

**HIERARCHICAL REVERSAL TEN YEARS ON  
(AFRICA, INDIA, POLYNESIA), PART I:  
CONTEXTS AND LEVELS**

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(translated by Robert Parkin)

*Foreword I: Contexts and Levels*

IN 1983, a number of British and French anthropologists organized a conference in Oxford with the intention of examining certain propositions in the 'holistic' method of Louis Dumont. *Contexts and Levels*, the JASO Occasional Paper in which the conference papers were published, has recently been reissued. This event has encouraged me to clarify here an aspect of my own contribution to that volume.

I have profited from numerous discussions with Raymond Jamous and Dominique Casajus, both of whom read an early version of this text. I have benefited from our common interest in 'two-level' models of the relation between the ideological and the empirical, in which the second term is seen to be fully recognized, a far cry from any holism that would be forcibly reduced to the translation of the cosmological discourse of a given society. My views on 'reversal' as a type of relation between these two terms have their origin in a previous work (Tcherkézoff 1983; cf. 1987), which had itself benefited from the collective reflections of an earlier group (RCP 436, CNRS) then under the direction of Louis Dumont. The Samoan example, only invoked in passing here, was discussed in detail with my colleagues in the seminar 'Identités et Transformations des Sociétés Océaniques' (GDR 'ITSO'). I am also grateful to Robert Parkin for translating the original French text of this essay into English. This article is in two parts. The second part will appear in the next issue of JASO (Vol. XXV, no. 3).

I put forward there a formal and general definition of ‘hierarchical opposition’.<sup>1</sup> My article concerned white/black dualism in the sacrificial code of the Nyamwezi of East Africa. Written specifically for the conference, it summarized an analysis dating from 1979, the year in which the manuscript of *Le Roi nyamwezi: la droite et la gauche* was completed.<sup>2</sup> Using a limited number of examples, the article presented one of the general results of the book, namely the three forms of a hierarchy of levels that the actualization of a hierarchical opposition might assume in social practice. One of these forms, reversal, must now be presented differently, because it has since become clear to me that many of us formerly had too narrow a view of this type of reversal (also called ‘a change of level’, at least in a top > down sort of model).

As regards hierarchical reversal, the ambiguity developed on two planes. To begin with, it is something that occurred to me while observing the hierarchy of levels in Samoan society from 1984, and more clearly from 1987. On this plane, the discussion remains within the domain of holistic anthropology. It leads to the following question concerning hierarchical reversal. When passing between two relations that are formally similar, do we have simply a reversal of superiority between them, or do we have a reversal that is simultaneously a change in the nature of the asymmetric relation? It seems to me that we are in the second situation: we pass from a relation of ‘encompassment’ to a relation of ‘inequality’, from an asymmetric reference that is itself a relation, to a substantialist reference. On the second plane, the ambiguity is situated in whether or not we distinguish between a model with ‘contexts’ and a model with ‘levels’.

These two forms of ambiguity, above all the second, appear in the commentary that Needham, in his work *Counterpoints*, addresses explicitly to Dumont and myself concerning the idea of ‘hierarchy’ (Needham 1987: 140–42 and chs. 7 and 8). Needham firmly, and rightly, criticizes a particular model of reversal, concerning which he says that Dumont has completely missed the goal he had set himself in putting it forward, for there is nothing new and nothing hierarchical in it—and that I had naïvely adopted it in order to analyse Nyamwezi ritual. The problem is that the model has nothing to do with what actually constitutes ‘hierarchical reversal’ (see below, section 3). Certainly, an inattentive reading of Dumont, followed by one of Tcherkézoff, might lead one to a cultural reversal in terms of contexts (such is the logic that Needham puts forward in the spirit of his own critical processes) as well as to a reversal one might call structural (a

1. I have retained the name given to this relation by Dumont (1972). However, I continue to be interested in the search for a formal definition of a structural character, as can be seen from my 1983 work on dualistic classification, while Dumont put the accent more on the hierarchy of ‘ideas’ (when one idea becomes ‘important’, it ‘acquires the faculty of encompassing its contrary’; see below). At the same time, Dumont has contributed greatly to progress in the formal search through his examination of the *logic* of encompassment between two ideas (Dumont 1979a, 1979b, 1982).

2. The publication of the French edition of the work (Tcherkézoff 1983) was somewhat delayed.

two-level structure) and which is the only one that appears to me to be useful. But I believe these two interpretations must be very firmly distinguished: only the second belongs to holistic logic, which is itself a tool of social anthropology, at least when this is choosing to view 'societies' as Maussian 'totalities'.

Thus in striving to clarify the presuppositions and consequences of the concept of 'hierarchical reversal', I will offer at the same time a response to the main criticisms that Needham has addressed explicitly to myself over many pages of his book.<sup>3</sup> These criticisms have been described by Beidelman, in his review (1989) of my book, as 'devastating' (a joke, let us hope) and as putting an end to Dumont's 'dubious' ideas, which I have mistakenly searched for the slightest grain of common sense.

The discussion I will be pursuing here has two aspects. On the one hand, we will see that Needham has not understood at all the analytical potential of the Dumontian idea of hierarchy, since he reduces the notion of level to that of context. On the other hand, the model of reversal certainly needs some clarification, being accompanied as it is by presuppositions that, so long as they remain unspoken, seem capable of promoting a false interpretation, as has perhaps happened with Needham.<sup>4</sup> The explanation is equivalent to presenting a choice.

3. The intention of this work is to examine 'the idea of opposition', but a reading of it soon shows that its central concern is its critique of Dumont 1979a and 1982 in chapter 7, and Tcherkézoff 1983 in chapter 8. In these works Dumont and Tcherkézoff had criticised that method of analysis that takes the form of binary tables, in respect of which certain of Needham's works (1960, 1967, 1973) had appeared exemplary. Needham freely accepts the lessons of the Nyamwezi ethnography that I had analysed (he contests my critique of his own analysis of the Meru case), but he regards the holistic model as burdening it without offering any advantages, a complex vocabulary concealing a conceptual void. He criticizes in advance any attempt to develop Dumont's ideas, for when all is said and done, the model Dumont proposes will be nothing more than a new vocabulary resting uselessly on the obvious, i.e. the possibility of a reversal of an inequality when one changes context ( $a > b$  in C1, but  $b > a$  in C2). We will see here that Needham actually reduces hierarchical reversal to a symmetric or converse reversal and, therefore, levels to contexts. His critique tilts at the windmills that his own imagination has set up; at any rate, they are not found in either Dumont or Tcherkézoff. At the same time, it is revealing of the substantialist view that all too often arises spontaneously when faced with the idea of hierarchy, and can lead to blindness when faced with the propositions of holistic anthropology.

4. In criticising my analyses in chapter 8, Needham's explains that this critique arises directly out of the one he has raised against Dumont's model in chapter 7. Here, then, is where the debate is situated. The book stems from a series of lectures on 'Opposition' given by Needham in 1984, an important part of which, I am told, was dedicated to this double critique. Needham had in fact just read my book, in French. Most of the other English commentaries on *Le Roi nyamwezi* are recent and follow the appearance of the English translation (1987). Apart from Beidelman (1989), who refers to Needham's critique, these commentaries are not on the same plane as Needham's (a theory of reversal between social practices) but limit themselves to suggesting that a linguistic model such as marked/unmarked would suffice to give expression to the project. As might be expected, this criticism assumes that questions of value and

Is one concerned with types of cultures or with types of structures? Is hierarchy an ordered list of references conceived in a particular world view, all situated as such in the representation of the members of the culture, or is it a structure of levels that necessarily results from the 'comparative' situation (that arising between 'observer' and 'society')?

These points will form the first and main part of the discussion here. In the second part, I shall deal with the other criticisms that Needham has formulated against my statements on the 'binary method' and its 'symmetrical' aspect, and against a particular remark of Dumont's concerning two forms of hierarchy, one in which the whole problem of ideology is confronted. This second part will conclude the present discussion and, as far as I am concerned, finally close a debate that began fifteen years ago (Tcherkézoff 1977, Dumont 1978), was extended in my book in 1983, and was transformed into a polemic by Needham in his book *Counterpoints*.

### *Foreword II: On 'Hierarchy'*

For purposes of the present discussion, let us recall that the expression 'hierarchical opposition' defines the only dualistic oppositions in which one term encompasses another. Encompassment does not signal only superiority. Two elements can be in a relation of superior/inferior in reference to something else, something 'outside' them. In this case, one element can 'have' more access than the other to the nature of this reference. But encompassment is a difference that does not make reference to the outside; one of the two terms reveals itself as constituting *the* reference for the whole of the relation. An opposition that is simply 'distinctive' (for example, right/left, given initially to a child as a geometrical pointer to enable him to orient himself on a blank page) is not hierarchical. The distinction invariably refers to an external reference, whether this concerns a universe of discourse, once contextualized (the universal geometric distinction of the space-plan formed by a sheet of paper), or any substantialized concept that properly defines the *nature* of the two opposed terms, differentiating them secondarily as to the amount of this nature that they possess ('more' or 'less' blue, big, etc.).

This difference, between encompassment and distinction, is itself a binary model constructed, it must be realized, as a distinctive opposition; and every analysis progresses in stages, each formed of binary schemes. But we are then at

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transcendence in the social are not relevant, as if we might content ourselves with discussing the form of a relation, forgetting that the problem is actually one of being able to deal with a hierarchy of relations.

a metalevel, that of the analysis of models, where social 'science' discourses with itself, using the means that the history of ideas in the West has given it. We are no longer standing at the viewpoint of a particular society seen as a totality. This analytical difference distinguishes on the one hand the hierarchical opposition, and on the other—and conjointly—distinction, and substantial inequality and equality, all three being statements of difference or identity in reference to something else.

The essential consequence for anthropology, one that is rather unexpected and thus often neglected, is that hierarchy is neither substantial equality nor any substantial inequality such as social stratification. These are all distinctions and *inequalities* with a substantial reference: one term possesses more than another of a part of the quality that forms the reference. Hierarchy is a difference in the reference to the whole that defines the relation. One of the two terms therefore *is* the whole. An unequal superiority may be at work from one end of the society to the other, but none the less it does not refer to the 'society' as such, i.e. it does not refer to a whole.

In France, for instance, the means of access to knowledge, power, material wealth etc. are unequally distributed, something that gives us one of the most non-egalitarian social systems in western Europe. But this is not *the* point of observation from which France appears to form 'society' in terms of comparative social anthropology. In fact, for all Frenchmen—those who draw profit from this inequality as well those who try to suppress it—the 'system' of this state of affairs resides elsewhere: one invokes 'the capitalist system', 'the Western economy', 'the price paid for democracy' (in liberal discourse), etc. Where, therefore, is the 'France' in question? This 'society' makes itself visible, at least in part, in the political domain. This is what is supposed to institute and perpetuate the value of 'equality' (in universalist-individualist terms, the rights of 'man', 'natural' equality etc.), which can then be contradicted by economic inequality. It thus appears that the contradiction is secondary, since inequality appears as one of the inevitable consequences of political equality, which is only an equality of access to those arenas in which competition is located. This equality is, for a Frenchman, a universal value, one that France considers itself to illustrate better than other societies, thus becoming the model of what the others 'ought' to be. It will therefore surprise no one that the representation of the 'system' of reference of political France, throughout the *longue durée* still with us today, has been situated beyond French territory, whether it is a matter of 'the Enlightenment', 'the West', 'democracy' or, more generally and quite simply, 'Man'.

What our tradition calls politics, and can only be feebly represented as such elsewhere, is here the location of central values, the mainstay of the representation *by* the French of France as a whole. One can therefore expect to find hierarchical oppositions here. Thus we should not be surprised if Dumont's analysis (1990) of political relations in France reveals the existence of a hierarchy between the left and the right (the first term being the encompassing one) for the modern period (i.e. 1789 to the dawn of the Fifth Republic, with extensions up to today). This hierarchical opposition defines France *in comparison with* its neighbours.

Let us illustrate this with reference to a recent problem. In France, the value accorded to the defence of the rights of man (the view of the 'left', i.e. identity of the human race, from which one arrives at equality as a principle and at solidarity as action) does not prevent the existence of another level in which certain immigrants are differentiated through inequality and thus constitute the lowest stratum in French social stratification, as 'immigrant workers' (the view of the 'right', i.e. the maintenance of an unequal real access to substantial values). Stratification can function freely, since it is not opposed to the dominant ideology. This does not constitute rejection, in which those concerned would be regarded as 'non-human': the racist attitude in the economic arena (refusing employment by invoking the applicant's origin) and elsewhere is forbidden, since it would contradict the primary level. Similarly, France has achieved the dishonour of being the last European colonial power, or nearly so, since the stratification between citizens of metropolitan France and those of 'overseas' France, while strongly marked, does not contradict the ideology of the 'left' *at the level where this is mainly situated*. One can take the natives' land, as long as one avoids racism towards them, which is a statutory offence. It is clear that French ideology ignores the fact that 'delocalization'—to slip into the technocratic language that disguises the real problems—can mean for others the negation of their existence. Indeed, the problem is seen precisely as 'technical' and 'local' in nature, not global (see Tcherkézoff 1995b). A reading of Needham's critique will lead us back to these questions of levels.

The three forms that can model the actualization of a hierarchical opposition are unity, conjunction and reversal. I represent them here with a slash to indicate the difference of level:  $a / a$  or  $b$ ;  $a + b / a$  or  $b$ ; and  $a > b / b > a$  (Tcherkézoff 1987: 66–8).<sup>5</sup> I still consider these three minimal forms to be appropriate in accounting for the different examples of hierarchy, whether one is dealing with Nyamwezi or other data, but the third form needs clarifying in a major respect. I will start by illustrating the first two forms again. Although they do not entail any ambiguity, they have yet to acquire currency in anthropological analysis, so that one cannot refer the reader to these models as ones long since having found unanimity in the profession. Another difficulty concerns the polysemy of the term 'hierarchy' in the discipline. It will therefore be useful to begin with a brief remark on vocabulary.

The only social 'hierarchies' with which we are concerned here are orders generated by hierarchical opposition (in the sense of encompassment, which implies that experience is ordered on two levels). This generative process is formally *etic* (it concerns a model supplied by the observer) and culturally *emic*

5. This formula (' $a$  or  $b$ ') goes back to my analysis of the Nyamwezi. Today, I would write ' $a : b$ ' (or ' $a | b$ '), the colon (or vertical bar) representing the distinctive opposition in general, which can be ' $a$  or  $b$ ', ' $a > b$ ' in terms of inequality, and even  $a = b$  in terms of *substantial* equality ('...as blue, big, rich etc. as...'). These formulae designate the 'second level' of a hierarchy, or more exactly, the 'reversal' of a hierarchical opposition (see below).

(the members of the society explicitly refer their differences of status to this opposition). While for the observer the second level 'contradicts' the first, the society sees in it only a context outside the ideology, 'outside the rules', beyond or below the domain of 'status'. Through status, we can designate an explicit system of reference to and membership in the society as in a concrete whole (see below, Tcherkézoff 1989 and 1994–95). Let us note in passing the generality of the fact of 'status' in this definition. In France 'status' is acquired through politics, which is why French politics is engrained in the *longue durée* of social organization, in history, in land, in kinship networks etc., as we know better these days (Abélès 1989, 1990).

Other 'hierarchies' appear in anthropological works, such as those that rest on substantial inequalities (stratification) or classifications that work by subdivision (for example, genus/species, clans/lineages/families, and other interlocking forms, like segmentation). But it seems that only hierarchies generated by encompassment can construct a 'total' order, the type of order that those concerned represent as an exhaustive enumeration of the society. It is therefore a materialization of value, which in its turn is the place where the society actually reproduces itself partially, yet considers conceptually that it has reproduced itself totally. Here, exhaustiveness does not mean that the order includes the ultimate plane of the most tenuous differentiation—for subdivision readily achieves that if one pushes it far enough—but that the hierarchy includes its possible contradiction in advance. This is why what might appear to be limited to a hierarchy of status under the form of a scale is in fact a hierarchy of two levels, with status being developed on the first level, and hundreds of different positions if need be, while a consecutive but different distinction will dominate on a second level.

The hierarchy that occupies us here, different from any sort of substantialist asymmetry, concerns 'holistic' models of the anthropological conceptualization of the social—society as a 'whole'. This 'whole' is what leads the observer to perceive that the different social relations he encounters are ordered in a non-reciprocal fashion, in which some relations determine others. Instead of having only analogies ( $a : b$  'is like'  $c : d$ ) or a circular order of distinctions ( $a$  is to  $b$  as  $b$  is to  $c$  as  $c$  is to  $a$ ), we have an order of relations. Hierarchical reversal is one of these holistic relations between relations.

We are in the habit of opposing substantialist models to those that take account of structures. In the former, the distinctions are in nature (see above), and the modification of one term does not necessarily entail the modification of all the others. The enrichment of a class  $c$  in an economic stratification of three terms, for example, does not modify the economic weight of  $b$  and  $a$ ; if the augmentation experienced by  $c$  does not reach the plane of  $b$ , the order itself remains identical. From the point of view of structures, the element acquires meaning through the relation, and a modification of the first implies that an overall modification is produced upwards. But in social analysis, if the structure goes no further than analogy or circular transitivity, it allows no value to be perceived. In addition to the system of differences, one must also take the trouble to observe

encompassments. In the rest of the discussion, 'hierarchy' is to be understood in the sense of holistic hierarchy.

### 1. *Unity: a / a : b*

One of the two forms that the realization of an encompassment can take is 'unity' or 'hierarchy in the strict sense'. The fundamental principle appears here clearly: one term is the whole (*a* alone occupies the first level). But on another level, one sees that a part of this whole is *distinguished* from the whole by means of a distinctive opposition *a : b*, which then confers on the whole the status of a simple pole opposed distinctively: as soon as the analysis encloses within this *level* the data it has collected on this plane, *a* becomes simply 'non-*b*' and the 'complementary' of *b*, as if this plane were the whole or at least a context and thus a domain to which one attributes a meaning by itself. A 'level', by contrast, only has meaning in a structure—a hierarchical structure—of two levels.

In his 1978 article, which inaugurated, in its second part, a formal approach to the 'theory of hierarchy' (to cite the title of his subsequent article, the 'Postface' to the 1979 edition of *Homo Hierarchicus*), Dumont speaks of 'hierarchy in the strict sense' (1979a: 812, 1979b). The double status of the 'part', at once identical with and contrary to the whole, is emphasized in the 'Postface' (1979b). In effect, the first level (*a*) is at once the holistic reference and a relation of encompassment, the 'principle of unity' that provides the hierarchy. This last term is taken here in a basic sense to mean an order that is referred to the whole ('status' in the broad sense; one notices subsequently, from the fact that this order is 'observed', that it generates a hierarchy of levels; see below). The reference is a 'whole', it is 'holistic' and not universalistic in the substantialist sense (see above).<sup>6</sup> If, with Dumont, we consider (but solely as a metaphor) the linguistic example of Adam and Eve in relation to 'man / woman', and then follow him in simultaneously invoking the Indian example of the social position of women (although he does not clarify it ethnographically), we arrive at the following (Dumont 1979a, 1982: 225). On one level, men and women are identified (the human species). On another level, they are opposed (the 'distinctive' opposition between the two sexes). It may be that, for the author, this subdivision, so simple in appearance, has to be understood according to a different logic of two levels: there is identity because

6. Substantialism appears when the reference is nothing more than a collection of elements, i.e. when it is the nature common to each element that defines the collection, in short, when it is the element in itself—in Dumontian language, 'individualism' as a sociological synonym of philosophical substantialism (Dumont 1966: 49). In view of the ambiguity in culturalist comparison borne by the other term I will retain here the term 'substantialism' (see also Tcherkézoff 1993c).



there is unity, but the principle of this unity can be 'outside', on a different level, and it can be holistic. One and only one of the two terms 'is' (represents) the unity; here 'man' = Man. This, in its turn, will be of consequence when we transfer our attention from the pair unity / opposition towards the different contexts of superiority. The 'unity' will often be realized as a superiority, that of the term that stands for the whole. At another level ('empirical', 'outside the ideology'), the term that was inferior can become superior. But at this point, one encounters the ambiguity of reversal (see below).

Let us leave on one side the question of universality, which would concern the holistic structure within the ideology (in other words, the 'sacred'). When the members of the group refer their identity and their interrelations to this 'group', will the principle of unity, which will be 'outside' the plane of distinctions, always be holistic and, consequently, a source of hierarchy? I believe that it will, but this implies that the 'holism' may, to begin with, be extended as a sociological method applicable to any society and will no longer be the label of a type of 'traditional' ideology whose consideration then brings about criticism of our spontaneous sociocentrism (even if this view is initially necessary to enable us to envisage a structural-holistic generalization). This also implies generalizing notions of 'status' (which was invoked in the discussion of France above) and, as will be attempted later, generalizing the relation of reversal between the two levels, which are always present when an observer, justifiably advancing a *universalist* project, is observing a *total* social fact (a society or a part thereof that makes a totality with regard to the question being posed). Here, it will be enough to distinguish, using gender differences as an example, an initial logic in which the whole is a collection defined by the sum of its parts (the human being = man + woman) and another in which the components find their identity (and the definition of their differences) according to their different relations with the same whole (man = man + woman). One term is or represents the whole (more or less), which the other term cannot. Hence we arrive at the paradoxical formula  $A = A + B$ . We thus distinguish a logic representing 'methodological individualism' (see n. 6, above) and another that we shall qualify as 'methodological holism' (see Dumont 1982: 222 n.1, on the 'holon'; 1986: 279, on 'holism', second definition obtained 'by extension').

As I said in *Le Roi nyamwezi*, every 'opposition' encountered in the ethnography should be submitted to this double possibility, instead of being treated immediately as if all the classifications of each culture were organized in a substantialist fashion, whether this be the complementary distinction, which leads to the construction of a binary table, or 'hierarchical' subdivision in the usual sense of genus / species. We must also seek the possible unity from which the distinction derives. Possibly we should always do this, if we accept that every social opposition is integrated in some manner into a whole that overrides it. We should then examine this 'unity'. It might be conjoint (see below), or it might take the form of a single element; but it would be a mistake to reduce it immediately to just one pole and limit ourselves to the search for its complementary pole. Let us consider, for example, those cosmogonic themes in which the two sexes are

supposed to come from a single ancestor. If the latter proves to be 'man' (Adam) or 'girl' (Sina, in Samoa), it means that we are being invited to listen to the next part of the story. When the two sexes enter the stage, will one of them be presented as a part of the other (Eve, or in Samoa a sister's brother), without reciprocity? If so, we will understand that the distinction is being preceded and determined by a hierarchy.

Following the 1983 Oxford conference, I met with a very clear example of this configuration on Samoa, namely the hierarchical opposition sister / brother. In both ritual and daily life, the relation between opposite-sex siblings is called *feagaiga*, which is also the term by which the sister herself is commonly called. In legend, she appears most often with a proper name, which itself never varies, 'a girl called Sina' (Sina meaning 'white', as a source of light). Nothing similar appears for the brother, and it is significant that, in the same legends, Sina's brothers have different names. The lesson provided by their exchanges should also be retained: sororal goods (fine mats) wrap, complete and conclude the giving of masculine goods (cooked food). The side of the sister is to that of the brother (i.e. groups of descendants from a brother-sister pair) as God (both the former god, Tagaloa, and the God of today) is to men, the mental source of efficacy (*mana, tapuai*). On Samoa, although the side of the brother may have power and hold the ancestral 'title' that defines his family, it can only 'make' power. The side of the sister, on the other hand, is that which 'gives life' to the title by allowing transmission between generations and the efficacy of the goods that maintain the status of the title in the village. In the ritual of compensation for murder, the human person is defined as a cooking pig wrapped up in a fine mat, an image that condenses the whole hierarchy between sister and brother.

On the superior level this relationship, defined at the same time as a brother-sister unity (as shown by the kinship terminology) and as the encompassment of the brother by the sister, can be represented by a particular sign:  $a \gg b$ , in which the  $\gg$  represents the idea of one figure contained in the other and thus reminds us of the concentric scheme used by Dumont, partly following Apthorpe (two circles or two rectangles, one inside the other; Dumont 1979b, Apthorpe 1984; see also Dumont 1972: 384 n.118a, Tcherkézoff 1987: 106-12). Let us note that this unique relation includes, in the Samoan example, two cycles of goods that are entirely independent, the mats going from sister to brother, and cooked food (pork; also fish, taro) from brother to sister. In both myth and ritual, the mats wrap the other goods, both literally and figuratively, just as the sister encompasses the brother. Thus level one is broadened out by an internal hierarchy that in a sense announces the possible reversal to us (Fig. 1; and see below). Here, the 'sister' suffices to define level one. As a person who 'is' a relation (*feagaiga*), she defines, through her existence, every conceptual space in which the brother himself can find existence and social significance.

The Samoan example is equally instructive for the hierarchy of levels. The second level is very different from the first level, and dependent on it. Each of the two terms appears under a 'sexual' aspect in the Samoan sense (male / female,

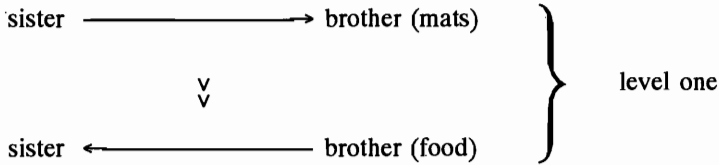


FIGURE 1. Dynamics of the Sister >> Brother Unity

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in homology with the animal world, with the addition of presuppositions concerning the sexual activity of the woman). The superiority then changes in direction and in nature: the brother, as a man, dominates his sister (here, the language of 'strength / weakness') when she is in the situation of being a woman or female. This arises if she commits the error of entering the 'sexual' domain (e.g. being accused, as someone unmarried, of maintaining relations with a man, or committing the error of marrying 'at home', in the village where she is a 'daughter', even if the marriage is not incestuous in the usual sense). The brother can and even must then dominate her, through his bearing and his words, and even with blows in the case of an unmarried sister, because, they say, he is the male. The brother-sister relation unfolds in the status system, i.e. the system of titles, which is basically an order of all the ancestral names that have founded a line, a system of reproduction in which everyone is classed, through the name he or she is attached to, as a descendant of a brother or a sister. On this plane, entering sexuality (in the aforementioned sense) breaches a major prohibition for the sister. Once this boundary has been crossed, one enters the world of the distinctive opposition of the sexes, one of great inequality, a setting that, being outside the status system, is not restricted by hierarchical references and is therefore open in part to violence. Everything takes place as if certain adjacent properties qualifying the brother on level one become autonomous (and substantialized) on level two. In both exchanges and ritual the brother certainly possesses the 'strength of the male', which he places at the service of the relationship (he does the gardening and ritual cooking). His relation with the pig defines his 'nocturnal' aspect (the animal, the forest, the raw, the connection between pigs and 'spirits'), but it is he who transforms this aspect into 'light' and who brings to the day what is present in the 'night' (the hunt, stockraising, cooking, service in the house at mealtimes). On level two, 'strength' becomes a characteristic in itself and is no longer at the service of a relationship in which the brother is a part: one finds here, for instance, the strength of the brother towards his sister if she demeans herself, of the man in search of conquests (seduction is an enterprise that men represent and pursue like the chase).

This second level is 'outside the ideology', at least if one understands by 'ideology' the first level of the hierarchy of relations between two terms (here, the whole system of titles, which forms the 'status' structure). But this formal definition of global ideology (global for the totality being considered, since it

defines level one) must be clearly indicated. Otherwise, one leaves for the second level, as Dumont has done,<sup>7</sup> the problematic definition of an 'unconscious' or 'less conscious' state, something that risks reducing the hierarchy of levels, the effect of a social logic of relations, to a psychology. It can easily be seen that the Samoans are entirely conscious of the fact that the 'nocturnal' side of life exists (the vocabulary of 'night', 'the dark', 'the black' and 'the hidden') and has its properties (war, relations with the spirits, 'sexuality', the homology with animals), just as the 'diurnal' side ('day', 'light', 'truth', 'evidence of understanding') has its properties (the system of titles, the reference to God, sister » brother relations, and other relations modelled on the latter).

Given this example of an apparent cosmological dichotomy, the errors into which an analysis might fall that contented itself only with a binary table, that sought only 'analogies' between the pair day / night (*ao / po*) and other relations, as Needham and others have done with other examples in *Right and Left* and elsewhere (Needham (ed.) 1973, Needham 1980), can be imagined. In doing so, one would not notice the specific configuration of the Samoan social relationship between individuals of different sex, in which the male / female relation modifies, on another level, the sister / brother relation.<sup>8</sup>

Let us summarize what we have said concerning hierarchical 'unity'. If we return to the example of right / left, we will say that hierarchy is at work whenever we encounter two terms that apparently form a pair of complementary opposites, though in reality, on a certain level, the term 'right' (or 'left') is at once the whole of the body and its right (or left) side.

## 2. *Conjunction: a + b / a : b*

The second form represents configurations in which the whole appears as such, as a third term. In addition to *a* and *b*, there is '*a* and *b*'. Clearly, the parts are still hierarchized if they belong to the same whole. I have indicated that this type of attachment has as its necessary consequence a difference in the level of attachment. Two identical attachments would signify that we have in fact only encountered a single term, since, in holistic logic, identity is nothing other than the 'place' occupied in relation to a whole (Tcherkézoff 1987: 113–16, 1986a, 1986b, 1989). Let us consider systems of titles, with or without ranks, in Polynesia, the caste system in India and all 'status' systems, provided we agree thus to extend the term

7. Dumont has used this terminology a great deal; see his 1966: 16 n., 58 n., 91 n., 106, 295, 319, 323, 355; 1983: 236 n., 255, 258.

8. Shore (1981, 1982: appendix and *passim*) provides an example of an analysis of these Samoan data in binary mode which might have found a place in *Right and Left*. For a critique, and an analysis of the sister–brother encompassment, see Tcherkézoff 1992a, 1993b.

and to oppose status (holistic reference) and stratification (substantialist reference) in a distinctive way. On Samoa, the 'place' of everyone in the society (in our terms, the limited totality of the individual's strategic choices, constituted by whatever he enters into in his relationships with various other individuals) depends on the *tulaga* or 'sitting place' of the family head in the village council, which is, within the ceremonial village 'circle' (the circle of 'titles'), the position of the 'title' defining the 'family' to which the individual in question belongs.

It was conjunction that attracted me towards reflecting formally on hierarchy when, in 1975–7, I analysed an East African ethnography in which a given term (in this case, the sacred king) is at once the sum of all the distinctive oppositions in the thought of the society and something more than the simple sum or collection of these terms. What is entailed by the fact that the Nyamwezi king is simultaneously the first personage of the domestic domain and the first figure of the wild domain, the consecrated 'cattle' and the murderous 'lion', this giving him efficacy in his sacrificial work, in which he transforms the external powers of death into domestic powers of life (Tcherkézoff 1980, 1981, 1983, 1985b, 1986a, 1986b, 1989)? In a sense, a way of reversing the usual order that prevails in the analysis of sacred kinship must be found. Instead of limiting ourselves to modelling royal symbolism in such a way as to 'unify' a posteriori all the differences represented in the vision of the day-to-day world, we must examine how the terms of these diverse oppositions are represented as the parts of a king who is himself considered to be a whole (the well-known equivalence between the sacred king and the world). Moreover, this view applies very generally to all places that enjoy ritual efficacy, to all *mana* objects and *mana* persons (Adler 1987; Tcherkézoff 1986b, 1989, 1991b).

On one level, we have '*a* and *b*' as something 'more' that *a* adds to *b*, for '*a* and *b*' is the source of differentiation between '*a*' and '*b*'. Thus the holistic *conjunction* should not be confused with *addition* (sum, collection, complementarity). For example, it does not constitute the human race, which regroups men and women, but it can constitute an androgynous ritual figure, as is the case with the Nyamwezi king, or with a pair of twins differentiated by sex or by order of birth, as in Dogon cosmology, or in the Nyamwezi court ritual concerning twins. The difference is then posed *within* the unity. This, at least, is what the ritual demonstrates. The unity is there from the start, but by itself it is unproductive, for it is only a *singularity* (perfect twins, cosmogony with a single gender, etc.). Once the difference has been established, the *unity* becomes productive of life and consequently productive of numerous distinctions, while, retrospectively, it is established as a holistic unity (Tcherkézoff 1981; 1987: 67–8, 89–92, 127–31, and see references to *unicité* in index; 1986b).

By way of contrast to these propositions, let us refer to Needham's article on 'unilateral figures' (mythical personages whose bodies consist only of a half, whether right or left). The author fails to posit the difference between singularity and unity, as if, once again, 'symbolic' unity and duality could be considered outside their social references, in a landscape in which the sole indicators the mind

has to observe are here 'ones', there 'twos', 'unilateralities' and 'dyads' (Needham 1980: ch. 1). This criticism has been formulated elsewhere by Hérítier-Augé (1991), who accuses Needham of contenting himself with the statement that the existence of symmetric forms must be complemented by the existence of such asymmetric forms as those of the one-sided body (the idea of the symmetry of the human body would lead naturally to the idea of a cut into two symmetric halves). Hérítier-Augé sees something else here, a statement of the asymmetry of the sexes (these bodies are in fact masculine), with respect to the total idea of the two sexes that the whole body can represent. We might think here of the Dogon example, in which each empirical body, each individual, carries within himself the two sexes and their asymmetry (in the representation of the fundamental 'grains', situated in their collar-bones; see Tcherkézoff 1987: 90–91). It is appropriate simply to add to the singularity the possibility of its sometimes being also a unity and therefore a sign of totality (see *ibid.*: 63–4, on Nyamwezi ancestors with one foot). In any case, the presence of asymmetry is fundamental and is not derived from symmetry: it can signify the presence of totality, in either the form  $a = a + b$  (the singularity then indicates that one side determines, by itself alone, the space of meaning, and encompasses the other), or under the form  $(a + b) > (a) + (b)$  (the singularity is a primordial lack of distinction in which asymmetry appears in order to create movement and life (see *ibid.*: 63–4, 89–92 and n., 128–31)).

In his brief remarks in 1978 and 1979, Dumont did not pay any particular attention to these ternary systems (body / right / left; the body is not only the right but also right-and-left). Some Nyamwezi examples, as well as that concerning the chief in ancient China and the Osage case, have shown what is at issue (Tcherkézoff 1987: 46ff., 58, 97–8, ch. 5 (section 3), see also references to *totalization* in the index). The Osage example is a particularly clear one. The society is a system of moieties (right / left, heaven / earth, etc.) and, moreover, represents itself to itself, in its totality, through the features of 'a man'. When the whole tribe is assembled, the 'man' faces the sun, but when, for example, it is time to make war, he turns round: the moieties change position, around an east–west axis. At the same time unity, the first form of hierarchy, is at work. Within one moiety, it can be seen that one and only one sub-moiety has the same name as the whole moiety. Again, considering the two moieties, it can be seen that certain symbols, like the sun, are at once above the two moieties (this is conjunction: in the numerical associations, the sun is 13, the moieties are respectively 6 and 7) and the representatives of only one moiety (one is Earth, the other Sky; the Sun belonging to the latter).

Despite these few differences, unity and conjunction permit the presence of reversal in identical fashion. Conjunction is reduced to unity as soon as, instead of remaining with the relation between the whole as such and its parts, the relation between the parts is considered: one represents the whole, the other does not, or at any rate not on the same level. Aside from representations of a whole as such, like the 'man' of an Osage tribe, such configurations as the chiefs being of one moiety but having authority over the whole tribe are often encountered. There is

also the famous Bororo case (Lévi-Strauss 1944). Thus although we may always encounter the reversal of an asymmetry ( $a > b \rightarrow b > a$ ), with conjunction the reversal appears when consideration bears on the parts. It will be remembered that there are two configurations of levels, tied successively to each other: (1) the whole // its parts, and (2) the principal asymmetry  $a > b$ , reflecting the superiority of the global representation of one part, which can be reversed on a secondary level. We encounter this distinction in Dumont's 'Postface' (1979b), where the author notes that the level of the 'principle of unity' is *outside* the level on which the terms can be considered in themselves (this exteriority is the basis of the hierarchy) and where he adds that this hierarchy 'simultaneously introduces' the possibility of a reversal (ibid.: 398). The interest of the example of Nyamwezi sacrificial codes was in showing that the three forms, unity, conjunction and reversal, appear in the taxonomy issuing from the same ritual ensemble (Tcherkézoff 1987: ch. 3, sections 2 and 3). We see it equally at the meta-level of models. Unity includes reversal (but this presents us with the problem of distinguishing between the ideological and the empirical; see below) and conjunction includes unity: even when the 'body' is affirmed as such, as a totality, the 'right' side (or equally the 'left') represents it more than the other side does. And the difference is not one of degree: one will represent the whole, but the other will never be in a position to do so, or else it will be on another level (we will then have three configurations ordered among themselves). But this representation of the whole by a part will take place in a second-rank configuration, following an initial configuration where, as among the Osage, the tribe is 'one' body, 'one' man, something standing above the two moieties.

Can we then say that reversal is clearly defined in the theory of hierarchy? Apparently not, since as soon as we leave symbolic writings in order to tackle the *princeps* example, that of king and priest in India dealt with by Dumont, we encounter an ambiguity, one that led Needham to view the example in a substantialist fashion and to conclude that Dumont's theory 'adds nothing' (1987: 141). What is it about the 'absolute' authority of the priest that brings about a reversal 'on another level'? In what respect is there a level, i.e. an order of situations, and not a context? The answer is that the first asymmetry is an encompassment, while the 'reversed' asymmetry is no longer one. This distinction is crucial, but Dumont's formulations, and mine at the Oxford conference and in *Le Roi nyamwezi*, did not make this clear. I will try to do that here, in the hope that this clarification will prevent further erroneous interpretations like Needham's in *Counterpoints*.

The discussion will underline the difference between contexts and levels. It will be seen that Needham's critique is addressed to an object of his own imagining, and that this imagining is, if one may say so, characteristic of a logic of 'contexts'. Thus the present essay returns directly to the Oxford conference and proposes to add something to it. It will then turn towards the remaining ambiguity in the theory of hierarchical reversal: is it a question of culture or of structure? A reply in terms of structure will require us to define formally the orientation of

contexts that turns them into levels. Reversal defines a descending (top-down) *transformation* and not simply the recognition of a second, less important 'idea' that we encounter without having to ask about its formation, which is thus present and acts within the field defined by the initial idea. In brief, do we have a reversal of asymmetry, this asymmetry being found binding two different ideas (one dominating here and the other there)? Or do we, of necessity, have a reversal of the first idea, in the sense in which any global ideology in a totality (a social space defined by holistic relations) is contradicted at a given moment? In this case, we have not two ideas but one, not several values, but a hierarchy generated by the fact that there is always a reference to *the* value.

### 3. *Reversal*

The hierarchical structure is a configuration of two levels. 'Level' is distinguished from 'context', first by being defined by a relation, not a substance. But this structural condition does not suffice to make a structure 'hierarchical': it is still necessary that these relations be interdependent and that this internal connection be orientated. The first level is a part-whole relation that, viewed from the second level, appears as the integration of a distinction. The second level is this distinction, which presents itself as the reversal of the first level.

The first level is a relation of the type 'sacred » profane' or 'divine » human', in which the first term defines the whole space within which the second term is able to exist. In taking the example of the sacred, some clarification is immediately called for. It is a matter of the sacred in Mauss's sense ('everything that qualifies society') and Durkheim's (that which contains all the rest, without finding itself to be contained in anything) (Mauss 1968 [1906]; Durkheim 1912). It is therefore not a matter of the distinctive or substantialist pair of the functionalist sociological tradition, of two sets of contexts, whose collection forms the social space, disjointed, and in contact along a frontier whose crossing, first in one direction and then in the other, forms the ritual act. The second level is the one in which the term that was the 'part' on the first level becomes the determinant of a relation with its complementary term (which was the 'whole' on the first level), whether this relation is simply distinctive or is defined as an equality or inequality. The heart of the matter lies in this last formulation. The fact of encompassment (the first level) implies a 'part' whose meaning implies in its turn another plane of consideration and of experience, namely that of the distinction of that part. In my view, this is the only way of formalizing the orientated interdependence between the levels: the second level is then 'hierarchically' dependent on the first. The 'hierarchy' is this 'sacred order', where the 'sacred' *encompasses* the profane instead of being simply the distinctive complementary of the latter. The term is appropriate because—as the ethnography seems repeatedly to demonstrate—the



social order, which appears 'sacred' to us (because it is the most global; we would say 'status') is generated by a logic of encompassment (a 'hierarchical opposition'), not by a dichotomous distinction or a series of distinctions fitting together.

As a result, the relation on the second level is very different from the relation on the first. We pass from encompassment to distinction (the latter includes substantial equality or inequality):  $a \gg b \rightarrow b : a$ . The second level can be specified as an inequality  $b > a$ , in which we then find the figure of reversal proper:  $a \gg b \rightarrow b > a$ . But we do not have a symmetrical reversal between two inequalities ( $a > b \rightarrow b > a$ ). Hierarchical reversal is not a symmetrical reversal, contrary to what Needham thinks he has read in Dumont's work and in my own.

### 3.1 The view in 'contexts'

Let us see what Needham has to say on reversal in *Counterpoints*. He does not, he says, intend to raise the whole set of problems linked to the holistic method but will limit himself to published remarks concerning dualistic classification in Dumont 1979a and 1982, and in Tcherkézoff 1983. He might have added Dumont 1979b, where, more than anywhere else, Dumont invokes formal problems. Needham writes:

In the lecture on value, Dumont returns to the topic of reversal.... The example he gives is that of the relationship between priest and king: in matters of religion the priest is superior, but in matters of public order the king is superior. In the outcome to this very brief illustration...Dumont...concludes: 'This chiasmus is characteristic of hierarchy of the articulate type' (1982: 225). The situation he appears to have in view can be represented... [as in Fig. 2 here]. Something of this kind must be figured, or else the *chi* (Gk.  $X$ ) that is formed by the intersecting lines will not appear. That a merely grammatical chiasmus, in which the second phrase is an inversion of the first, is not what is in question is made sure by the connection with levels; here, religion is in some sense (Dumont asserts that it is a 'logical relationship') 'absolutely' superior, while matters of public order are 'subordinate'. (Needham 1987: 140–41)

Needham continues by pointing out that the logic of Dumont's remarks is clearly not the only conceivable one concerning the relationship between priesthood and royalty. He points out that the 'kind of "reversal"' that Dumont presents is 'entirely familiar', and that he himself has already dealt with it in the collection *Right and Left*; but he also says that Dumont's conceptual apparatus is unfamiliar. He concludes by saying that despite everything, it is 'probable' that the scheme he has thought up 'is in a direct correspondence with Dumont's intention'. The conclusion imposes itself, says Needham, that Dumont brings 'nothing at all' to the problem, save that this reversal is characteristic of an articulate type of hierarchy—'what is either obscure or disputable', adds Needham, without developing the point (1987: 141). In any case, he says, 'the graphic

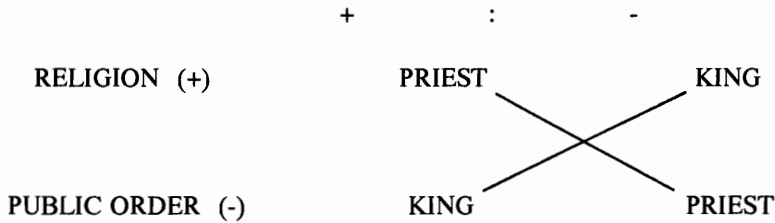


FIGURE 2. Chiasmus of Sovereignty (after Needham 1987: 141)

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chiasmus, with its levels...is produced within the kind of binary scheme that elsewhere Dumont so much rebukes in the work of his colleagues' (ibid.: 142).

Let us leave aside for the moment the distinction between an 'articulate' hierarchy and any other sort of hierarchy. Dumont makes this distinction only very briefly (1982: 225), and it has no bearing on the logical nature of the reversal (see Part II of the present article). But the discussion of the orientated character of the reversal, which is itself the result of the 'absolute' character of the first asymmetry (the first level), is independent of these distinctions; this must be posited at the outset. Needham's scheme allows us to clarify things. In effect, if hierarchical reversal were what this scheme indicates it to be and if, as a result, it belongs to binary logic—for Needham is right in saying that the scheme he draws here belongs in its entirety to the logic illustrated by the studies contained in *Right and Left*—it would indeed bring us 'nothing' new. Needham would be perfectly justified in saying so, were it not for the fact that nothing here corresponds to the lessons to be drawn from Dumont's Indian studies, even though the compression and unclarity of Dumont's expression in his formalist texts may sometimes allow—but only by forgetting the whole of *Homo Hierarchicus*—a binary interpretation such as that shown by Needham's scheme.

What does that scheme tell us? We have two contexts, one positive, the other negative, and the possibility for each context to contain a positive term and a negative term. The priest who is '+' in religion is '-' in public order, and the king behaves in 'symmetrically reverse fashion.'<sup>9</sup> It matters not at all that the context of 'religion' is placed on the first line of the scheme, nor that it is assigned the '+' sign. The signs respectively modifying the two contexts are not organically linked to the chiasmus; and in any case, the first level of the scheme might be that of public order. It is therefore not a level. The reversal of signs that characterizes

9. 'Symmetrical' reversal (for example, a reversal of inequality:  $a > b \rightarrow b > a$ ) is distinguished from hierarchical reversal. In the second case, the reversal reverses the terms *and* shows that we have passed to the second relation, that which is 'contrary' to the logic of encompassment: a distinction (by this latter term we understand a substantialist distinction).

the terms in each relation is independent of the signs (or of the order of presentation) of each relation.

We shall call this view of reversal the substantialist view, a view 'in contexts' and, therefore, a culturalist view. It views things as if the situation were as follows. Reversal is a thing, a purely logical thing: if 'religion' and 'public order' are opposed to each other (as '+' and '-', whatever the context in relation to which they are '+' or '-'), the two terms that represent respectively each of the two contexts are opposed in the same fashion (according to the same logic) once they are united within each of the contexts; and the orientation of asymmetry between the two terms will be reversed with the passage between contexts. Furthermore, the affirmation of the absolutely superior character of religion and of the subordinate character of public order are a different thing, which Needham transcribes with the signs '+' and '-' placed beside the term that defines the content of each of the two contexts. The question of value is thus separated from the fact of distinguishing—it follows it. Value is a secondary addition to the order of the facts.

Dumont's assertion concerning 'absolute' superiority is thus reduced to a statement that religion is more important than power. It remains gratuitous, even peremptory, like a prejudice according to which religious ideas are more important than political ones. All this constitutes a culturalist interpretation: for all societies, or perhaps just for India, religion is whatever is superior. But formal proof of this is lacking. The different social relations are presented as formally identical ('+' / '-'), which leaves one thinking that everything then rests on the observer's interpretation, on his translation of the different contexts (what we call 'culturalism'). The relation '+ / -' (in which the priest is '+') is religious, and because it is religious, it will be superior to the relation in which the '+' represents the king. And even if one were then to assert a logic of the 'encompassment' of religion over what remains, this would entail an encompassment between two 'ideas', while social relations would all remain 'analogous', sometimes oriented in the same direction, sometimes in the opposite direction, to each other. Thus, in effect, from a structural point of view, it is still 'analogy' that would remain the only solid aspect of the analysis. But this conclusion of Needham's is no more than the automatic result of a method that has placed the question of distinction above that of value, reducing the second to the status of being simply the valuing of a pre-existing state of fact.

### 3.2 The view in 'levels'

Let us therefore abandon the scheme that effectively tells us 'nothing', nothing at any rate concerning the identity of a society, a notion that has to be represented as an order of relations (a hierarchy of social facts, in the holistic sense) if one wants to avoid turning it into the result of an interpretation of a conception of the

world (whether interpreted well or badly); and let us quickly reread what Dumont has to tell us in the text referred to by Needham (Dumont 1982: 224–5):

Now let us suppose that...we agree not to separate an idea and its value but to consider instead as our object the configuration formed by *idea-values* or *value-ideas*.... First about ranking [*sc.* hierarchy]. ‘High’ ideas will both contradict and include ‘low’ ideas. I called this peculiar relation ‘encompassment’. An idea that grows in importance and status acquires the property of encompassing its contrary. Thus I found that in India purity encompasses power. (original emphasis)

One might be misled by considering just these few lines. One might think that two contexts are being presented (‘purity’ on the one hand and ‘power’ on the other), because an encompassing relation has been established (perhaps historically) between these two cultural ‘ideas’.<sup>10</sup> Dumont continues (*ibid.*: 225):

We have already alluded to the second characteristic, *reversal*. The logical relationship between priest and king, as found in India or, nearer to us, in Christianity itself, five centuries after Christ, under the pen of Pope Gelasius, is exemplary in this regard. In matters of religion, *and hence absolutely*, the priest is superior to the king or emperor to whom public order is entrusted. But *ipso facto* [*du même coup*] the priest will obey the king in matters of public order, that is, in subordinate matters. (emphases added)

One may notice immediately the difference between this passage and Needham’s summary of it: ‘the example...of the relationship between priest and king: in matters of religion the priest is superior, but in matters of public order...’ (1987: 140), whence the schematization in the form of *chi*. Only then comes an examination of the fact that, for Dumont, religion is ‘absolutely’ superior. For Needham reading Dumont, it is the distinction between two contents of experience that is primary. Possibly one might then ask oneself about the relative valuation of these contexts (why is religion absolutely superior?). This attitude is the result of refusing to consider the existence of value as a social fact, from which arises an improper distinction between fact and value, as if social thought were first distinguished and only then hierarchized. In short, value is something added.

For Dumont, on the other hand, the initial superiority is absolute from the outset. Doubtless it is absolute because it is religious, but ‘religion’ is for Dumont the central status system (the most global attachment)—here, caste. It is therefore the Durkheimian and Maussian sense of the concept, the sacred, i.e. ‘society’ represented to itself as a global order. This superiority links one term (here, priest), which, when taken alone, represents the whole principle of the ‘religious’ system (the system of castes in the primary sense, the distinctions and interdepend-

10. In the sense of ‘values’ from the point of view of a hierarchy with (more than two) values:  
*a / b / c / d ...*

encies in the name of the least impurity; this appears throughout Dumont's work on India), with another (the king or his equivalents). This other is at the same time a caste, therefore an element of this system, and a caste defined, in contradistinction to the others, by an intrinsic property, namely power (Dumont has often mentioned the historical equivalence between the royal function of the past and the dominant caste, that which possesses rights to the land; see his 1972: ch. 7 and appendix C). Then, '*ipso facto [du même coup]*', the priest also has a relationship in terms defining the intrinsic domain of the king (he 'will obey'), when the plane of experience being considered is the domain of the king. This inferiority speaks volumes, for we see it (as we must) as the immediate concomitant of the first relation.

This *dependence* of the second relation with reference to the first is clearly confirmed in the example from the European Middle Ages cited frequently by Dumont as a parallel to the Indian case. This concerns the text in which Pope Gelasius defines the relations between the two powers. The priest's obedience to the king in matters where the king rules is justified, because the royal power itself, in its entirety, is in the last resort received from the hands of God. The second, royal power is distinguished from the first, divine power, but it exists because the first exists (the converse proposition being untenable):

There are mainly two things, August Emperor, by which this world is governed: the sacred authority of the pontiffs and the royal power.... In things concerning the public discipline, religious leaders realize that imperial power has been conferred on you *from above*, and they themselves will obey your laws, for fear that in worldly matters they should seem to thwart your will. (Dumont 1986: 46, citing Gelasius, after Carlyle and Carlyle 1903; emphasis added)

As Dumont says, 'priests are superior, for they are inferior only on an inferior level' (*ibid.*). This commentary summarizes two points of view in Dumont's work. On the one hand is that often cited, which would appear culturalist if left to itself: 'the reference to salvation clearly indicates that Gelasius deals here with the supreme or ultimate level of consideration' (*ibid.*). On the other hand is this observation, which immediately follows the preceding one and is not redundant but supplements another, formal point of view: 'we note the hierarchical distinction between the priest's *auctoritas* and the king's *potestas*' (*ibid.*).

One might also read the remarks that follow (*ibid.*: 47–8), where Dumont puts into relief the distinction between this 'hierarchical' disposition and an interpretation that would see only a symmetric distinction between the 'two powers'. This passage ends by citing a recent author, Father Congar, who thinks that for Gelasius the Empire is in the Church (the Emperor is a believer) in the same way that, moreover, the Church is in the Empire. One could also differentiate this case with another discussed (*ibid.*: 49ff.), where, nearly three centuries after Gelasius, the popes arrogated to themselves political authority over a part of Italy. This introduction of the Church into the world creates a spiritual monarchy uniting terms that hitherto have been definitively separated. From that point on,

the distinction between the two powers is no longer hierarchical but substantial; and one notes that ‘the spiritual [becomes] conceived as superior to the temporal *on the temporal level itself*, as if it was a superior degree of the temporal.... It is along this line that later on the Pope will be conceived as “delegating” the temporal power to the Emperor as his “deputy”’ (ibid.: 50, 57; original emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

As will be seen below, one thing in Dumont’s remarks perhaps still needs clarifying: the second state of inferiority is different in nature from the initial state of superiority. The Brahman’s obedience to the king is something quite different from the avoidance of those who are a source of impurity through contact (the gaps that define a ‘caste’). There is a contrast between, on the one hand, an inequality of access to valued substances (here, power) and, on the other, an encompassment in which one of the terms is the whole for the other; the Indian priest *is* caste, i.e. the principal ‘caste’ *vis-à-vis* all the others. The necessary clarification is provided by reading the ethnography concerning caste relationships on the plane of purity, and then comparing it with the ethnography of relations of domination with respect to differential access to the ownership of the soil (1972: ch. 6; cf. ch. 7).

In a study of royalty, which first appeared in 1962 in English and was then reproduced as an appendix to the French edition of *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966: appendix C), Dumont speaks to us of ‘the relationship’ between priest and king. This *unique* relationship ‘concretely...has a double aspect’:

While spiritually, absolutely, the priest is superior [to the king]...he is at the same time, from a temporal or material point of view, subject and dependent.... The former, ideological aspect of the relation is not unknown in the West on the level of values, but it takes on in this case a particular form, largely because the spiritual element here is embodied in a person. It is obvious that the second, the ‘practical’ aspect is important in fact. (Dumont 1970 [1962]: 65)

The first level describes the aspect that Dumont calls ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ or ‘absolute’ or ‘ideological’. A little further on, he cites texts that describe the relationship on the first level, the aspect of absolute superiority (the Brahman is to the others *like a god to men*; because he teaches sacred knowledge, he is ‘a human god’; thus the relation is ‘»’, that of the type ‘divine » human’); and the texts also describe what we call here the ‘second level’, the aspect of domination (the priestly office is the livelihood of the Brahman).

To summarize. Needham’s critique neglects precisely what defines holistic hierarchy: (1) the second relationship must be worked out in a context the very

11. Father Congar’s interpretation takes the form of a *symmetric* reversal. The second example, that of the political popes, is characteristic of *addition* (in the sense in which we have distinguished it from *conjunction*). With this addition, hierarchy is transformed into stratification or inequality: the asymmetry spiritual > temporal no longer depends on a question of level.

existence of which is a consequence of the existence of the first context (and therefore we no longer speak of 'contexts'); and (2) the first relation must be of the 'part-whole' type (which is not the case for the second relation). Needham neglects what constitutes Indian hierarchy: the dominant are only dominant in so far as they form a caste. This aspect of 'caste' thus includes power, even 'encompasses' it, once it turns out that the second aspect defines a 'contrariety'—here, the fact that the priests can be inferior (but they are so 'on an inferior level'). And the system is on the side of caste: the non-dominant are also castes. In the same way, Needham neglects what forms the hierarchy invoked by Gelasius. If the king has a power distinct from that of the priests, he none the less holds it 'from above', an 'above' represented by the priests.

It is certainly strange to see the discussion apparently stumbling over the evidence. For the simple fact of distinguishing between a *hierarchy* of relations and an *analogy* of relations should not constitute an obstacle. It is true that, for Needham, the idea of 'hierarchy' designates solely a classification by branching, an interlocking (1980, 1987). And this classification can be generated by a distinctive opposition alone, or else one can have analogies between different binary oppositions contributing to the construction of a taxonomic tree. In any case, the objects before us entail other difficulties, more real and above all more useful to examine, like the examination of different forms of dependence between two relations (cultural order or structure, only two levels or more, existence of partial wholes, etc.). Let us therefore leave the false problems in order to be able to see the true ones more clearly.

#### 4. *The Holistic View*

##### 4.1 From culture to structure

As will now be realized, we are faced with a very clear choice in interpreting the logic of 'hierarchical' configurations. One might think, in forgetting the ethnography and retaining only some of Dumont's formulations, that the question is one of societies (or of a sociology) privileging the plane of religious ideas (beliefs). Here, where the relation touches the world beyond (the 'salvation' Dumont refers to concerning Gelasius), we are on the superior plane (value or 'ultimate' level, as Dumont says again). This view brings us nothing but disadvantages. It submits the comparison to a culture-centric interpretation: we declare to be 'religious' and superior what would be considered religious if it arose with us (see Pouillon 1979 for this criticism). It cuts society up into contexts, in which the religious and the political each function for themselves. This removes any possibility of studying the organizing capacity of the ideology; whereas any 'social organization' is a system of 'representations', a bidimensional system

between the what-ought-to-be of organization and fact, the facts (i.e. the interpretation of the facts by means of representations defining the ought-to-be of organization) constantly coming to contradict the ought-to-be and to be enclosed within it (unless some upheaval enters, completely modifying the representation of the 'ought-to-be'). Why must we say that the facts also come to 'contradict' the idea of the 'ought-to-be'? For, without this contradiction (which anthropology calls the relation between ideology and practice), all social systems would stay put, without history. The hyperfunctionalist analysis ('everything functions') would be right, though the opposite has long been noted (Augé 1975).

The other choice is structural hierarchy, i.e. the order of relations, not the order of ideas. What is important in the definition of the Brahman is his relation with other men as an encompasser. For he is 'like' a god to other men, that is, the representative of the idea that presides over the most extensive classification in this society, that of the least impurity that defines a 'caste' group, those who protect themselves (downwards) from all the others. The first definition does not reside in the fact that the Brahman is within the religious sphere, in the sense of this observation informing us, in terms that are solely distinctive, that the Brahman is not 'profane', that he is not a 'man of power', etc. It follows—and this is a point that has still not entered sufficiently into the analytical practice of anthropology—that we must draw the immediate consequence of encompassment: '*ipso facto [du même coup]*' there is another place of consideration defined by whatever permits the encompassed to be encompassed and thus distinguished from the whole. But this implies that the second level is always a place of substantialist relations: it is defined by the intrinsic nature of whatever distinguishes the encompassed. Thus, if it conceals an inequality that appears as the 'reverse' of the relation on the first level, we must be careful not to set this inequality and the asymmetric relation of the first level—which is, in respect of the former, an encompassment—in the form of an 'analogy' (as in a binary table: '+ / -', 'right / left', etc.)

Let us reflect for a moment. We might have merely a 'collection' of groups closed in on themselves, each with its idea of purity. Or we might have a system, but simply a system of gaps, with neither beginning nor end, a flat system. One of the elements of this collection or of this system is then found to contain a property—here, power—allowing it certain relations, ones of domination, over other elements. This surplus will be a simple addition to the collection or system. We will remain on the same level, for there is only one possible plane of consideration for all that can exist in this collection or flat system. Let us turn to reality, which is quite different. We have a status system, i.e. the enumeration of an attachment 'to a whole', an attachment in which each depends on one or several others in order to 'be attached', in which each is attached differently.<sup>12</sup> The

12. This has already been emphasized (Tcherkézoff 1987). Two 'equal' attachments reduce the whole to a collection, and each member element must then find in substance its reason for existing. This is the situation with the 'modern' individual in respect of the ideology he calls



collection becomes an orientated system with a beginning (or, if one wishes, an end). At this point, whether initial or terminal, we no longer find inclusion, but the sacred, the maximal sacred. From this point, we can turn back and see all the other attachments. But as soon as the view 'redescends', it must in some way realize what allows the elements to be distinguished in this differential attachment. Looking 'upwards', one sees only the whole, so to speak. Looking 'downwards', one sees distinctions. To put it differently, in entering the 'sacred', one becomes uniquely defined as more or less sacred; when one is in the 'profane', on the other hand, one is this or that, 'right' or 'left', man or woman, etc. But, because we are considering a society, the sacred encompasses the profane. The system of inclusions encompasses the system of distinctions, the attachment encompasses the empirical difference between individuals. At the same time, the latter must reappear at a particular level.<sup>13</sup>

In order to mark clearly the contrast between the two methods, we can summarize roughly what would be the 'culturalist' and the 'holistic' views of India. The culturalist view 'of the holism of India' would be as follows. On an initial plane, that which counts in the scale of values of the people, relationships are a matter of purity. Everyone is obsessed with this religious idea (the ideal of purity or the fear of impurity), the local version of those prestige systems that anthropology sometimes tells us about when it encounters a gradation that certainly does not appear to be expressible in economic terms. Let us note straightaway the contradiction: there will be only separation, and we will search in vain for the interdependence that makes a society out of all these groups. Now, one knows how much the system of castes becomes not only a collection of avoidances (gaps of least impurity) but also a set of mutually rendered services (ritual acts of purification, exchanges of goods and services in terms of occupations, etc.). The culturalist view goes on: elsewhere, on another plane, power will intervene on its

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his own, 'modern', 'Western', 'human', etc. But if this concerns a whole (like a 'society'), the elements are parts, since this whole is like a 'body'. 'Status' as social attachment is a universal fact, even if its forms vary. Its presence—and this differential attachment of which we speak—does not indicate that we have located a specific type of 'status-oriented society' but that, in the cultural area being considered, the sociological unity we are speaking of 'makes a totality' for those concerned. In the Nyamwezi area, which comprises several kingdoms, it is a matter of what constitutes a kingdom; in the 'French' ideological-cultural area, it is a matter of the national political community; in the Samoan area at the present time, it is a matter of the 'village' as a circle of titles (see Tcherkézoff 1992b, 1993c).

13. I am leaving aside one difficulty here. Is the distinctive domain that appears when the view of hierarchical gaps of least impurity reverses itself in a 'contrary' sense, impurity as substance (material, bodily etc. distinctions), as source of impurity, or is it power, or both? The real difficulty remaining with *Homo Hierarchicus* is that there are two encompassments (purity / impurity and status / power). The model evoked here (i.e. sacred (the inclusions) / profane (the distinctions)) is entirely Durkheim's and Hertz's, assuming one is reading these authors without privileging the binary scheme (see Tcherkézoff 1995a).

usual scale, based on unequal access to valued resources (here, mainly land). One will note that, as regards the India of the texts, the first domain appears more important, though contrary indications can also be found. Each observer is then free to advance his own interpretation of the necessary relationship (in 'his' sociological universal) between religion and power or economics.

The sociologically holistic view of India—and holism is a method, not a type of society—consists, for its part, in picking out the encompassing relation(s) (whole / part) and not forgetting that each encompassment is accompanied 'by reversal' on a second level. It then encounters the relation of caste, the separation of least impurity on the one hand and the interdependence of ritual services on the other.<sup>14</sup> This interdependence is the social relation, which rests on the one hand on the least impurity—the officiant must be superior<sup>15</sup>—and on the other on 'domination': the householder is the officiant's 'employer'. The particularity of India is that the relationship between employer and employee is hierarchically inferior to (logically dependent on) the relationship between officiant and client (sacrificer / sacrificant) in the ritual.<sup>16</sup>

14. As Raymond Jamous has remarked to me, Dumont did not make this duality of aspects and their underlying relationship his main object of study. It is the first aspect that largely prevails in his work, since his critique was aimed at the school of social stratification, and it was necessary to bring to the fore the structure, the 'structural' gaps in the Lévi-Straussian sense.

15. He is so in the proper sense where the Brahman is concerned, but also in all other cases, in the sense that the officiant is employed by the householder. Whatever the mutual caste relation between these two may be on other planes (the marriages or funeral practices etc. of each one), which might well indicate a reversal of superiority, in the ritual employment the officiant is assimilated to the Brahman and the householder to the Kshatriya (the 'royal' varna). This can be seen in the way every ritual relationship is expressed in 'sacrificial' terms, which are (were) those of the relation between these two varna (i.e. Vedic categories that form the conceptual model, historical or not, of the castes (cf. Dumont 1972: ch. 4)).

16. Dominique Casajus has remarked to me that with Dumont, the inferiority of the first relation results from a methodological choice, namely to take an explanation accounting for the whole system, and to begin with what occurs at the extremities (here, Brahmans and Untouchables), hence 'caste'. One then sees that, in the centre, the order one expects is disturbed, and one encounters power. If it were just a matter of accounting for the centre, the primary position of power would be acceptable (whence, let us add, the tendency to place royal power first in studies centred on 'the local kingdom'; see the discussions raised by Pouchepadass (1990) and Toffin (1990)).

More exactly, we are anxious as far as possible to avoid taking an intuitive approach to what constitutes the 'whole' in an ethnography, so as to avoid culturalism. If two references appear to be in play, we must try and see if one of them functions with a holistic logic (in which the differences are generated by an opposition of the type  $A = A + B$ ), while the other only functions with a substantialist logic. If such is the case, before concluding that the one is being encompassed by the other, we must verify that what is encompassed in the encompassing relation is found again (through the dynamic of a 'transformation' that can be a 'reversal') as a 'distinctive' determinant in the other relation. Only then will we have a hierarchical structure, and only one. It remains to be seen to what extent the inferiority of the first relation in India

The central social fact, fulcrum of any comparison between societies, is *one* relation that indicates simultaneously attachment for all, and a gap between this collective representation of the group as a system of attachment (together with associated practices) and other practices (where the observer notices a discordance). In India, this relation, the relation of caste, is the relation of ritual services between castes: A is superior to B, in that he effects the rite, but A also serves B, who employs him. These are two inseparable aspects of the same relation, but the specific inseparability is the fact that one aspect depends on the other, while the reverse is not true. In effect, caste membership is a function of a relationship with purity (more exactly, a function of a certain distancing of oneself from sources of impurity) and not a function of proximity to means of payment, employment, power and the ability to command. The culturalist error, concomitant with a symmetric view affixed to the Dumontian reversal, would end up seeing in the caste relation, if this is regarded as central, the relation of a search for purity, a gradation towards an ideal of purity without interdependence with respect to '(ritual) service'. Now precisely, this is only met with in India when the individual 'leaves' the system of castes by 'renouncing' interdependence to seek an individual state of devotion—another reversal of attachment. And we will not be astonished to read in Dumont that power (in its 'encompassed' manifestation: 'contractual' royalty and 'interest' theorized as *artha*) has, in its evolution, worked hand in glove with the renouncers (Dumont 1966: 362–3, 373).

It matters little whether Dumont's formulations ('spiritually' *contra* 'the temporal point of view') permit a culturalist interpretation or not. One thing is certain, and he has said it sufficiently: everything rests on his interpretation of Indian society. Here again, it is necessary to leave aside polemics between Indianists. Although clearly important, they do not touch on what is at issue in the present discussion. The logical hierarchical structure that can be formalized from what Dumont tells us he has seen in India and that might appear useful in the analysis of all societies is, in my view, that of hierarchized levels. Now, as I showed in 1983 (see Tcherkézoff 1987), this configuration is antinomical to the binary table on the logical plane and with regard to the evidence of African and other facts, and it is antinomical to reversal between contexts. For Needham's scheme (i.e. Figure 2 above), I would therefore substitute the scheme represented in Figure 3.

All caste relations borrow from this 'hierarchy', which brings to prominence the two main figures of the traditional varna model, which, Dumont tells us, seems to be the model for the logical genesis of a complex system integrating hundreds of castes and sub-castes. And if, in the ritual that forms the life of the community (Dumont 1972: ch. 4), the relation of payment for employment is inferior to that of purification (along with the sacred gift that comes in as a compensation), it is

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(employment, domination) is also linked to the presence or transfer of an impurity when we know that the second relation ('sacrifice') is a purification (see Tcherkézoff 1994–95).

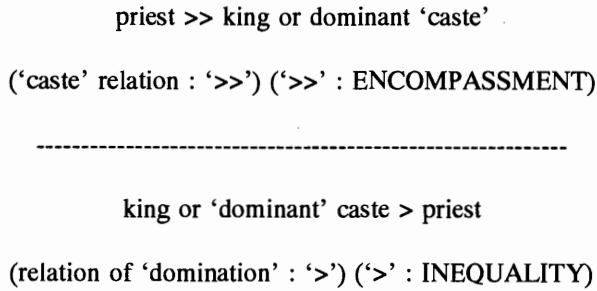


FIGURE 3. Hierarchical Reversal in India

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not because the people of India include in their conception of the world the despising of material goods and base everything on religious ideas, but because the relation of purity functions according to an encompassing logic (in matters of purity, superiority is 'absolute'), whereas the relation to money and food (both representing land) function according to a substantialist logic.<sup>17</sup> One can then decide to call 'religion' or 'sacred' any domain of encompassing relations. This would be a positive step, a way of extending Mauss's aim in a perhaps more rigorous fashion, certainly a way of distinguishing the global analysis of a society from the substantialist one (or 'individualist' one on the methodological plane), which first divides things into contexts in order to find subsequently a law of composition. The latter has the disadvantage that it then reflects the cultural identity of the observer more than that of the society encountered.

#### 4.2 An oriented structure

Let us add two corollary remarks to what has just been said. The first concerns the encompasser. One can see that this, when it becomes inferior upon attention

17. At this point, we have been brought beyond the distinction between structural analysis and analysis that considers the terms from the outset. The choice is no longer between the structural system that is caste (where a group is not 'pure' to the nth degree but less impure than M, N and P by certain criteria, at the same time as B, C and D are less impure than it by other criteria) and the stratified system, which constitutes a scale of commands and/or access to substances ('power'). We are, in the structural universe, at the stage of asking ourselves by which type of opposition the system of gaps is logically generated, a hierarchical (encompassing) opposition, or a different one? Let us add that a grammar or lexicon of proper relations generating social orders is a task that by and large has still to be carried out.

being transferred on to the second level, none the less escapes total inferiority. This is a logical consequence, from which we can draw profit, of the fact that the second relation is a (hierarchical) transformation of the first, that it is logically generated by and dependent on the first. In the case of India, one notes that the priest—and he alone—even when falling under the law of royal power, automatically escapes certain punishments and, in principle, taxation too.<sup>18</sup>

Another remark, leading us to the same conclusion, concerns the notion of 'value'. Properly speaking, there is no hierarchy 'of values' in a given society. There is only one value, the value of attachment, more exactly, that which implicitly concerns ritual action, which is itself a construction or reaffirmation of this attachment. For what would appear to constitute a second value is the 'contrary' of the first, precisely in the sense of a hierarchical reversal. This statement is at least valid for each partial whole (each hierarchical structure uncovered). We must leave open the question of whether a society can contain several 'wholes'. This putting of 'value' in the singular thus commits the analysis to a systematic search for the points of articulation, according to this logic of encompassing of the contrary, whenever it encounters several apparently heterogeneous values. Only if these points of articulation are discovered can we say that the two values encountered are hierarchized and that they therefore constitute a unique configuration. The articulation itself takes its bearings from the fact that (1) the terms of the relation that define one value are found in the relation defining the second value, and (2) they find themselves being modified (see below).

Thus the second level is not simply 'other', but a plane of experiences that becomes significant when contrasted with those on the first level. Thinking of contemporary India, Dumont notes the interest in a remark of Tambiah's: the individual appears, amongst other things, as if in 'an alert pursuit of personal advantage...disengaged from any abstract ethic of the common good...[in] a frantic quest for power and money' (Dumont 1979b: xxxii). But this banal, reputedly universal trait assumes a particular (i.e. comparative) colouring when it is presented in the analysis as one of the consequences (the second level) of 'the non-valorization, in a sense the non-moralization, of the individual' that characterizes the castes. This moral non-individualization of the empirical

18. 'The Brahman...is inviolable (the murder of a Brahman is, with the murder of a cow, the cardinal sin), and a number of punishments do not apply to him: he cannot be beaten, put in irons, fined, or expelled. The learned Brahman (*śrotriya*) is in theory exempt from taxes, and the Brahman is specially favoured by the law about lost objects, which generally, when they are found, revert mainly to the king, and which only a Brahman finder may keep in part or in whole; similarly, if a man dies intestate, only if he is a Brahman do his goods not accrue to the king (here one can see a certain mixing of the two functions)' (Dumont 1972: 109). Logically, if the inferiority of the encompasser is only applicable on an 'inferior level', one would expect that the exercise of domination on this level would be limited by elements that are on the boundary of the first level or which belong to it. (I thank Raymond Jamous for drawing my attention to the privileges of the Brahman.)

individual on the principal plane is an aspect of caste membership, expressed through a comparison centred on the West. The presence of the latter would be misleading if it had to serve to define the first level and thus the caste ('absence of individualism' and other negative traits); on the contrary, like any other status phenomenon, caste must be defined by the pair difference–interdependence, which defines social belonging, meaning here protecting itself from impurity from below *and* having a reciprocity oriented towards the ritual 'service' of the *jajmani* occupations. But it becomes useful again in expressing our recognition of these 'non-ideological' concomitants, as Dumont calls them, which accompany but also contradict the principal level, in short, of a second level, itself necessary to make comparison meaningful (Dumont *ibid.*). It is not enough to describe the status principles of the caste. We must also describe everything else, both as we grasp it and as it 'emerges' against the backdrop of the castes. In India, this will be renunciation, and the relation of the individual to gain, and also politics again.

We can therefore now clarify Dumont's remarks. Having indicated what seems to us to be indispensable to the concept of hierarchical reversal, we can indicate what, with Dumont, is asserted clearly and what not so clearly in the formulation of the theory. It is quite obvious that the binary scheme is nowhere to be found in Dumont's remarks. On this plane, Needham's interpretation in terms of '+' and '-' is inadmissible. On the other hand, what seems to me to be essential, namely the transformation of the encompassment into inequality, is not affirmed as such, even though the ethnography indicated by Dumont appears to me to demand this formulation. In his 1978 text, Dumont emphasizes that the 'symmetric opposition' (the simple distinction, or complementarity) is not indicative of a place in the whole, since it can be 'reversed at will; its reversal produces nothing'. Dumont continues:

On the contrary, the reversal of an asymmetrical opposition is significant, for the reversed opposition is not the same as the initial opposition. If the reversed opposition is encountered in the same whole in which the direct opposition was present, it is evidence of a change of level. In fact, it announces such a change with maximum economy, using only two hierarchized elements and their order. (1979a [1978]: 811; emphases removed)

In this text Dumont contrasts, on the plane of reversal, the distinctive relation and the asymmetric relation. But the text can be read to mean that the significant asymmetric reversal is of the type  $a > b \rightarrow b > a$ . For all that, one does not end up with Needham's schema, for Dumont also adds: 'it is highly probable that one level is contained within the other (encompassing the contrary...)' (*ibid.*).

The ambiguity that remains is thus perhaps this. The two relations are of the same nature, and the first level encompasses the second. At this point, we are again presented with a clear choice between an anthropology of interpreted ideas and an anthropology of structures. If this is reduced to saying that reversal signals a change of level and that one of the two levels encompasses the other—but in order to know which is the encompassing one it is necessary to interpret the scale

of cultural values expressed and to observe that in India, for example, religion counts for more—then we lose the advantage of formal proof in order to fall back into culturalist interpretations. It therefore matters to the utmost degree that the reversal indicates formally which level is the encompassing one. This is why we retain only reversal of the type  $a \gg b \rightarrow b > a$ .

We have said that, beyond the statements contained in Dumont's theoretical exposé, the ethnography suggests this formulation. But if the second relation is thus a transformation of the first, its dependence on the first is still stronger than the example of priest-king allows one to realize. The Indian theory of power (*artha* is within *dharma*) and that of Gelasius (the source of political power is divine) bring out the possibility of a contrary idea being included in the first. The space in which the contradiction has its effect is more restricted than the global space of the first idea—thus we speak of a *second* level. And this is not the result of a choice made by public opinion when confronted with two initially independent ideas: one proceeds from the other, in the minimal sense that the reference that authorizes the second idea in order to obtain experience belongs to the first; we thus speak of *levels*. But in addition, we must admit that with the transformation of the relation, the terms themselves (A and B) are transformed in crossing the barrier between the levels, as must be the case in a logic in which the terms acquire meaning and existence from the relation that unites them. The man of caste A becomes an employee, the man of caste B an employer. Equally, A who protects himself from the impurity of B (by which he is defined as a man of the caste) becomes he who treats B's impurity ritually, just as B, also defined simply as a caste and thus at a distance of less impurity from C, etc., is now considered under the aspect in which he is charged with impurity (body, food, dirty clothes; life-cycle events, births, funerals). For not only is the system of gaps structural, it is not as disjunct from matter as a phonological system, which, in structural linguistics, is just that, a system of gaps. Impurity in India is not only what others can communicate, even if contacts with others (concerning food, water, clothes, but also marriage) all contribute to this dynamic of impurity and are regulated mainly with respect to this idea-value. Or again, on Samoa, in a striking epitome, the 'sister' who is served like a goddess by her brother (and like a virgin whose brother would love her to be a virgin with child, in order to allow him to reproduce the ancestral name) can become a 'female' whom her brother—being the 'strong' sex—corrects, and whom other 'men' seduce.

This needs stressing. Hierarchy can be a very powerful tool in anthropological analysis, provided certain traps are avoided. It is not a matter of decoding a scale of references, deciding that what counts more is the pantheon, or the theory of the person, or the circulation of the constituents of the person, etc., under the pretext that these are the domains that transcend individual life—as if value was always opposed to the individual, as if anthropology's societies had decided to be anti-modern even before the term had been invented. Nor, having been decoded, is it a matter of indicating that, because we are in a whole (the notion then being reduced to a synonym of 'a particular culture'), the scale of references possesses

a logical or topological particularity and that, two by two or according to an infinite segmentation, the superior domain 'encompasses' the following one(s), the term 'encompassment' then becoming a slogan for relativism rather than a tool of comparison (Barraud 1990, Barraud and Platenkamp 1990, de Coppet 1990). On the contrary, we will say that *the 'transcendences' we are seeking are the formal encompassments of distinctions observed by us ethnographically* (cf. Dumont 1979b: 403, 1982: 222–3 and n.) and that, as a consequence, the opposed terms must be deduced from what they stand for in the relations that transcend the oppositions.

Hierarchy is therefore not simply the logical decomposition on two planes of a double and contradictory statement of the type: at once  $a > b$  and  $b > a$ . Hierarchy is the logical decomposition on two planes of the statement of a single *attachment*. And as the essential thing in anthropology consists in comparing the modes of attachment of the empirical individual in the socio-cultural set of which he is a member, hierarchy is a tool of vital necessity. It allows us to recognize, under the form of a relation, the two aspects of the social fact, the empirical individual and the socio-cultural group. The first must be present in the model, lest we enclose anthropology within the idealism of a Durkheimian society reduced to the 'sacred'. But it must not be forgotten that the anthropology concerned is 'social', that it has 'societies' as its object and not collections of individuals ('collective' behaviour), and that consequently it must *deduce the individual* from the group rather than 'collect' individuals together in order to analyse the 'group'. Reversing the encompassment allows this deduction to take place. It is still necessary to avoid deciding a priori where value is to be found. Here it will reside in what appears to us as religious (India), elsewhere in what appears to us as political (France) or economic (the exchange of goods in Oceania)—it matters little. It will be wherever we discover encompassing relations: unity, conjunction, superiority 'reversing itself' into inequality, and other forms, doubtless, that anthropology will isolate in the course of its comparisons, provided that the view it brings to bear on each society be the most global possible.

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