The Gender of Debt

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The Last 50,000 Years

By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3134-1
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3134-5

To my wife, Alberta, the light of my eyes

What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust in us unus'd.

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 4, 4, 33-39).

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

BC	before Christ
BCE	before Christian (or common) era
BP	before present
kcal	kilocalorie
ky	thousand years
kya	thousand years ago
MIS	Marine Isotope Stage
M	million
My	million years
Mya	million years ago
ya	years ago

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge special thanks to Stefano Allovio, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Milan, and Giovanni Destro-Bisol, Professor of Physical Anthropology at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" and editor in chief of the *Journal of Anthropological Sciences* (JASs) for reading the manuscript and providing me with precious critiques and suggestions. I owe a debt of gratitude to Emily D. Tenenbaum for revising my manuscript.

PREFACE

This book presents the scientific tale of the determinant contribution of women to the development of modern mankind that the females of the species *Homo sapiens* supplied with their knowledge of the vegetal realm. The history of human symbolism has dealt in various ways with the link between women and the generative power of the earth and the mystery of plants growing from the soil: a metaphor −of, and a direct correspondence to the generative power of females. But beyond symbolism, the contribution of women was economic. The traditional picture of prehistory is that for hundreds of thousands of years, males devoted themselves to hunting, whereas females provided vegetables. We do not know exactly how and when the two factors of production (male hunting and female gathering) became so strictly linked and resulted in an optimal system of subsistence. We can hypothesize that it happened when hunting became more intensive and males needed the strategic cooperation of women in securing the vegetables necessary to meet basic energy requirements. Thus, male dominance was the political device locking women into a close cooperation under the control of men. The aim of this book is to explain from a historical and an economic point of view how the female contribution was so determinant in the success of our species, and how it was linked to male dominance. Ethnographic evidence shows that female gathering is more productive and less time-consuming than male hunting. Therefore, a local community of foragers could manage its social labor-time in the most productive way only if women lent their time to men through the supply of basic energy: a debt that men have incurred since the dawn of history but have never acknowledged.

I conceived the project of this work while reading David Graeber's *Debt. The First 5000 Years* (2011): a successful book following which debt has become a fashionable topic. Debt is a word that often inspires negative sentiments and odd feelings, and even fear. Running into debt may be the prelude of existential dramas sometimes with tragic outcomes. But what is debt? The moral sentiment by which one feels obliged to reciprocate a benefit or a gift? Or the legal situation that requires one to fulfill an obligation following the Roman jural principle (*Obligatio est vinculum juris a quo necessitate adstringimur alicuius rei solvendae secundum*

nostrae civitatis jura),[1] such as, for example, to pay back a loan? Maybe both and much more. Debt may be perceived as just an empirical and temporary condition of a person indebted toward an institution, a bank, or more simply to someone else. From a collective, religious or political point of view, it may be thought of as the ontological status of mankind toward God, or the primordial burden of any individual toward human society, or merely the public debt of the modern state. Graeber wants to demonstrate that debt is the condition of the slave-like man subjugated by the violence of the state. That way, debt looks like the personification of inequality. The "first 5000 years" – which would be better identified as the last 5000 years − are the period of the history of written civilization, a short span compared to the history of mankind. What about before the invention of writing? Or before the invention and spread of agriculture (from the tenth to fourth millennia BCE in the Old World)? And what about the long prehistoric dawn of mankind dominated by a foraging[2] economy? The absence of writing techniques is not an adequate reason for dismissing the concepts of history, economy and, of course, debt. I prefer to think that the roots of inequality in the human realm must be investigated beyond the existence of written documents. Contemporary research techniques allow an ever more accurate interpretation of archaeological and paleobiological remains that can disclose and narrate a very complex story. I claim that there is no reason at all for contending that before the civilization of writing there was no debt, and therefore no inequality. Unlike Graeber's project, historicizing debt would first require deconstructing the concept, and then reconstructing the different processes − historical, social and economic − that molded debt's evolution up to contemporary times. This small booklet is not aimed at such an ambitious task. My more modest goal is to put the discourse about debt back on track and show that the primordial debt of men toward women is a fundamental feature of human cooperation and sociality. History is not ruled by an abstract and violent power, as some current essentialist

[1] "Obligation is a jural bond by which we are necessarily obliged to fulfil something according to the laws of our state" (*Iustiniani Institutiones*, recensuit Paulus Krueger, Berolini (Berlin), apud Weidmannos, 1908, liber III, titulus XIV 'De obligationibus').

[2] 'Foraging, forager' are terms used to designate a pre-agricultural subsistence system based exclusively on the acquisition of naturally reproducing resources in a hand-to-mouth economy. Such a definition, therefore, excludes populations relying heavily on collecting abundant seasonal resources, either vegetal (like *Gramineae*, cereals; *Fagaceae*, acorn, etc.), and/or animal (like salmon), along with processing and storage techniques.

theorists like Graeber seem to contend, but humans have themselves created a debt system through which the male half of the society came to dominate women. From this basis, all other forms of inequality have followed.

A further source of inspiration for this book was the reading of two stories, *The Evolution Man, or, How I Ate My Father* by Roy Lewis (1960-1993), an intelligent and amusing fiction about the prehistory of mankind; and *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari (2015), that despite its title is not a brief but a long and somewhat debatable narration of the cultural evolution of man. These two stories convinced me that it is necessary to clarify two points that remain unclear in the literature: 1) that the successful history of our species is due not only to the cognitive and technological capacities of *Homo sapiens* − presumed to be higher than its competitors including *Homo neanderthalensis* − but mostly to its capacity of putting in place a rational and efficient socio-economic system of production and reproduction; and 2) that such a rational system owes its efficiency to the indebtedness of men toward women that male dominance has concealed since the beginning of their existence. Indeed, my scope is to disclose the nature and historical meaning of male dominance beyond the myths of culture, and thus to discover the reality of the debt that men owe to women.

The first formulation of my subject must be traced back to the early 1990s when I was engaged in an economic analysis of ethnographic and archaeological data on hunting and gathering societies (Pavanello 1993). In the present work, I explore, and try to understand how that debt was constituted not only in the primary social relationship (mating and filiation), but above all in the foraging relationships of production characterized by the combination of hunting and gathering, the two primordial factors of subsistence. This is an investigation into the trust relationship that united women and men to build their lives together from prehistory to the eve of the Neolithic (agricultural) revolution, a trust relationship that is possibly reproduced and represented in the economic behavior of contemporary hunter-gatherers.

The postmodern wave in anthropology in the past decades showed scarce interest in complex narratives. Contemporary turns −their multifarious, and even contrasting epistemic and theoretical stances notwithstanding − are re-opening the attention of the anthropological debate toward wider scenarios, as Graeber's book reveals. Therefore, the bulk of my old analysis, updated with the most recent ethnographic, archaeological and

paleobiological research, may be of some interest, particularly focusing on gender economics relations. It is time now to give these relationships the crucial place they deserve in a theory of human cooperation and sociality, not forgetting that it is necessarily a theory of social inequality.

Mariano Pavanello
Highland Park, N.J., USA
10 November 2018

FOREWORD

WHAT IS DEBT? A CRITIQUE OF DAVID GRAEBER'S ARGUMENTS

While the title of Graeber's 534-page book implies debt is a unified and immutable category, in each of its twelve chapters the concept of debt assumes distinctive features and connotations. Debt eventually appears as a meta-narration of the history of mankind, and, alas, as a mysterious object: a mathematician would label it as a fuzzy set, and a pessimistic philosopher would see it as a meta-historical principle on which the human tragedy is grounded. However, ignoring such a problem, the author tries to outline an economic and political history of debt, and affirms that money and debt − both products of the violent, military nature of the state − appeared simultaneously in the theater of human history:

> What is the difference between a mere obligation […] and a debt, properly speaking? The answer is simple: money. […] a debt can be precisely quantified. This requires money. Not only is it money that makes debt possible: money and debt appear on the scene at exactly the same time. […] A history of debt, then, is thus necessarily a history of money. (Graeber 2011, p. 21).

According to Graeber, before the existence of money no debt was possible, and such an essentialist stance is confirmed by the uncritical acceptance of the anti-utilitarian conception of money:

> […] money can be seen in human economies as first and foremost the acknowledgement of the existence of a debt that *cannot* be paid. (Graeber cit., p. 136, italics in the text).[1]

In his dark vision of history dominated by the violence of power, Graeber transforms what in many religions is the primordial and infinite debt toward the divinity into a more prosaic money-debt process that makes us slaves and proposes the equation 'state=money=market' as (1) the meta-historical foundation of the commercial economy, and (2) the ideological

[1] This thesis was set forth by Rospabé (1995).

basis of the present-day system of unequal relations. In his scheme, there is no place for a genealogy of debt that may recognize its roots in the process that molded human social cooperation over hundreds of thousands of years. On the contrary, he wants to shed light on the past through his personal perception of the present, and particularly on his wrong idea that debt coincides with a state budget deficit, and that money is nothing but an extension of public deficit. This confusing interpretation brings him to paradoxical conclusions:

> Much of this seems to turn on the nature of national deficits and credit money. The national debt is, as politicians have complained practically since these things first appeared, money borrowed from future generations. […] On the one hand, deficit financing is a way of putting even more military power in the hands of princes, generals, and politicians; on the other, it suggests that government owes something to those it governs. Insofar as our money is ultimately an extension of the public debt, then whenever we buy a newspaper or a cup of coffee, we are trading in promises, representations of something that the government will give us at some time in the future, even if we don't know exactly what it is. (Graeber cit., p. 358).

> […] since modern money effectively *is* government debt, if there was no deficit, the results would be disastrous. (Graeber cit., p. 450 n. 110, italics in the text).

Graeber's historical reconstruction of debt begins with the clay tablets of the third-second millennium BC with their cuneiform business accounts. This was the dawn of writing and of the Mesopotamian polities. Coined money already existed and served as means of payment of the fees due to the temples and the palaces of power, as well as units of account and means of exchange in market transactions. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that coined money and writing −not debt −appear on the scene probably at the same time. It is surprising enough that Graeber interprets practices in use in an archaic civilization through the modern economic concept of debt.[2] To support his point, Graeber revives the evolutionist myth of stateless societies, putatively egalitarian, without markets and, consequently, without money:

[2] Graeber ignores Oppenheim's warning of 1957, when the distinguished Assyriologist wrote: "In dealing with a written civilization, the most efficient means of reaching its understanding is to study the semantics of selected key terms rather than to use modern categories of organization as the avenues of approach." (Oppenheim 1957, p. 28).

> Stateless societies tend to be without markets. (Graeber cit., p. 50).

This statement is arguable because Graeber assumes the 'stateless' category without any critical analysis and disregards the ethnographic and archaeological awareness of the systems of exchange in the late Upper Paleolithic, Neolithic, and most contemporary non-Western economies, both foraging and farming-herding.[3] Obviously, not all those systems can be considered market-like, but the opposite generalization must be rebutted as well. The 'stateless' label is a colonial anthropological construction aimed at describing 'primitive' communities, which appeared as lacking any form of central government.[4] It is an ahistorical category because many of those communities had historically fallen under the domination of stronger chiefdoms before European colonization; therefore, the social anthropological category tends to hide their previous history. The so-called acephalous societies represented the ideal context for the invention of the 'gift economy' (Gregory 1982),[5] the deformed Mauss's heritage widely celebrated in the anti-utilitarian literature.[6] Graeber, indeed, seems to take the existence of such an economy for granted:

> There's an enormous anthropological literature […] on 'gift economies' that operate on completely different principles than market economies. (Graeber cit., p. 90).

Thus, earlier than *ca*. five thousand years ago, the night of prehistory conceals the golden age of gift, whose remnants would be the 'gift economies' of contemporary stateless societies. The presumed diversity of nature and principles of the economic systems based on the gift as opposed

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[3] For the Upper Paleolithic, see, for example, Bar-Yosef (2002, p. 367); for the Neolithic, see Pradeau *et al*. (2016); Isern *et al*. (2017). An interesting comparison between Neolithic and Bronze-Age societies is in Kristiansen and Earle (2015). For contemporary non-Western societies, the anthropological literature about long-distance ritual exchange and trade networks is huge and well known.

[4] See Middleton and Tait (1958); Horton (1971).

[5] It is necessary to point out that institutional forms of both ritual and trade exchange networks (with circulation of real, apparent or presumed gifts) are witnessed in many societies characterized by social hierarchies and centralized powers, like the Kwakiutl and the Trobriand, which constituted the basis of Mauss's analysis. This makes more complex and problematic the theoretical construction of the gift as a salient form of economic relations, and not only as a 'futile' feature in the universe of familial and communitarian interactions (see Gudeman 2001; Mirowski 2001).

[6] See, among many others, Caillé (1989, 1994, 2000); Godbout (1992, 2000); Latouche (1989, 1998).

to those based on the utilitarian exchange of commodities is the point of departure of our author for the creation of what he calls "a new theory, pretty much from scratch" (Graeber cit., p. 90). Indeed, such a theory looks rather old and comes straight from Graeber's academic mentor, Marshall Sahlins of *The Original Affluent Society*, who affirmed:

> The hunter is 'uneconomic man' […] he is the reverse of that standard caricature immortalized in any General Principles of Economics […] his wants are scarce and his means (in relation) plentiful. […] An undeveloped mode of production is thus rendered highly effective. […] Reports on hunters and gatherers of the ethnological present suggest a mean of three to five hours per adult worker per day in food production. […] Hunters and gatherers have by force of circumstances an objectively low standard of living. But taken as their objective, and given their adequate means of production, all the people's material wants usually can be easily satisfied. (Sahlins 1972, p. 13, 34, 36-37).

Sahlins was not aware of the contradiction into which he had fallen: it is illogical to define as 'uneconomic' the behavior of contemporary hunter-gatherers that minimize cost (labor-time) and maximize output (nutritional level). The out-of-date thesis of stateless societies, egalitarian and characterized by gift economies, is useful to Graeber for supporting his certainty that markets arose under state military pressure. Unlike Braudel (1969, p. 298), who thinks markets necessary for the circulation of surplus, Graeber advances the thesis that

> Markets appear to have first emerged, in the Near East at least, as a side effect of government administrative systems. Over time, however, the logic of the market became entangled in military affairs, where it became almost indistinguishable from the mercenary logic of the Axial Age warfare, and then, finally, that logic came to conquer government itself to define its very purpose. As a result, everywhere we see the military-coinage-slavery complex emerge, we also see the birth of materialist philosophies. (Graeber 2011, p. 248).

These statements show uniquely that the difficulty of historicizing money and market equals the difficulty of historicizing the state.[7] The old ethnocentric arrogance, which used to define 'primitive' economies as non-market and non-monetary, reappears under camouflage, whereas the

[7] For the problems of definition, and for economic and historical analyses of the state in the current Foucauldian wave of political anthropology, cf., among others, Aretxaga (2003); Ferguson and Gupta (2002); Fisher and Downey eds. (2006); Sharma and Gupta, eds. (2006).

originality of Graeber's theory lies only in deriving the market from the state, *i.e.* the economic from the political, upsetting the Marxian epistemological stance of the determining causality of the economic structure.

The assumption that money and debt arose contemporaneously at the origin of the market economy hides deeper and more deceptive implications that are at the heart of Graeber's argument. One is that debt and money represent the conditions of slavery into which the victims of the violence of power − like insolvent debtors − are put, as an admirer of Graeber's book affirms:

> If it is true that, in the course of history, humans have been subjugated in various ways, the most frequent and efficient way is by transforming them into debtors. (Aria 2012, p. 494, my translation).

The transition from an empirical case (the insolvent debtor and its reduction to slavery) to a meta-historical level (the social indebtedness of every individual toward the state as equaling the condition of slavery) is thus asserted without any plausible arguments.

A second deceptive assertion made by Graeber is that a primordial phase in the human history characterized by a pure barter economy −as narrated by Adam Smith, and generally shared in economic textbooks −has never existed. Graeber affirms:

> When economists speak of the origins of money […] first comes barter, then money […] the story of money for economists always begins with a fantasy world of barter. (Graeber cit., p. 21, 23).

He takes several pages to demonstrate the trivial truth that

> barter does not exist, or even that it's never practiced by the sort of people that Smith would refer to as 'savages.' (Graeber cit., p. 29).

The denial of barter is functional to Graeber's overall theory, because the very idea of a barter economic phase preceding the market economy would demonstrate that human societies have always been governed by utilitarian principles. However, Graeber is right in claiming that barter may have been in use for particular cases,[8] and not as a rule, because

[8] Graeber is probably referring to the most historically significant case of barter, although he does not mention it: the 'silent trade' witnessed by Herodotus (lib. IV, 196) between the Carthaginians and some indigenous groups of North-Western

generalized barter would create a system of undetermined social debt, but he fails to support this idea with sound economic arguments. Indeed, he omits to point out that almost all textbooks of economics reach the same conclusions: two disadvantages hamper the course of barter, (1) the difficulty that the contracting parties always have goods of reciprocal interest to exchange; and (2) the indivisibility of many goods. This second disadvantage in particular makes barter impracticable as a general form of economic exchange, *i.e.* as a 'form of integration' as Polanyi would label it.[9] Graeber's discussion is therefore useless because Adam Smith's discourse about a mythical age of barter was only aimed at demonstrating its impracticability.

Many forms of reciprocity, investigated by social anthropology, such as the 'food-sharing' system widely described in foraging societies, may superficially appear as a form of barter or as an institutional exchange of gifts, according to the ideological stance of the analyst. Polanyi theorized reciprocity as one of the three forms of economic integration, together with redistribution and exchange. Unfortunately, these forms are merely descriptive, and their heuristic value is therefore limited. The issue is crucial and in the present work I intend to show that foraging societies were based on a system of labor-exchange, a device that does not confer to economic life any anti-utilitarian character or a better moral connotation in comparison to the system that Graeber labels as 'commercial economy.' It is precisely this device I wish to analyze, showing that through it, local communities economize their labor-effort and maximize their returns. That system − as I will try to demonstrate − has been made possible through the sexual division of labor, which allowed men to devote themselves to hunting, a highly specialized and time-consuming activity. This hypothesis was recently outlined by Adrienne Zihlman and Nancy Tanner: "Hunting with tools is a high risk, low return activity that, to be reasonably effective, requires precise skills and refined tools. It seems logical that it could only

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Africa. Herodotus's narration is perfectly analogous to the much later annotation in the *Mappamondo* (Atlas) of the Venetian cartographer Fra' Mauro (ca. 1459) and the description made by his compatriot Alvise da Ca' da Mosto (Cadamosto [1463-1550] p. 489-492) about the silent trade for the exchange of gold and salt among diverse groups in fifteenth century Western Africa.

[9] "A study of how empirical economies are instituted should start from the way in which the economy acquires unity and stability, that is the interdependence and recurrence of its parts. This is achieved through a combination of a very few patterns which may be called forms of integration. […] Empirically, we find the main patterns to be reciprocity, redistribution and exchange." (Polanyi 1957, p. 250).

have become common in this form after gathering was fully developed. Gathering then could have provided a secure nutritional and social base from which a few hunters could go forth and expend energy for uncertain success."[10]

Therefore, human history − or, paraphrasing Graeber, the last 50,000 years − is based on the debt of men toward women, who were left with the twofold task of reproducing society and provisioning the basic high-energy food resources through the gathering of vegetables. In other words, as my wife argued, women financed male dominance.

[10] Zihlman and Tanner (2007, p. 182). See also Huber (2007, p. 46).

DEBT IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Preamble: debt is credit

Some readers will object that the Garden of Eden is the mythological scene of the original sin, not the theater of a meta-historical debt. Nevertheless, the link between the two ideas, debt and sin, lies in the history of words. The Greek term *ὀφείλεμα* (*oféilema*) that we find in the Biblical tradition of the Hellenistic ecumene contains both meanings: debt and sin. The most important Christian prayer, *Our Father*, in its Greek version, uses the concept of unsolvable debt imploring God to erase it: "*ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν*." The meaning is exclusively moral as the English translation confirms: "forgive us our trespasses." Indeed, why should we pray to God to cancel our debts if only we could pay them? The sense is moral: we pray to the Lord to forgive our sins through a gratuitous act of grace (*i.e.* redemption), which we deserve only if we cancel the unpaid debts of our debtors: "as we forgive those who trespass against us," "*ὡς καί ἡμεῖς ἀφίεμεν τοίς ὀφειλήταις ἡμῶν*." Such a condition is generally assumed as a metaphor and a model of the status of slaves compared to free people. For the Christian tradition, the sinner is like a slave, who can be freed through a unilateral act of its owner: the sinner is redeemed, and its debts erased through the gift of the divine grace. On the contrary, the Latin word *dēbĭtum* is closer to a jural rather than a moral horizon. Indeed, the Latin version of *Our Father* says "*dimitte nobis debita nostra*," "remit us our debts," and implies automatically the concept of *crēdĭtum*, "*sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris*," "as we remit to our debtors," like a debt-credit balance.

People do not reflect enough on the fact that debt is at the same time a credit and an obligation. It is a credit because when someone incurs a debt, it means that such a person is spending a credit that he/she has, and that is acknowledged at the creditor's own risk. The term credit derives from the Latin *crēdĕre* (to believe, to trust), and therefore a creditor could never be literally a 'creditor' unless he/she believed that the people whom he/she trusts would be in a position to resolve their obligations. Debt is therefore an obligation grounded on mutual credit between two or more parties. Since early antiquity, penniless people could not enjoy any credit. Could

you imagine a bank lending money to a beggar? The latter deserves charity, not credit. You can get credit only if you have credit. And the more you pay your debts, the more credit you get. While the reward of charity should be only the peace of the donor's conscience and therefore it is at least a zero-sum operation ("don't let the left hand know what the right hand does"), the reward of credit is interest or prestige, a payoff or a step ahead in social recognition.

The notion of debt in antiquity, as well as in most non-Western cultural contexts, has a fundamentally moral character beyond its undeniable economic connotations. It generally tends to merge with, rather than set itself against the notion of credit. In Latin, *crēdĭtum* (credit, loan, debt) and *dēbĭtum*, (debt, obligation, from Lat. *dēbēre*, to owe) are not as distinct as they appear nowadays; in fact, *crēdĭtum* is often used in the sense of debt (*solvere crēdĭtum*, to pay a debt).[1] Economic transactions are always established on a mutual trust relationship in which debt and credit are often hardly distinguishable.

In the past, when transactions were part of a longstanding relationship within a network of partners, the debt-credit bond was often represented and guaranteed by human pawns, as in the history of trade relationships in the Ancient World and even in Medieval Europe and in pre-colonial Africa. It was customary in those contexts that pawns were family members, generally of a subordinate status, who were entrusted to a creditor−debtor (*e.g.* a daughter whom a master had got from a domestic kin servant, or from a slave woman, could be given as a wife or concubine to a commercial partner), thus establishing a durable, mutual, moral and non-monetary credit-debt relation. Anthropological theories of kinship and marriage − particularly in elementary or semi-complex systems − have often debated whether givers or receivers of wives are debtors or creditors. To give a sister or a daughter as a wife to a member of an allied group can be the acknowledgment of a debt (or an allegiance) toward the prospective receiver and his lineage. At the same time, receiving a wife may mark the contracting of a debt. Be that as it may, many kinship systems obscure the ambiguous status of givers and receivers by masking the marriage alliances under the appearance of a more-or-less egalitarian exchange of

[1] Cf. the Gr. *χρεῖος ὀφειλόμενον* (*chréios ofeilómenon*), the unpaid debt, where *ὀφειλόμενον* provides the meaning of insolvency, and *χρεῖος* anticipates the concept of credit, from χράω, to loan, to lend [Lat. *commodare*, *mutuum dare*]; οὐ δεδωκὼς ἀλλὰ χρήσας, not as a gift but as a loan (Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea*, VIII, 13).

sisters, either simultaneous or delayed along the generations.[2] Many marriage arrangements, particularly in poor rural areas, even nowadays, are managed as debt-credit relationships according to a strategy of reciprocity within networks of family groups in which every marriage represents a provisional balance. A case in the field of symbolic kinship is the one labeled as the patron-client relationship where the patron grants help, protection, material and moral support, and clients owe to him a perennial debt based on the superior power with which the patron is credited. Patron and client are reciprocally linked by an indissoluble debt-credit bond.[3]

Can we transfer the assumption of the structural relationship between debt and credit onto the timeline of the history of mankind? I think so. If it is true that women financed male dominance, we can hardly imagine that it happened in the absence of some credit on the side of men. I propose that such a credit was accumulated during the process that produced the genus *Homo* from Pliocene to Pleistocene across more than 3.5 million years. In a seminal essay published in the *Journal of Human Evolution* in 1982, Hill advanced the hypothesis that the increase in meat eating, and consequently in predation (scavenging and hunting), may have played a crucial role in human evolution, not only biological (*e.g.* the pronounced encephalization and the increase in body size), but also behavioral, creating the conditions for food-sharing and sexual division of labor:

> An important difference between modern human foragers and non-human Primates is the pronounced sexual division of labor, and redistribution of food resources. It is instructive that Primate researchers have described predation as primarily a male activity. A shift to increased hunting for humans may provide the key to understanding sexual division of labor, which is much more difficult to explain if one assumes no shift in feeding strategy. Similarly, the increased incidence of 'sharing' seen at predatory events among chimpanzees and baboons suggests that increased meat eating may be very important to understanding human resource sharing. The causal connection between meat eating and these behaviors is by no means clear; however, explaining the origin of the behaviors without a hypothesized change in feeding strategy appears even more difficult. (Hill 1982, p. 528).

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[2] The anthropological literature on kinship, descent and marriage is huge, but for the peculiar problem dealt with here, cf. Lévi-Strauss (1947); Leach (1961a); R. Fox (1967).

[3] Cf. Anderson (1957); Boissevain (1966, 1974); Davis (1973); Gudeman (1975); Nutini (1984).

Hill's article was published after a long scientific debate,[4] and was followed by a growing quantity of research and studies. The hypothesis of the increase in meat-eating as the main trait characterizing the evolution of the hominin *phylum* from Australopithecines to *Homo sapiens* appears today almost unquestionable, although, as we will see, many of its arguments are under discussion. A further crucial issue is that predation is a male activity in the Primate realm. Thus, the hypothesis that the males of the early *Homo* species devoted themselves to scavenging carcasses and developing ever-growing active hunting is quite plausible. The progressive change in feeding habits from early *Homo* (*ca*. 2.5 Mya) to Middle and Upper Paleolithic *Homo sapiens* (*ca*. 250 to 12 kya) brought about an organization of territorial groups based on the sexual division of labor with the females almost exclusively devoted to gathering wild fruits, legumes, nuts, rhizomes, tubers and other energy-rich vegetables, and the males mainly engaged in hunting animal prey with the task of providing for meat. In the next pages, we will briefly outline the history of human evolution, and the scientific debate about the controversial origin of the primordial bond between the females and the males of our species, the origin of paternal care and cooperative breeding. But let's start with myth.

Myth in history: the original sin

> And God went on to create the man in his image, in God's image he created him; male and female he created them. Further, God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and become many, fill the earth and subdue it, and have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving on the earth." […] And the Lord God commanded the man "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die." […] The snake asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees?'" The woman answered the snake: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it, or else you will die.'" But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes. So, she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. When they heard the sound of the Lord God walking about in the garden, the man

[4] See, for example, Isaac (1978); Harding and Teleki eds. (1981).