proves its presence.' I suspect that the often-repeated jibes against 'Victorian hypocrisy' might be dismissed for a similar reason. Tillyard (1943) blames this phenomenon for what he considers to be the falsity of conventional interpretations of Elizabethan society and thought. Hocart also warns us against it on occasion (e.g. 1970: 13, 68, 201).

again, a protest or a disclaimer can often suspend, distort or veil the truth. There are, of course, ways of handling this epistemologically, but first it has to be recognized for what it is; and often it is not. Distinctions may indeed lie dormant, being glossed over as insignificant, especially in conversations with an outsider; but for Dumont they do not exist without ultimate purpose, a purpose that is normally discriminatory in intent.

Such comments have not endeared Dumont to his colleagues, and, as already noted, Duff-Cooper was only one among many critics. These criticisms have tended to shift easily from the scholarly to the moral. Duff-Cooper's erstwhile supervisor, Rodney Needham, has made a much more forthright attack on Dumont's view of hierarchy on grounds involving matters of principle as well as epistemology, saying of Dumont at one point (1987: 144): 'he is clearly against egalitarianism and individualism, as social ideals, and he is for hierarchy and totality'. Among other detractors, Berreman (1971), André Beteille (1986) and Keith Hart (1987) all take a similar line, one in which reasoned argument threatens to become overshadowed by their obvious exasperation at Dumont's obtuseness in apparently preferring hierarchy to equality as the ideal that ought to be shaping social life. Dumont's claim that even when anthropologists recognize hierarchy they do not fully understand it, because their own tradition seeks to suppress it wherever possible, seems to have been fully vindicated by some of the very reactions it has stimulated subsequently. And what for him is largely a question of avoiding inconvenient preconceptions often becomes for his adversaries a matter of temperament (cf. Needham 1987).

If Dumont sometimes seems to extol hierarchy above equality, it is simply because it is better able to accommodate conflict, to which it is clearly an alternative, if not actually preferable (see his 1986: 267). It is not that caste, for instance, is itself free from conflict; but disputes centre around the ranking of particular castes more than around the existence of caste itself. Although Dumont's is not a simple consensus model, it does suggest that fundamental caste values are accepted throughout the hierarchy in India (Dumont 1957: 18; see also Moffat 1979, Fuller 1988). By being thus able to accommodate difference, caste is in fact more tolerant than the egalitarianism of the West: 'while the West, under the logic of contradiction, approves or excludes, traditional India under the logic of encompassing attributes a rank' (Dumont 1971: 76). In crude terms, the famous tolerance of Hinduism is little more than a philosophy of 'a place for everyone, and everyone in their place': despite all the prescriptions, within certain limits one can act as one pleases, at the cost, possibly, of being accorded an irremedially low status by the society as a whole. Moreover, a hierarchical order is infinitely extendable and can accept new ranks into it, as the extreme micro-differentiation of the caste system shows us.

Dumont's view of Western egalitarianism, on the other hand, seems to be one that stresses not so much equal rights for all as equality in those respects that form group identity—an equality of qualities rather than of rights, so to speak, though all with the first also enjoy the second. In other words, those that meet the criteria are accepted, and treated as equals through the principle of the ignoring of difference; those that do not are rejected, being defined as qualitatively different. This is presumably why Dumont spends so much time talking about racism, in which race is seen as being the qualitative difference *par excellence*; that is, it is completely irremovable. As long as this difference continues to be recognized, there is no way of accommodating it without introducing hierarchy—which in itself violates the principle of equality. Hence the 'separate but equal' slogan is modern in the sense of being post-hierarchical, but still discriminatory. While caste, precisely because it is hierarchical, can integrate as well as separate, racism can only separate if it is to be able to discriminate and still remain within an egalitarian milieu.

Maybe here we find a reason why democracies, from ancient Athens to the modern United States, tend to ditch their democratic and freedom-loving principles as soon as they begin to expand overseas. This paradoxical nexus certainly characterized the recent colonial period. One aspect of the world's current attempts to overcome this legacy are the direct claims of all ethnicities for equal access to political and economic power, claims that increasingly threaten the existence of many nation states and are rapidly replacing such criteria as merit or democracy as the goals of political action (see Tambiah 1989). A related but converse aspect, especially in Africa, has been the attempt to suppress tribalism in favour of identity with the post-imperial but multi-ethnic state. A third, identified recently by de Coppet (1990: 143–4) in developing an earlier point of Mauss's, is the modern stress on human rights, which refers the individual directly to the generality of humankind without the society to which he or she belongs, and which lies in between, being involved. Indeed, the notion of human rights explicitly blinds itself to all social, cultural, national or racial peculiarities.

The success of such trends is piecemeal at best. Generally, however, we may say that the world is moving not back towards hierarchy but forward towards widening still further the criteria of equality by eliminating any remaining recognition of difference. The discourse of the international bureaucracy, in its relentless search for common ground, glosses over cultural differences as much as possible. And as far as race is concerned, it is rapidly becoming *de rigueur* not to allude to it at all, as the world strives to move beyond equality as Dumont sees it.

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