UDC 141.82
DOI: 10.5937/spm82-44944
Review paper

Српска политичка мисао
број 4/2023.
Vol. 82
стр. 279-306

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CONTENDING MATERIALIST CONCEPTIONS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE STATE: ON THE DIVIDE BETWEEN MORGAN AND ENGELS**

Resume

This paper will present a comparative analysis of two major materialist conceptions of the origin of the state, namely, those of Lewis Morgan and Friedrich Engels. The first part of the paper will offer a brief overview of the 17th century origins of this theory: the philosophical attempts to establish how the state came to be. Thereafter, we will look at how Morgan's innovative approach enabled tremendous progress on this issue, offering, if not the answer to the question of the state's origin, then at least the means of reaching it. The central part of the paper will present Engels' attempt to create a theory of his own, featuring aspects of both Marx's and Morgan's thought: in this regard, we will focus on the fundamental elements that are shared between Morgan's and Engels' theories. Finally, the subject of the last part of the paper will be the divergence between the two authors: here, we will examine the theoretical limitations of Engels' attempt to surpass Morgan's work and point to a number of errors that proceeded therefrom.

Keywords: Morgan, Engels, materialist conception, origin of the state, social contract

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** This article was created within the research activity of the Institute for Political Studies, funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development.

INTRODUCTION

In more ways than one, the theory of the origin of the state is a unique issue in the social sciences. For one, no single discipline can lay sole claim on it, as it was sparked by philosophy and taken over by anthropology, though not without a significant contribution from history. Additionally, the knowledge that would enable us to put the issue to rest has theoretically been at hand since the classical era, and yet its furnishing from 'raw material' to a scientific theory was completed only as late as the 19th century. Furthermore, despite having both the relevant knowledge and the method for its interpretation, a broader consensus on the issue has yet to be reached. Therefore, in order to understand the different conceptions of the origin of the state, we must start from the beginning.

Lawrence Krader places this beginning in the 18th century, naming Rousseau, Ferguson and Condorcet as the precursors of anthropological thought, at least insofar as inquiry into the origin of the state is concerned (Krader 1968, 1). However, I would propose that we go a whole century further back, to Hobbes and Locke, as they were the original theorists that noted the fundamental incompatibility of the then-reigning doctrine of the divine right of kings with the evidence brought about by the discovery of the New World. Namely, if indeed the state had existed, in one form or another, since the inception of mankind itself (Locke 2003, 9), how could we explain the non-state character of Native American societies, which was evident even at that time?

The singular importance of the European discovery of America also holds the answer as to why neither a social contract theory (such as the ones Hobbes and Locke proposed), nor any other kind of theory on the origin of the state came before the colonial era. Even the greatest political minds of classical antiquity, such as Plato, Aristotle and Cicero never produced this kind of theory and when we take the circumstances of their societies into account, we can understand what prevented them from doing so. Having been only several centuries in advance of the peoples that surrounded them (both in terms of technology and social institutions), the ancient Greeks and Romans assumed their neighbors' societies to be substantially similar to their own.

This mistake, however, could not have been repeated in the 17th century: when compared with the early modern European states, native American tribes and tribal confederacies could scarcely be described as

identical.[1] The distinction was apparent to the social contract theorists, who used it as a foundation for the argument that, assuming a similar path of development of various peoples the world over, the state didn't exist since the inception of mankind, but had to have been created at some point – this revelation brought about innumerable theoretical and practical advances. However, the social contract theorists' ignorance regarding the institutions of Native American peoples simultaneously led to a number of grave errors. In context of the issue at hand, these errors mostly stemmed from the scarcely avoidable human need to fill our gaps in knowledge with imagination, for which we inevitably draw upon from our own worldview.

In attempting to discern how humans lived before the creation of states, Hobbes and Locke posited a *state of nature*, which they both understood as a lack of commonly recognized authority, though the severity of this issue varied considerably between the two.[2] As the discoveries of 19th century pioneer anthropologist Lewis Morgan would later show, the social contract theorists' assumption that the non-existence of the state meant the non-existence of any social authority whatsoever, was plainly false. However, it's important to note that Hobbes' and Locke's assumptions about the state of nature were justified when they were first proposed, since no form of governing authority other than the state was known at the time.

During the 18th century, no fundamental advancements in understanding the origin of the state were made. Philosophers such as Rousseau

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1 Notable exceptions to this include the so-called 'empires' of the Aztecs, Mayas, and Incas. However, Lewis Morgan's detailed research into the Aztecs reveals that the description of their society as a kingdom or empire is untenable, since it stems from the Spanish conquerors' fundamental ignorance of the actual Aztec social relations (Morgan 1876; Morgan 1877, 191-220). Applying his methodology to the analysis of the Spanish accounts of the Mayan and Incan 'empires' could reasonably be presumed to yield similar results (Morgan 1877, 66). That being said, it should be noted that certain elements of Morgan's analysis of the Aztecs have been called into question (Gibson 1947); however, his general observations on the gentile character of their society have not been refuted.

2 Hobbes (in)famously viewed the war of "every man, against every man" (Hobbes 1996, 84) as a necessary consequence of this condition; he recognized "mere gatherings" (Hobbes 1998, 24) as the pinnacle of human association in the state of nature. Locke, on the other hand, gave a far milder view of human nature and propensity toward conflict, but still saw the "want of a common judge" in the state of nature as the chief cause of war, due to the impossibility of appealing to a higher authority (Locke 2003, 108–109).

and Kant took the social contract theory in a more abstract, speculative direction, though some of their points still hearkened back to the inventions and discoveries of Hobbes and Locke. The main points, however, remained the same: prior to the creation of the state, humans lived in a state of nature from which they had to emerge due to the non-existence of common authority therein (Rousseau 1994, 54; Kant 2006, 72). The shortcomings of these theories demonstrate in no unclear terms that, before discovering how humans actually lived in the state of nature, a tenable theory of the origin of the state could not have been made.

MORGAN'S REVELATION

Originally a lawyer whose professional success enabled him to finance his own scientific endeavors, Lewis Morgan became one of the pioneers of American ethnology and anthropology through his 'hands-on' research of Native American tribes. Having spent a number of years among the Seneca-Iroquois, who even went so far as to accept him as an honorary member of their tribe, Morgan came upon a revelation the significance of which can hardly be overstated: the Indians he studied neither had a state, nor, indeed, were they in a lawless state of nature. Instead, they had a distinctive form of government: a *social* organization, based entirely upon persons and their relations, as opposed to a *political* one, founded upon territory and property (Morgan 1877, 61). Morgan based this *societas*/*civitas* dichotomy on the works of George Grote (Grote 2001) and Henry Sumner Maine (Maine 1963).

His first treatise on the Iroquois, *League of the Ho-de-no-saunee, or Iroquois*, published in 1851, remained regarded as the single best source on their society for over a century (Trautman 1987, 36). The discovery of a hitherto unknown form of government drove Morgan to look into the ancient history of the Greeks and Romans, which he was already familiar with, owing to his study of law. His attempt to discern whether a similar pre-state organization could be identified among the classical cultures is one of the central innovations of Morgan's *magnum opus*, *Ancient Society*, published in 1877, in which he established that, indeed, the ancient Greeks and Romans possessed social units essentially identical to those of the Iroquois. Per his nomenclature, these were the *gens*, *phratry* and *tribe* (Morgan 1877, 62).

According to Morgan's definition, the gens is "a body of consanguinei descended from the same common ancestor, distinguished by a gentile name, and bound together by affinities of blood" (Morgan 1877, 62). Its natural outgrowth, the phratry is formed through the segmentation of an original gens into several new ones, whereby the scions maintain a connection to their progenitor and reintegrate on the basis of common descent (Morgan 1877, 88). Finally, the tribe is the penultimate unit of gentile society, being formed by a number of associated gentes, and having its own dialect, territory and government (Morgan 1877, 103).

The fundamental difference between gentile and political society meant that the former could never be governed in the manner of the latter: since personal relations were the criteria of association, as opposed to territory and property, there was no need for written laws, clear borders, or magistrates. Instead, gentes, phratries and tribes were governed in accordance with customary rights, duties and obligations, many of which fundamentally differed from state laws. For example, among the Iroquois, the office of the civil chief (*sachem*) was hereditary inside the gens; however, descent in the female line made it impossible for sons to inherit the position from their fathers – instead, upon the death of its previous holder, the office was filled by democratic election, but usually passed from brother to brother, uncle to nephew, or, in some cases, from (maternal) grandfather to grandson (Morgan 1877, 71).

Additionally, property, which was quite scarce when compared to later stages of development, was typically inherited by the gens as a whole, though its small size meant that it was often appropriated by the nearest kin of the deceased gentile (Morgan 1877, 75). Perhaps the most interesting difference, at least insofar as it relates to the social contract theorists' state of nature, was in the way justice was dispensed prior to the creation of states: the absence of written laws and courts necessarily made for a level of arbitrariness, but not nearly to the point that, in Hobbes' words, every man had a right to everything (Hobbes 1996, 85), or in Locke's, that every man was judge and executioner (Locker 2003, 137).

Instead, should a member of a gens be harmed or killed by someone from another gens, the gens of the perpetrator would attempt to appease the gens of the victim with gifts and apologies. If this failed, however, the gens of the victim would nominate avengers, whose task would be to seek out and kill the murderer of their kinsman. If they were successful, the gens of the perpetrator would have no grounds for seeking revenge

of their own: "Life having answered for life the demands of justice were appeased" (Morgan 1877, 77).

Thought it wasn't directly involved in government, unlike the gens, the phratry still had important religious and social functions (Morgan 1877, 90). The tribe, on the other hand, was in many cases the pinnacle of gentile association, which came with its own customary rights and obligations, many of which were similar to those that governed the gens: beside their territories, dialects and religious ceremonies, tribes had their own ruling councils and were authorized with investing sachems and chiefs nominated by the gentes that constituted them (Morgan 1877, 113–114).

The final member in the sequence of gentile institutions is where a significant difference between American tribes and those of the ancient Greeks and Romans emerges: whereas the former united into *confederacies*, creating a common military government, but maintaining independent civil governments, the latter created *nations* through coalescence, forming unified military *and* civil governments (Morgan 1877, 137). Beside this, the immense interval of development that occurred before the 'light of history' shined upon the Greeks and Romans also resulted in a number of other differences: gentile descent was now traced in the male line, the right to elect and depose chiefs no longer existed and the prohibition of intermarriage, a fundamental law of the gens, was lifted in cases of wealthy heiresses, so as to insure that property remained inside the gens, rather than passing into another through inheritance (Morgan 1877, 232).

Most of these changes were brought about by the development of property, the maintenance and expansion of which gradually became a primary concern. Due to its negligible size at the birth of gentile society, property gained relevance proportionally with its growth, eventually becoming a major antagonistic element to gentilism and greatly contributing to its overthrow. This is partly demonstrated by the three rules of inheritance, the first and earliest of which meant that the property of a deceased owner would be inherited by his entire gens; the second rule restricted property inheritance to agnates, the closest kin within the gens, while the third limited it to only the owners' children, as illustrated by the law codes of Solon and Moses (Morgan 1877, 558).

In spite of the great changes that were wrought upon gentile society by the development of property, as evidenced by the non-existence of the right to elect and depose chiefs of the gentes among ancient Greeks

and Romans, Morgan still had the inclination to regard these organizations as fundamentally egalitarian and democratic (Morgan 1877, 222). More recent research, however, has exposed a number of problems with this conception: as noted by C. J. Smith, "The egalitarian 'gens' of the anthropologist has nothing to do with the historical *gens* at Rome, yet the slide between one and the other is now clear and persistent" (Smith 2006, 101).

Although many anthropologists focus on Morgan's pioneer research in the field of kinship, it could be argued that his theory of the origin of the state is his greatest contribution to the social sciences, as it offers us the means of answering a question that has puzzled various thinkers since the 17th century. In fact, Morgan's analysis of the Grecian and Roman gentile society and their gradual transition to a political society forms the largest and most complex section of the main part of *Ancient Society* – 'Growth of the Idea of Government'. In it, Morgan combines his empirical study of gentile society, as seen among the Indian tribes, with a detailed knowledge of classical history, in order to reveal the factors that necessitated the replacement of gentile society, and the process by which it was fundamentally transformed.

Morgan notes that, since gentile society originated among small and tightly interconnected social groups, its failure to address the wants of an increasingly larger and more complex organization was inevitable (Morgan 1877, 263). Beside the size of the population, which was now numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and all manner of disposable property that grew exponentially, the chief tether of gentile society was its relative inability to integrate new members. Among the classical civilizations, as among the Indian tribes, the only means of becoming an equal member of society was through adoption into a gens, which was rarely practiced. The consequence of this was that, in the Roman case, for example, all free people were divided into the *populus* and the *plebeains*, the former belonging to the gentes and tribes that originally created Rome, and thus ruling it, and the latter being without government, since they couldn't trace their descent to the original founders (Morgan 1877, 332).

This problem was further exacerbated by the turbulent times in which great city-states like Athens and Rome were founded, which were marked by the displacement of huge numbers of people through wars and trade, who were unable to integrate into the gentile societies of their newfound homes (Morgan 1877, 274). The increasing difficulty

of governing an ever-richer and increasingly stratified society, as well as one in which there was scarcely a way of becoming a member of, save through birth, incentivized the Athenians and Romans to reinvent their societies along new lines (Morgan 1877, 339). This involved replacing a system of government based on persons and their relations with one founded upon territory and property: "Although apparently a simple idea, it required centuries of time and a complete revolution of pre-existing conceptions of government to accomplish this result" (Morgan 1877, 223).

In the Athenian case, the first attempt at subverting gentilism was that of Theseus in the legendary period: according to Thucydides, he persuaded his people to unite as one nation in Athens and divided the population into three classes according to calling, and irrespective of gentes (Morgan 1877, 265–267). His plan, however, didn't go far enough, since it failed to transfer governmental power from the old gentile groups to the new political ones. Solon's scheme met a similar fate: he renewed Theseus' project, dividing the people into classes, though he did it according to the amount of property they possessed. These classes had different rights, privileges and obligations, but the criteria of their association made it possible to include all freemen into the ranks of the citizenry (Morgan 1877, 271–272).

Though it went farther than Theseus' reforms, Solon's project was still imperfect, as it failed to transfer governmental power from the gentes, phratries and tribes to the newfound classes. This revolutionary change was finally accomplished by Cleisthenes: he divided Attica into a hundred *demes*, grouped into ten districts, and every citizen had to enroll his property in the deme of his residence. Membership in the governing council, previously dependent upon gentes and tribes, was now connected to the new territorial units of government (Morgan 1877, 277–278). With these changes, the old Athenian gentile order lost its political significance and took on a purely social and ceremonial role that it would maintain for a number of following centuries.

Much like its Athenian counterpart, Roman society also took three notable attempts at reform in order to abolish its gentile government and replace it with a political one: the first one was that of Romulus, the legendary founder and first *rex* of Rome, who unified the Latin and Sabine tribes into one nation and instituted the senate (Morgan 1877, 321), creating a common civil and military power and making the most of the reigning gentile system. The second rex, Numa Pompilius, attempted to divide the people into eight classes by arts and trades, however, as in

the case of Theseus and Solon, his scheme failed to change the plan of government, as it did not transfer power from the ruling gentile organizations to the new classes (Morgan 1877, 339).

The third plan, commenced by the sixth rex, Servius Tullius, involved the substitution of gentes by classes based upon territory and property, the creation of a new popular assembly based upon the *centuries* that the new society was organized around, and the institution of four city wards (Morgan 1877, 340). Although vastly favoring the nobility and wealthy property-owners, Tullius' scheme radically transformed Roman society: classes and the centuries that composed them were now the units of organization and territory and property were the criteria of association. Organized in the manner of an army, the Romans numbered 80.000 citizen-soldiers at Tullius' first muster (Morgan 1877, 343). With that, much like their Athenian counterparts, the Roman gentes were relegated to symbols of pedigree and privilege but lost the governmental role they once had. The creation of the state was complete.

COMMON GROUND

In his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Friedrich Engels notes that Morgan rediscovered in America the materialist conception of history that was discovered by Marx forty years ago and, further, that he arrived at the same conclusions in the main points (Engels 2004, 25). The kind of materialism mentioned by Engels here has nothing to with pursuit of material possessions, but rather comprehends the philosophical idea that the material world is the ultimate reality (Sowell 1985, 28). In the political-economic context, Engels specifies that, "According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life" (Engels 2004, 25).

In the preface to the German edition of 1891, Engels offers a comprehensive summary of the research into kinship within anthropology: of particular note is his critique of Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Mother Right*, whose thesis on the progressive evolution of society reposes upon the development of religious ideas: "Thus, according to Bachofen, it is not the development of the actual conditions under which men live, but the religious reflections of these conditions of life in the minds of men that brought about the historical changes in the mutual social position of man and woman" (Engels 2004, 29). A philosophical idealist, in the

sense of believing that ideas are the ultimate reality as opposed to the material world, Bachofen reappears several times throughout the book as the 'primary antagonist' to Engels' own position.

On the other hand, Engels' appraisal of Morgan is nothing short of admiring – summarizing the main points of the latter's research and contributions, he goes on to say that: "The rediscovery of the original mother-right gens as the stage preliminary to the father-right gens of the civilised peoples has the same significance for the history of primitive society as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology, and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy" (Engels 2004, 34–35). This accolade is only tinged by Engels' estimation that the fourteen years which had passed between the publication of *Ancient Society* and the fourth edition of *Origin* have shaken some of Morgan's hypotheses and made others untenable (Engels 2004, 36). Since it never gets brought up again, this point is only noteworthy insomuch as it will illustrate Engels' puzzling lack of familiarity with certain aspects of Morgan's work later on.

Much like Morgan, Engels begins his book by presenting an overview of the prehistoric stages of culture. Unlike the archeological three age system that only uses the material for tools as a measure of development, *ethnical periods* (as Morgan calls them) rely on a variety of factors, such as the use of fire, the invention of the bow and arrow, pottery, etc. In the main, these eras follow the schematic of *savagery – barbarism – civilization*, with the first two being further divided into *lower*, *middle* and *upper* stages.[3] This explanatory model is meant to be applicable to cultures the world over, the only relevant geographical difference being that the middle status of barbarism emerges in the Western hemisphere with the cultivation of plants through irrigation, whereas it commences in the Eastern hemisphere with the domestication of animals (Engels 2004, 41).

This was a consequence of the unequal endowment of the hemispheres, the Eastern possessing all animals adapted to domestication, save one, and the Western having only one cereal fit for cultivation, but that the best: maize (Morgan 1877, 22). As philosophical materialists,

[3] Morgan's and Engels' nomenclatures diverge on a number of terms which are nonetheless synonymous: for example, what the former calls 'ethnical periods', the latter refers to as the 'great periods of development'; beyond this, Morgan calls the different developmental eras 'statuses', whereas Engels refers to them as 'stages'. Finally, Engels replaces Morgan's complicated term 'syndyasmian family' with the simpler 'pairing family'.

Morgan and Engels are concerned with these eras of development of material culture because they view social institutions as fundamentally inseparable from inventions and discoveries. Neither of them, however, can take credit for the formulation of the aforementioned scheme, as it was developed by Morgan's predecessors in the field of anthropology, John Lubbock and Edward Burnett Tylor, in their books *The Origins of Civilisation* (Lubbock 1882) and *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1871).

Whereas Morgan dedicates the largest portion of his book to the growth of the idea of government, Engels primarily focuses on the family. Nonetheless, both authors arrive at a fundamentally identical conclusion in this regard: though it is often presented as *monogamian* since its inception, with some instances of the *patriarchal*[4], the history of the family is significantly more complicated, but both past and present evidence points to group marriage as the original form of the institution (Morgan 1877, 393). Although Bachofen's theory confirms this view, his interpretation of the processes behind this development is, as one might expect, the inversion of Morgan's and Engels' (Engels 2004, 28).

The analysis of the various forms of the family is relevant in the broader context because it is tied to the gentile organization and the growth of property. As such, a widespread form of group marriage that Morgan calls *punaluan*[5] emerges from the division of society into gentes: this is because gentilism prevents kinsmen from intermarriage, while descent in the female line that marked the early gens is fully compatible with group marriage, under which only the child's mother could be known with certainty. On the other hand, both authors distinguish between *syndyasmian* or *pairing* and monogamian marriage because, while they are both based on the coupling of single pairs, the former lacks the strict bonds of monogamy that would emerge with the transition of descent to the male line (Morgan 1877, 462).

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4 Morgan and Engels use this term to describe the marriage of one man to (at least) several women, but in some cases also extend it to comprehend the early monogamian marriage of the Greeks and Romans which was marked by almost complete domination of the husband over the wife (the monogamian family of the patriarchal type).

5 This form of group marriage is named after a Hawaiian custom, whereby several brothers would be married to each other's wives, or several sisters to each other's husbands. The spouses themselves most commonly weren't siblings: instead, they were regarded as special companions and their relationship was called *punalua* (Morgan 1877, 437).

These forms of marriage are important to both Morgan and Engels since they vividly illustrate one aspect of the fundamentally different conditions of society under gentilism: Morgan criticizes the one-sided obligations of the early form of monogamy, as practiced by the ancient Greeks and Romans for entirely subjecting the wife to her husband (Morgan 1877, 482–485), while Engels goes even further, saying that "The overthrow of the mother right was the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*." (Engels 2004, 67 – emphasis in original) This instance also begins to illustrate the divergence that would emerge between the two authors: on the one hand the former praises modern monogamy in contrast to its ancient counterpart for rendering the obligations of marriage reciprocal (Morgan 1877, 488), while the latter throws a jab at "modern jurists and lawyers" who assert that the advancement of laws has made women equal to men, claiming that they disregard women as much as the bourgeoisie do the proletarians (Engels 2004, 78–79).

In this context, Engels recognizes the introduction of monogamy as a great historical development, but points out that, like all advances under class society, it is also a comparative regression (Engels 2004, 73). He concludes that just as the democratic republic does not abolish class antagonism, but merely provides a field in which it is fought out, the complete legal equality between men and women will lay bare the need for the abolition of the individual family as a basic economic unit of society in order to achieve the emancipation of women (Engels 2004, 80). Morgan, on the other, hand, is more cautious in this regard: he notes that improvement is possible under monogamy until the full equality between the sexes is reached, but maintains that, should it fail to satisfy the needs of society, its successor will be impossible to predict (Morgan 1877, 499).

Finally, Morgan and Engels share fundamental beliefs regarding the relation of the modern state to property as well certain implications of ancient gentilism for the future of humanity. Engels particularly accentuates these similarities, claiming that Morgan criticized present-day society after a fashion reminiscent of Fourier and spoke of its future transformation in the words Marx himself might have used (Engels 2004, 36). While this claim might be somewhat exaggerated, it is not wholly unfounded; for example, Morgan speaks critically of the influence of property on the development of mankind, saying that: "The element of property, which has controlled society to a great extent during the comparatively short period of civilization, has given mankind despotism,

imperialism, monarchy, privileged classes, and finally representative democracy. It has also made the career of the civilized nations essentially a property-making career" (Morgan 1877, 351).

When compared to Engels', Morgan's critique of the role of property is more nuanced and layered, lacking the former's revolutionary fervor: for example, Engels explicitly cites insoluble class antagonisms that arise from production relations as the sole reason for the state's existence (Engels 2004, 157). Upon this foundation, he argues that continuing development will inevitably result in the overthrow of classes when they become a hindrance to it: "They will fall as inevitably as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of producers, will put the whole machinery of the state where it will belong: into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe" (Engels 2004, 160).

Morgan is, again, more cautious in his optimism: "But when the intelligence of mankind rises to the height of the great question of the abstract rights of property, –including the relations of property to the state, as well as the rights of persons to property–a modification of the present order of things may be expected. The nature of the coming changes may be impossible to conceive; but it seems probable that democracy, once universal in a rudimentary form and repressed in many civilized states, is destined to become again universal and supreme" (Morgan 1877, 351). Toward the end of *Ancient Society*, he expresses his hope that: "Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. It will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes" (Morgan 1877, 561–562). Engels was so enamored with this quote that he proudly concluded his own book with it (Engels 2004, 162).

DIVERGENT PATHS

One has to wonder how theorists that had so much in common could still crucially diverge on certain essential issues. And yet the devil, as they say, is in the detail. For while Morgan and Engels fundamentally agreed on the historical materialist[6] perspective of social development,

[6] In modern anthropology, the term 'evolutionism' is used to lump together the theories of Morgan, Tylor and Spencer under a supposed single framework (White

marriage, family, and, to an extent, property and classes, the central theme of Morgan's *Ancient Society* – the origin of the state – is their greatest point of disagreement. To this we should also add the broader theory of the state – specifically the ancient state, since Morgan's underdeveloped view of the modern state actually illustrates a broad agreement with Engels (and, by extension, Marx), as seen previously. The forthcoming analysis will clearly accentuate Arthur Kuper's view that "the Morgan who took his place in the Marxist tradition was already at several removes from the historical Morgan" (Kuper 1988, 74).

Engels' Misreading of Morgan

Here we will present a detailed analysis of the divergence between the two authors' views on the origin of the state: the resulting comparison will illustrate that the rift between them can mostly be ascribed to Engels' troublingly casual approach to Morgan's work, rather than to a thorough development within Marxist theory that 'shakes' some of the latter's hypotheses and makes others 'untenable' (Engels 2004, 36). Nowhere is this more apparent than in Engels' attempt to revise Morgan's scheme of marriage institutions, claiming that new, previously unknown forms of marriage have been discovered since the publication of *Ancient Society*.

To substantiate this assertion, Engels refers to the research of one Lorimer Fison, an Australian reverend who discovered an intricate marriage system among the Kamilaroi tribes, in which the entire population was divided into four classes of males and females, with each of the two pairs of groups being regarded as either brothers and sisters, or husbands and wives to each other (Engels 2004, 56–57). Engels presents this as an entirely new and hitherto unmentioned discovery. However, there's a problem: Morgan knew all about Fison's research, since the reverend was his main source for Aboriginal society (Morgan 1877, 49). In fact, he devotes an entire chapter, titled 'Organization of Society Upon the Basis of Sex', to the detailed analysis of the Kamilaroi marriage system (Morgan 1877, 47–60), and later clarifies that it is, in fact, a form of *punaluan* marriage involving groups of unusually large size (Morgan

1945, 223). Arguably an oversimplification, Morgan himself never used the term to describe his theory, one of the main points of which is the causal interconnection of inventions, discoveries and institutions which leads to their gradual parallel development.

1877, 434). To make matters worse, this is the very first chapter of the central portion of *Ancient Society* – the aforementioned 'Growth of the Idea of Government'.

One has to wonder, then: how could Engels not have known this? A possible answer to this question is offered by Lawrence Krader: Engels isn't entirely to blame here, as *Origin* is based on his "reading of Marx's excerpts on Morgan's work" (Krader 1975, 278). This, unfortunately, also explains a number of other problems with Engels' book. A good illustration of this is the brevity with which he deals with the Western hemisphere. As such, the study of Native American societies that takes up over a hundred and fifty pages across six chapters of *Ancient Society* (Morgan 1877, 61–220) becomes a meagre dozen-page chapter (Engels 2004, 88–99). Furthermore, 'The Aztec Confederacy', one of the largest and most ground-breaking chapters of Morgan's work (Morgan 1877, 191–220) is reduced to a literal footnote in Engels (Engels 2004, 106). This is disheartening because, according to Morgan's conception that Engels claims to build upon, Native American societies give us the clearest possible glimpse into earlier ethnical periods, which is essential for understanding the original conditions of key social institutions.

As a result of his inattentive treatment of the Iroquois and other peoples of the New World, Engels presents a naïve and idealized view of their society: for example, in discussing the aforementioned practice of adopting foreigners into gentes, he mentions that it was done with regard to prisoners of war who weren't slain (Engels 2004, 91). What he conveniently fails to mention, however, is that prisoners of war who were put to death weren't abstractly 'slain': rather, they were burned at the stake (Morgan 1877, 198), a method of execution that is more reminiscent of the Catholic Inquisition than of a 'primitive communist' society.

That being said, Morgan himself specifies that a number of cultures on both hemispheres lived 'communistically' under gentile society (Morgan 1877). It's important to note, however, that he treats the term quite differently from Engels: in Morgan's case, communism primarily arises, not out of the impossibility of class distinctions in earlier ethnical periods, but out of the blood ties that bind people together. Regarding the Iroquois, Morgan specifies that, beyond the benefits of mutual protection, the confederacy of their tribes reposed upon shared gentes, whose members descended from common ancestors and viewed each other as brothers and sisters with the fullest cordiality (Morgan 1877, 135–136).

While he recognizes that this form of organization was eventually doomed to extinction due to continual development, Engels deeply admires the kind of people it produced, lauding their honesty and bravery and assuming them to be fundamentally different from those that later came under the corrupting influence of civilization (Engels 2004, 98). Morgan, on the other hand, names a number of cases that imply the contrary: for example, he notes how the designation of an Iroquois chief of the second grade, literally called 'an elevated name', reveals the ordinary motives for personal ambition, as well as the sameness of the nature of man, "whether high up, or low down upon the rounds of the ladder of progress" (Morgan 1877, 148).

None of these detractions, however, find their way onto the pages of Engels' *Origin*. In place of the many factors that reveal nuances behind the actual workings of 'primitive communism', we find spellbound praise: "And this gentile constitution is wonderful in all its childlike simplicity! Everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kings, governors, prefects or judges; without prisons; without trials … There can be no poor and needy – the communistic household and the gens know their obligations toward the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal – including the women. There is as yet no room for slaves, nor, as a rule, for the subjugation of alien tribes" (Engels 2004, 97–98).

While most of the above isn't incorrect in the literal sense, it points to a worryingly uncritical approach, the theoretical shortcomings of which will soon become apparent. In foreshadowing what's to come, let's dissect this particular example: firstly, the implication of Engels' praise of the gentile constitution's simplicity, particularly as it pertains to the non-existence of modern state institutions, is that it necessarily arises from the economic conditions of the earlier periods of development. Unfortunately, this interpretation ignores the strength of the bonds of gentilism well into the growth of inequality and development of classes. Morgan notes that, according to Grote, the Grecian gens had most of the rights and privileges of the earlier female-line gens, including the mutual obligation of help, defense and redress of injuries (Morgan 1877, 227–228). In case of the Roman gens, Morgan quotes Barthold Georg Niebuhr (Niebuhr 1850) to offer a number of examples from the historical period, well after the establishment of slavery and state institutions, in which members of the same gens, even when opposed to

one another, still went out of their way to support each other in times of need (Morgan 1877, 301).

The strength of the bonds of gentilism also explains the non-existence of poverty and neediness lauded by Engels: as seen from a number of previous examples, gentiles supported each other well after the introduction of slavery – this would suggest, then, that the communistic character of the gens proceeds from its blood ties, rather than the mere inability of establishing class distinctions at the time when gentes came into being. This is also why the Iroquois simultaneously treated their kin with care and their enemies with cruelty, as mentioned above. The final point that Engels makes regarding slavery and subjugation ties into this: while it's true that their economic conditions made it impossible for the Iroquois to enslave their enemies,[7] conquest and subjugation are a different matter entirely. An example of this are the Delaware people who became Iroquois tributaries through warfare (Morgan 1877, 152), a relation that was mirrored by that of the Tlaxcalans[8] to the Aztecs (Morgan 1877, 199).

Although it isn't particularly relevant in the context of this topic, it should also be noted that a detailed comparison between Morgan and Engels reveals innumerable factual errors on part of the latter, ranging from the early forms of kinship to the political institutions of ancient Athens and Rome. Beyond this, unlike Morgan who carefully sources each of his factual claims, purposefully separating them from speculative ones, Engels hardly names a single source for his own highly general and ambitious assertions, which makes any attempt at verifying them a frustrating affair. Lastly, Engels freely and frequently 'borrows' from Morgan without actually quoting him, which is hardly excusable in spite of his nomination of *Ancient Society* as "the book upon which the present work is based" (Engels 2004, 34). A possible explanation of this, as we've seen, is that Engels used Marx's notes without knowing some of them were actually Morgan's direct quotes.

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7 This is supposedly because slaves would not be able to create a surplus of goods beyond what is necessary for their own subsistence, due to a lack of development of productive forces.

8 Morgan calls them 'Tlascalans' in *Ancient Society*.

Class and State: Causation or Correlation?

All of this finally leads us to the central divide between Morgan and Engels: the question of the origin of the state and its causes. Since we've already seen the outlines of Morgan's account of this process, we will have to present Engels' understanding of it, while comparing it with the former. To this end, we shall examine a number of different chapters from *Origin*, though the main focus will be on 'The Rise of the Athenian State' and 'Barbarism and Civilisation'. In these chapters, Engels pays lip service to Morgan's theory of the origin of the state (Engels 2004, 108), acknowledging that the growth of non-integrated population and management over increasingly greater amounts of property made the downfall of gentile society inevitable. He also defers to Morgan on issues that he hadn't personally studied such as, for example, the constitution of the Aztec confederacy (Engels 2004, 106).

At the same time, however, Engels presents a different, parallel theory of the origin of the state that fundamentally diverges from Morgan's; while he notes that it is based on Marx's *Capital* as much as on Morgan's *Ancient Society* (Engels 2004, 148), he may not have even been aware of the divergence due to the many positions that he and Morgan otherwise shared. Its relevance, however, can hardly be overstated. In 'The Rise of the Athenian State', Engels largely follows Morgan on the issue of gradual changes and attempts to subvert gentile society that finally culminated in Cleisthenes' revolutionary legislative scheme. His interpretation of the causes and developments that led to this result, however, are vastly different.

He tells us, for example, that "The gentile constitution is absolutely incompatible with the money system" (Engels 2004, 109). While this may seem intuitive, given that Morgan himself accentuated the element of property as a great catalyst that largely contributed to the overthrow of gentilism, it isn't exactly true. A good counterexample is presented by the Aztec society, the gentile character of which was thoroughly argued for by Morgan (Morgan 1877, 191–220). However, according to the memoire of conquistador Bernal Diaz Del Castillo, who participated in the conquest of New Spain under Hernan Cortes, the Aztecs not only had large and highly sophisticated markets, but also money, using gilded feathers as a universal commodity (Castillo 2012, 210).[9]

[9] Morgan was also wrong on this point, believing that the Aztecs had no money (Morgan 1877, 191). A detailed look at his references reveals that he unfortunately

This is only one of a number of examples that illustrate that the capacities of gentile society far exceed Engels' assumptions, particularly in the 'negative' contexts of property, inequality and classes. Following up on his observation regarding money, Engels claims that "The gentile constitution originally knew no slavery and was, therefore ignorant of any means of holding this mass of bondsmen in check." (Engels 2004, 112) Here the qualifier 'originally' is what saves this statement from the brink of falsehood: indeed, as we've seen, the Iroquois who allegedly lacked the level of development of the means of production that would make slavery profitable (in the sense of being able to generate surplus value), had no slaves. However, the Aztecs, who were more advanced than the Iroquois by only a single period of development, according to Morgan's and Engel's conception, already possessed slavery, with slaves being treated as a commodity and sold in markets like any other form of merchandise (Castillo 2012, 208).

Engels, however, has a good explanation of this as a general phenomenon: referring to early civilization, he states that "Slavery, which had been a nascent and sporadic factor in the previous stage, now became an essential part of the social system." (Engels 2004, 152) This is certainly relevant since a glance at the size of the population of the various Greek city-states reveals that the ratio of slaves to free citizens was typically several to one (Engels 2004, 116; 155). Nevertheless, Engels' interpretation of exactly how these slaves were kept in check is where the problems with his theory reemerge: "We have seen that an essential feature of the state is a public power distinct from the mass of the people" (Engels 2004, 115). Seeing as the armed forces are the organ of the state that would keep bondsmen in check, we have to tackle those first.

Notwithstanding the clear separation from Morgan's conception, Engels' assertion is patently false. One would have to look very hard indeed in order to find even a single example of a culture whose military element was not distinct from the vague 'mass of the people'. Morgan's own thorough research of the Iroquois shows the exact opposite: military power among them was not only distinct from civil functions – they had no ties whatsoever. While anyone had the right to organize a war party, these were under no jurisdiction of the council of the gens or tribe (Morgan 1877, 119); Simultaneously, while the leaders of these parties that became famous and popular could receive the title of war chief,

had no access to Castillo's *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, referring to the conquistador only as 'the anonymous conqueror' (Morgan 1877, 201).

this title was distinct from that of a *sachem* (civil chief) in two crucial ways: it held no civil authority and wasn't eligible for inheritance (Morgan 1877, 148). Finally, the Iroquois confederacy created a dual office of *great war soldier* for the coordination of confederate warbands and made both hereditary in the Wolf and Turtle gentes of the Seneca tribe[10] (Morgan 1877, 149–150); however, as in the case of the previously mentioned war chiefs, these functions bore no civil authority whatsoever.

However, Engels is so convinced of his conception of a public force distinct from the mass of the people as a distinguishing character of the state that he boldly hypothesizes that Athenians used Scythian slaves for the purpose of policing because: "The free Athenian regarded this police duty as being so degrading that he preferred being arrested by an armed slave rather than perform such ignominious duties himself. This was still an expression of the old gentile mentality" (Engels 2004, 115). This has to be the most elaborate and ambitious claim ever based upon vase paintings; the problem is that the idea that those vase paintings actually represent Scythians has been considerably problematized if not entirely refuted (Ivantchik 2006).

Going back to the Iroquois who, according to both Morgan and Engels, represent a gentile society in full bloom, let's take a moment to look at their civil government in relation to the mass of the people. While the point may seem trivial, a charitable interpretation of Engels' theory requires mentioning that there was no repression among them in the modern sense. However, everything beyond this point is considerably more nuanced; in Morgan's words: "Although oligarchical in form, the government was a representative democracy; the representative being elected for life, but subject to deposition" (Morgan 1877, 118; 147). The oligarchical form of the government, however, remains a key feature because, while any member of a gens and tribe could address the ruling council, even women (though only indirectly, through orators), the council itself made the decisions that the mass of the people were governed by (Morgan 1877, 119).

Building upon the idea that the state apparatus is necessary for controlling slaves, at least insofar as they outnumber the free population, Engels treats the existence of the Spartan 'state' as a matter of fact (Engels 2004, 71). Although apparently intuitive, this issue is far more

[10] The reason for this was because the Senecas, being the westernmost tribe of the confederacy in what is today's state of New York, were most likely to come under attack from hostile tribes (Morgan 1877, 150).

complex in Morgan, for while he recognized that Sparta attained to the status of civilization (Morgan 1877, 283), little actual evidence can be presented for its subversion of the gentile and transition to a political society in his understating of it. To make matters worse, Engels addresses the Germans from Caesar's time soon after, and treats their institutions as fundamentally similar to Spartan ones (Engels 2004, 75); simultaneously, however, he regards the German state as having been created only *after* their conquest of Rome (Engels 2004, 143). What prevented him from putting two and two together in this regard was his preconception of class as the fundamental cause of the origin of the state.

We see this once again in the final chapter of *Origin*, 'Barbarism and Civilisation'. Here, Engels reminds us that: "Lastly, the gentile constitution had grown out of a society that knew no internal antagonisms, and was adapted only for such a society. It had no coercive power except public opinion" (Engels 2004, 156). Although this isn't patently false, it still bears a frustrating degree of inaccuracy: while it's true that the gentile constitution evolved out of a society with no internal antagonisms, this lack of antagonisms can be pinned on the bonds of consanguinity and affinity between gentes and tribes far more so than on economic factors. This is confirmed time and again by the survival of the bonds of gentilism well after the political and economic stratification of society. However, it also bears repeating that while early gentile societies had no internal antagonisms, they were already adapting to the various forms of subjugation of others, as seen in the examples of Iroquois tributaries and Aztec slaves. In these cases, coercive power clearly went far beyond 'public opinion'.

The key point to keep in mind here is that subjugation and slavery didn't ambush an unsuspecting gentile society out of nowhere. To be sure, gentilism originated in a condition of mankind that far preceded money, slavery and repression, but as these phenomena gradually evolved, so too did gentile society evolve with them. This is particularly accentuated by Morgan, who presents a scheme of the growth of government from that of one power in the lower status of barbarism, across that of two powers in the middle status, to that of three in the upper (Morgan 1877, 250).[11] This pattern is never even mentioned by Engels, whose surface-level treatment of gentes and tribes of the Western hemisphere

[11] In order of their gradual development from first to last, these three powers of government are the council, the military commander, and the assembly. While all three exist simultaneously in the upper status of barbarism, the assembly doesn't

effectively results in a 'time jump' that takes gentile society from its blooming period in the lower status of barbarism straight to the brink of civilization that heralds its downfall.

This, finally, brings us to the crux of the issue. Analyzing the fundamental changes that ancient Athens and Rome underwent, particularly the stratification of society upon the basis of class, Engels tells us that: "Such a society could only exist either in a state of continuous, open struggle of these classes against one another or under the rule of a third power which, while ostensibly standing above the classes struggling with each other, suppressed their open conflict and permitted a class struggle at most in the economic field, in a so-called legal form" (Engels 2004, 156–157). The error of this assertion should be obvious: Engels interposes the Marxist understanding of the *modern* state, which tempers and mitigates class struggle through legal equality, onto the *ancient* state where no such equality existed.

To better understand this phenomenon, let's consider a hypothetical example: Morgan and Engels would agree that the establishment of the Athenian state culminated with Cleisthenes' reforms. Therefore, by the fifth century B.C.E. Athens had transitioned from a gentile to a political society. But say, for example, that this didn't happen: that it instead continued as a gentile society for a few more centuries. The possibility, let alone likelihood of such a development is almost nonexistent considering all the factors involved, but it will help us illustrate the rift between Morgan's view, in which class isn't a significant contributing factor to the origin of the state, and Engels' view, in which it is fundamental. Engels informs us that, at its height, Athens had 90.000 free citizens and 365.000 slaves (Engels 2004, 116). Let's take his numbers at face value. Now, suppose that the Athenian state did not exist; suppose, instead, that Athens was still organized around a gentile constitution: would the position of slaves have been any different?

The answer is obviously no, since they had no rights under gentile society and gained none after its replacement by the political: both treated them as nothing more than mere property: captives in war and strangers in blood (Morgan 1877, 351). The Roman encyclopedist Varro's designation of slaves as tools that speak is quite illustrative of this point (Ostrovityanov 1957, 37). Furthermore, the existence of a great many cultures in the middle or upper status of barbarism that had slaves, yet

appear back of that, while the military commander is introduced in the middle status. Only the council can be traced as far back as the lower status of barbarism.

had no states renders Engels' explanation of the origin of the state untenable. One needn't look further than the Greeks of the Heroic Age, or Latins from a time before Romulus, but can also turn to Germans from the time of Caesar, Vikings, Aztecs, or any other people that lived under a highly stratified gentile society to prove this point beyond any doubt.

Now, there is an argument in favor of Engels' theory to be made here, but it is tangential at best: namely, the creation of the state in both the Athenian and the Roman case involved a political stratification based upon occupation and property. The problem with this argument is that this change didn't affect the position of slaves in any way since they had no rights and continued to have none, the division applying to free citizens only. In this regard, Ostrovityanov et al note that besides the contradiction between slaves and slave owners, there was also a contradiction between large landowners and small producers, but the former was the defining one (Ostrovityanov 1957, 29), and the overthrow of gentile society was inconsequential for it.

However, the best possible insight into this issue is given to us by French Marxist anthropologist Pierre Bonte: in researching different nomadic pastoralist tribes of East Africa, he noted that they were all stratified by economic classes, but that only some had states, whereas others, like the Tuareg that he personally studied, did not (Bonte 1981). This led Bonte to question the general applicability of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the origin of the state (Bonte 1981, 22), concluding that the relation between class and state at the very least isn't direct. Had he been intimately familiar with Morgan's theory, he might have gone on to say that class and state were parallel phenomena at best: that while the growth of property was a key contributing factor to the overthrow of gentilism, its consequence, the gradual stratification of society, was merely corelative.

CONCLUSION

If one sets as ambitious and extravagant a goal as eventually putting 'the whole machinery of the state into the museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe' (Engels 2004, 160), one is obliged to thoroughly research how the state originally came to be, and even more importantly, *why*. The purpose of this paper was not to criticize historical materialism. Far from it, I believe that historical materialism is by far the best method for interpreting the gradual development of human society.

Instead, my goal here was to criticize a misapplication of said method, by which extremely ambitious assertions were based upon a weak foundation. Without even having read Morgan's book from cover to cover, let alone countless other works of anthropology and history that would have provided ample material for tackling the issue at hand, Engels recklessly proceeded to claim that the discoveries he presents shake some of Morgan's hypotheses and make others untenable (Engels 2004, 36).

The resulting work can at best be considered a serviceable 'digest' of *Ancient Society*, though one that still misrepresents a number of key issues to a concerning degree. This isn't to say that it's impossible for a Marxist theory of history to surpass Morgan's. Such an effort would involve developing a model of historical materialism that would, in addition to the theoretical framework, also have to include many works of anthropology and history. Although the endeavor would be difficult indeed, a work of Marxist theory that builds upon and even surpasses *Ancient Society* could hypothetically be produced. However, Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* isn't it.

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СУПРОТСТАВЉЕНЕ МАТЕРИЈАЛИСТИЧКЕ КОНЦЕПЦИЈЕ О НАСТАНКУ ДРЖАВЕ: О ЈАЗУ ИЗМЕЂУ МОРГАНА И ЕНГЕЛСА

Сажетак

Тема овог рада је компаративна анализа различитих материјалистичких концепција о настанку државе које нуде Фридрих Енгелс и Луис Морган. С обзиром на утемељеност неких елемената марксистичке концепције о настанку државе на Моргановој антрополошкој концепцији о развоју друштва, ове две теорије деле многе неминовне сличности. Међутим, упркос овоме, оне имају и бројна значајна разилажења. Циљ овог рада је да прикаже сличности дотичних теорија као и да представи и образложи узроке њиховог разилажења. Као што ћемо видети, разлог за одступање марксистичке теорије о настанку државе од Морганове нису нова научна открића на која Енгелс опскурно реферира, већ је то примарно његова тежња да натегне историјске чињенице према идеолошким претпоставкама.

Стога се у првом делу разматра Моргановo откриће феномена праћења порекла по женској линији код древних народа (овде се атрибут ‘древни’ односи на народе у ранијим ступњима развоја, попут античких Грка и Римљана, америчких и аустралијских домородаца, итд.) и његов постепен пренос на мушку линију, који се типично дешава паралелно са развојем земљорадње и сточарства, металургије, и др. Морган своју теорију темељи како на сопственом етнолошком истраживању, тако и на радовима Грота, Неибура, Момзена, Тајлора, Лабока и других великих историчара и антрополога.

Енгелсова концепција се, пак, заснива на амалгаму Морганове антрополошке и Марксове економске теорије, услед чега он значајно већи фокус ставља на моменат класе у развоју државе и, налик Моргану, спекулише о њеној будућој сувишности (додуше,

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* Овај рад је примљен 09. јуна 2023. године, а прихваћен на састанку Редакције 27. новембра 2023. године.

са тоном неизбежности). Из овога произилазе и суштинске разлике између Морганове и Енгелсове концепције: док се једна заснива на историјским чињеницама и гаји искру наде у бољу будућност човечанства, друга ту будућност постулира као апсолутну неминовност која се може тврдити са сигурношћу природног закона – и отуд нужно залази у изостављање и дисторзију историјски и антрополошки кључних чињеница.

Кључне речи: Морган, Енгелс, материјалистичка концепција, настанак државе, друштвени уговор