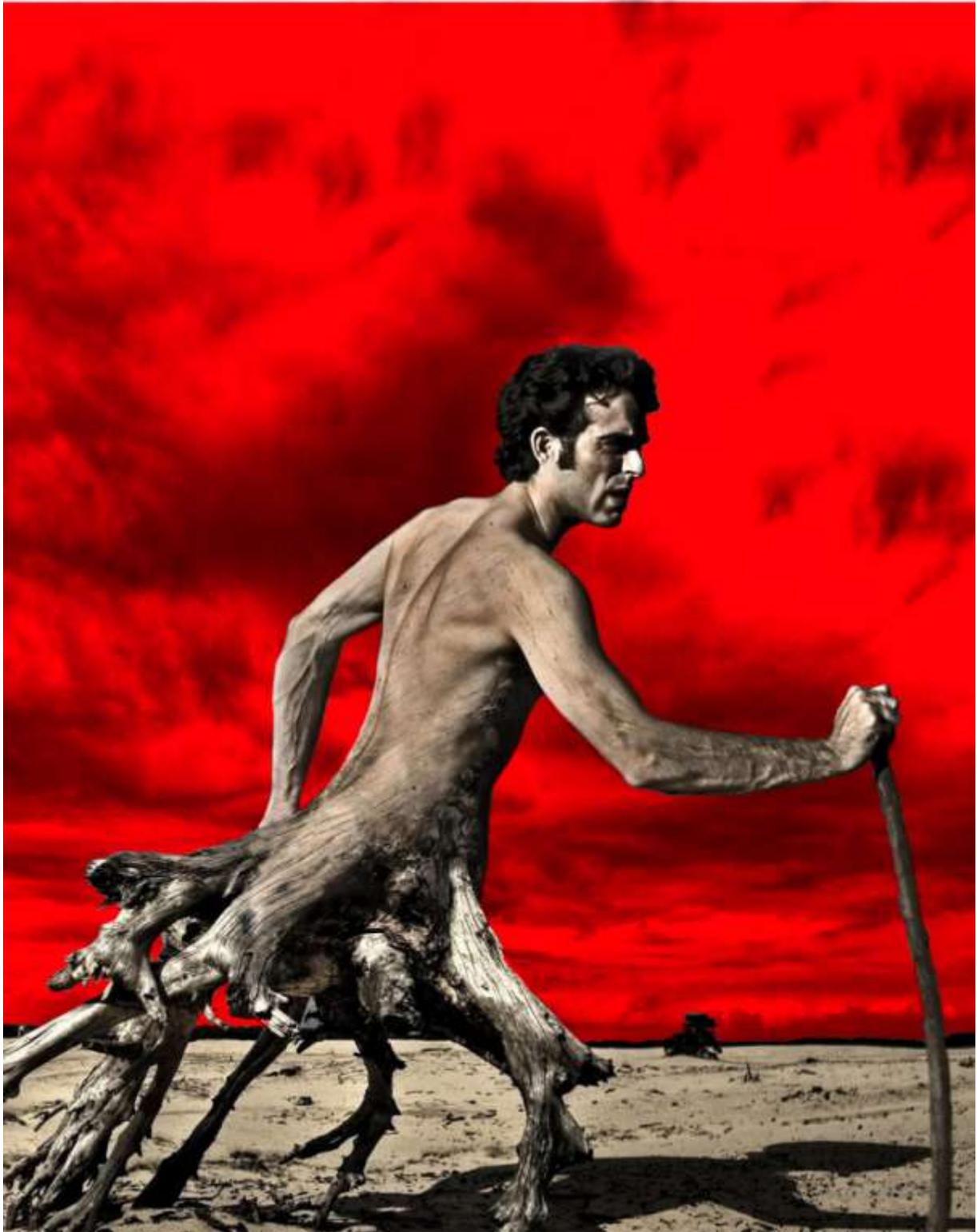


René Hirsch
THE MASCULINE CIVILIZATION



The Masculine Civilization

Metahistory

by Rene Hirsch



Cover: Men merged with nature

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I hereby wish to thank all of you who have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the creation of this book.

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Pretext

A few years ago, speaking at Leiden University, Professor Peter Akkermans reminded us how King Nabonidus (556-539 BCE [\[1\]](#)), after having plotted his way to the throne of Babylon, forged for himself a mythical past worthy of his status, and came to believe in it. This story does not only refer to an epoch and a personage, but also implies that the scheme conceived by this monarch impregnated the reality of his people and of his time, acquiring, as a result, a historical dimension.

Such phenomena abound throughout history, sometimes provoked by a traumatic event, but mostly surfacing during dictatorships, as Nazi Germany has shown. The myths it supported were accepted by whole populations who came to believe in the propaganda imposed on them. Affecting their perception of reality, it marked their judgments and opinions, and, ultimately, left its imprint on history. It is only when the deception collapses that people finally realize to what point they have been mystified, possibly triggering a collective trauma.

Eventually, the passing of time ineluctably relegates past interpretations into obsolescence, leaving as only accepted reading of the past the one bestowed by the present. The way historical events were perceived by the ones who have lived those events, who have been marked by them, is generally discarded as archaic and irrelevant. Manifest of this idea is the acknowledgment that societies and civilizations are to be appraised in the light of the “progress” they have achieved, regarding therefore most bygone cultures as “barbarian,” or even “savage” [\[2\]](#). And though the savagery of two world wars has somewhat toned down this point of view, the notion of progress appearing not as inexorable, we continue to support the idea that the knowledge and technology gathered by our industrialized civilization represents an apogee that no other culture has ever matched, even less surpassed. As a result, we tend to forget that choices were made every step of the way, choices that were influenced by the way contemporaries perceived their present, every trodden path leaving behind alternatives that are now lost in time, obsolete.

On the tree of human history, the diversity of cultures represents as many branches sharing a similar vein, fed by the same sap. It would therefore be beneficial for all of us to delineate the common denominators that reconcile all these impetuses born from an identical core that form the different facets of our humanity. In the words of Mircea Eliade, we should never lose sight “*of the profound and indivisible unity of the history of the human mind.*” [\[Eliade, 1976\]](#)

To recognize our human nature in the way other populations lived and interpreted their present – whether they preceded or paralleled our time – could help us understand our present in a manner closer to our nature, every explored path adding to our accumulated

experience. These principles remain even more valid today as our relationship to nature must be urgently reevaluated.

I propose we retrace here a path that was taken a long time ago, the path that led to the advent of the “masculine civilization.” Some of the choices made at the time were so decisive that they have alienated parts of our intrinsic human nature. Still today, despite all our progress, their consequences weigh heavily on our lives, our decisions, our goals.

Nature versus Culture

There was a time when men and women did not know what the purpose of sex was. While physiological evidence made women’s procreative responsibility indisputable, it was impossible to attribute any reproductive function to men, as long as the role of sex was not understood. There was thus a time when fatherhood did not exist.

The world before fatherhood was characterized by an all-encompassing nature, source of all life. The fact that the feminine, with its obvious fertile attributes, was nature’s representative remained a source of frustration for men who thought of their role as being a secondary if not a redundant one.

In an initial attempt to control nature, men will use the spirits to explain most of its mysterious manifestations. One of their main functions will be to provide pregnancy with its first comprehensive explanation, while endowing men with a primordial role in its process. The spiritualization of nature will eventually lead to the holistic conception of the universe that characterizes the primitive world.

Sedentarization and animal domestication will offer the likelihood to observe the consequences of the sexual act. However, the full integration of fatherhood will only come into effect after the collapse of the Neolithic society and the disappearance of its millennial traditions. From its ashes, new social and economic structures will emerge that in a very short time see villages become cities, kingdoms, and empires, while divinities replace the spirits that have lost most of their functions. In the new society, men occupy all key positions, their patriarchal principles implemented through ancestor cults at the household level and tables of law at the collective level.

In the Middle East, the masculine civilization will find its ideological climax during the Axial Age, with the precepts of the prophets and the advent of Levantine monotheism. The new divinity mirrors the position man has forged for himself in the universe, nature and woman both subjected to him. Replacing Mother Nature as source of all life, the Divine Father sits now at the summit of the creation.

Synopsis

This book is divided into four parts.

In the first part, we see why the spirits were invented and which roles were assigned to them. Their omnipresence and the functions they fulfilled allow us to reconstruct the way humans saw the world and the role they played in it.

The second part describes how the first sedentarized communities, despite the profound transformations brought by the Neolithic Revolution, kept most of their ancestral customs and values during the new era. Women remained the main contributor to the economy by playing a crucial role in the process of sedentarization and in the production of food (agriculture). Men, for their part, went on hunting, providing the community with meat while keeping nomadic and shamanic traditions alive.

In the third part, we see that the climatic and environmental deterioration at the end of the Neolithic era, combined with the discovery of fatherhood and the bull's domestication, precipitates a complete transformation of the society. The egalitarian tribal structure gives way to a hierarchized society in which men occupy all key economic and administrative positions, relegating women to a secondary role. Deprived of their main functions, the spirits are replaced by divinities that are organized in pantheons, mimicking the hierarchical structure in force in the urban society.

The last part depicts the introduction of Yahweh, a new divinity in the landscape of the Middle East. The functionality of its first manifestations, in full concordance with the prevailing polytheistic context, gradually becomes more abstract, influenced by the ideologies of the Axial Age. We see how the prophets adapt their divinity to the people they represent, a tribal community of nomadic pastoralists without religious or political organization. It is their oral tradition that the prophets use as background for their narrative of the creation: a people longing for a time before the revolution, for a paradise that has been lost.

The conclusion proposes a new division of human history in which the introduction of fatherhood serves as pivotal element to mark the start of the masculine civilization. Having dominated for the last 7,000 years, its ideology is confronted today with a major challenge, the resurgence of women's economic role and the notion that, for the first time ever, nature has to be protected from our own deeds. Both plead for the resumption of a more holistic vision of the universe.

Considering the extended period over which the events I relate are spread out, it has not been possible to take into account the numerous variations, the multiple exceptions, and the

innumerable nuances that characterize human history. Constrained by the objective of this work, my purpose is to refer to a general behavior and to retrace the well-trodden path.

Another fundamental bias of this work is that it sees history through the eyes of a male Westerner, voluntarily disregarding all other interpretations of the sources, for the simple reason that this narration is the result of a quest, whose resolution resides in the world that created it, in the world to which it belongs.



Knight

Why can't I kill God within me? Why does He live on in this painful and humiliating way even though I curse Him and want to tear Him out of my heart? Why, in spite of everything, is He a baffling reality that I can't shake off? Do you hear me?

Death

Yes, I hear you.

Knight

I want knowledge, not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge. I want God to stretch out His hand towards me, reveal Himself and speak to me.

Death

But He remains silent.

Knight

I call out to Him in the dark but no one seems to be there.

Death

Perhaps no one is there.

Knight

Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.

Death

Most people never reflect about either death or the futility of life.

Knight

But one day they will have to stand at that last moment of life and look towards the darkness.

Death

When that day comes...

Knight

In our fear, we make an image, and that image we call God.

[BERGMAN Ingmar (1957): *The Seventh Seal*]



Part One

To Be and To Have

In this part, we see why the spirits were invented and the functions that were assigned to them.

Most of the documentation used here comes from the ethnographical and anthropological literature.

This first part is divided into three chapters and a conclusion:

I. Of Sex and Procreation, which shows why procreation in most primitive communities has been the source of a gnawing mystery

II. Of Male Power describes why and how the spirits were used to explain nature's mysteries

III. Of Female Power sketches the misconceptions related to female sexuality and to pregnancy

To Be and To Have draws the conclusion that men, not knowing the function that nature had assigned to them, craved to possess what they did not have



The following text revives a discussion that began in 1865, when John Ferguson McLennan published [Primitive Marriage](#). In it, he sustained ideas that were, and still are revolutionary, proposing that somewhere in our past we, human beings, were ignorant of the relationship between sexuality and procreation. Besides, McLennan was also the first to imagine that a matriarchal organization of society had preceded the patriarchal system in force today. At the time, these ideas were certainly daring.

Moreover, this author also participated in the extended debate formed around the idea that sexual intercourse in primitive societies was characterized by promiscuity, a standpoint he defended with other renowned researchers such as Lewis Henry Morgan, Johann Jakob Bachofen, and James Frazer. Supporting McLennan's theory, Frazer concluded that there was a time when all people were ignorant of physiological paternity.

However, the interventions of Sigmund Freud and Edvard Westermarck imposed the idea that human society was, since its very beginning, structured around the father and the monogamous family. For a while, their standpoint silenced the discussion.

In 1966, Edmund Leach reawakened the debate by announcing that physiological paternity was recognized as a cultural fact everywhere in the world, and that to speak of ignorance on this topic inferred that one considered the natives as "*childish, stupid, superstitious.*" [[Leach, 1969](#)]

In her answer, Suzan [Montague](#) contrasted the nature-culture dichotomy of our Judeo-Christian universe with the conception of the Trobrianders (Papua New Guinea), a people who, until recently, did not know the facts of procreation as we understand them, its conception resting on a totem-rank dichotomy. Therefore, establishing physiological paternity was not of relevance for the Trobrianders, since the structure of their society did not take it into account. On the other hand, the social father – who does not exist or has a very marginalized function as a godfather in our societies – played a decisive role in theirs: around him was the relationship father-child organized. Through him, the heritage of the clan and the totem were also transmitted, determining elements for possessing land. As Torben Monberg summarized, every culture develops the logical markers that are necessary for framing its vision of the world [4].

In this first part, we go back to the time when all humans lived as nomads, completely dependent on nature that provided them with their sustenance. In the remnants of those bygone worlds, we discover which functions these populations attributed to sexuality, and how they considered their procreative role. However, the scarcity of information we possess on these people has made it necessary to approach the subject from another slant.

During the last few hundred years, travelers, explorers, missionaries, ethnologists and other scientists have described the lifestyles and customs of communities around the world that were isolated from Western civilizing currents. Some of their ancestral beliefs, kept intact and perpetuated from generation to generation, will allow us to retrace the state of knowledge of their forefathers. To this journey in time and space, this initial part is dedicated.



I. Of Sex and Procreation

During the Paleolithic era, humans lived in hordes or bands. The size of these bands was determined by the access they had to food. Plants were generally the domain of women, who supplied the nutritional needs and determined the camp's emplacement. Meat was provided by hunting, traditionally in men's hands, while fishing was usually done by both sexes, these last two activities contributing less regularly to the group's diet. It was a life of predation, the organization of which was dictated by the environment and was defined by the following features:

- 1) Humans, like all other species, obtained their means of subsistence out of what nature produced
- 2) Food abundance or shortage determined the degree of nomadism of these populations that had to move according to nutritional resources, animal migrations, and the degree of maturity of seasonal plants
- 3) Caves and other natural shelters offered the only alternative to life in the open air
- 4) The possessions of the group were strictly limited to what every individual could carry when changing location (material and tools necessary for the camp, for picking, fishing, hunting, etc.), making trade by barter very limited, and the creation of an exchange economy impossible

Living in an unforeseeable and dangerous nature, humans were prey to illness and accidents, to wild beasts and unknown plants, to the inclemency of the weather, as well as to internal struggles and to conflicts among hordes.

This Stone age will last a very long time during which humans will develop specific techniques and tools, and accumulate observations on their environment. With the passing of time, they will build up a tradition that will form a cultural heritage specific to each group.

Observing nature around them, these populations tried to understand its manifestations, and to relate them logically to their knowledge, to the way they understood the world. However, many of these manifestations seemed to occur without any reason, regardless of any logic that could justify their occurrence. Where did the clouds, the rain, the storm, or lightning come from? Why was the sky sprinkled with small lights, not always the same, and why did some of them move? Why did cataclysms destroy their food? Why did epidemics decimate so many of them?

Among all those mysteries, death certainly was the greatest of them all, with its incomprehensible rules, yet everywhere present. Irremediably anchoring humans into nature,

death was not only the most important event occurring in an individual's life, but was also a very prominent event within the group, especially when its size was modest.

Another most incomprehensible mystery to the people of those faraway times was pregnancy. They did not know how children were conceived, why the belly of women suddenly began to grow, and why, after a few months, women gave birth to one, and sometimes several children. They could not explain why one gave birth to a boy, the other to a girl, a third one to twins, and a fourth to a stillborn baby [6].

Of course, they had observed an identical phenomenon in the animal world where females deliver and nurse their offspring just as women do. Even so, one thing humans could not understand, could not even imagine, was the role that men played in this process. How could they have established a link between the sexual act, in which man seems to be the main actor, and the physiological conditions characterizing pregnant women?

Let us put into context a few aspects of this relationship.

First, the discontinuity of menses, a primary indication of a possible pregnancy, occurs weeks after the sexual act. Furthermore, women who breast-feed their baby are not submitted to the menstrual cycle, which does not mean they are pregnant. Besides, the menstrual cycle lacks regularity, especially for women who are often on the move or are subject to a rough life: *"The menses commence to flow among the native females at an earlier age than among Europeans, frequently beginning at about twelve; they are also subject to many irregularities in their periodical return, arising probably from the kind of life they lead and the nature of the diet upon which they live. I have known cases where this irregularity has extended to three months. Child-bearing does not commence often before the age of sixteen, nor have I ever noticed pregnant women under that age."* [Eyre, 1845]

We will further see that, even though humans had certainly noticed that pregnancy does not occur before the first menstruation, the function of menstruation has only very recently been understood. Second, the frequency of sexual intercourse exceeding by far that of pregnancies, and pregnancy becoming visible a few months after the sexual act, it was practically impossible, for men as well as for women, to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the two events.

Finally, the important number of sterile and crippled women, and the frequent miscarriages made establishing such a connection even more difficult.

In addition, two elements that would have simplified the observation of this relationship were missing. Domesticated animals, with their shorter procreative cycle, were only integrated into human society during the Neolithic era, around 8,000, except for the dog who sporadically appears a few millennia earlier. More significantly, the monogamous relationship between

men and women, with its strict copulating discipline, was not characteristic of these populations' sexual practices. On the contrary, promiscuity was the rule, which made observing the potential consequences of sex practically impossible.

Of Sexual Promiscuity

Many factors influence the procreative behavior of primates, the most important being the demographics and the way food is harvested and distributed. The sexual life of primates is organized around one of three forms of relationship.

Serialized monogamous relationship, the most infrequent of the three, is found among gibbons and some lemurs, and takes place when females gather food on their own: the males divide the isolated females among themselves and mate with them.

Single polygynous relationship, practiced by baboons and gorillas, is a sort of polygamy in which one male establishes a relationship with a small group of females when they collect food and search for protection. The male has to prove his strength and aggressiveness by chasing other males from the territory where females are harvesting. Having to compete to get access to the best male, sexual rivalry among females is rife.

Multiple polygynous relationships are practiced by macaques, chimpanzees, some lemurs and some baboons. In this organization, females form an important group (ten individuals or more), and several males make an alliance to get exclusive access to them. Inside the male group, competition is intense and appears at different levels: hierarchy, domination, violence, but also strategic partnerships and group tactics. Females' preferences and the need for variety add a supplementary degree of complexity to this structure of highly politicized relationships.

Female primates play a dominant role in the sexual organization within the group, as among chimpanzees where a female motivated for sex attracts all the males. In a multiple polygynous relationship, she indicates her preference for a particular male by joining the group in which he is, by having sexual intercourse with him during her fertile period, by displaying her support at times of conflicts with other males, and by developing social relationships with him. In the same way, she rejects a male who displeases her by refusing to mate with him, by trying to expel him from her group, or by leaving the group in which he is.

Females encourage males who best assure their protection and that of their offspring. Males with whom they develop a social relationship can win their favor as well. However, sexual intercourse does not limit itself to males they know: newcomers into the group are also accepted by them, not only for the renewal they represent, but also to make sure that they will not attack their young.

Moreover, adding a supplementary layer of complexity to these relationships, males display a marked preference for mature females who possess an extended network, and who have, time and again, proven their fertility and their capacity to survive, all these aspects exercising an obvious influence on their social status. A relationship with a teenage female who has no experience and who has not proven her fertility is exceptional.

For humans, the conditions of life during the Paleolithic era plead in favor of relationships based on promiscuity rather than on serialized monogamy. First, Paleolithic bands were composed of twenty to fifty individuals on average, which made serialized monogamy not viable [7]. Secondly, the clear distribution of tasks between men and women predisposed them to an organization of their sexual life similar to the one existing among chimpanzees. Furthermore, a multiple polygynous structure encourages the development of a social organization on two levels: it favors a wealth of nuances in the relationship between the sexes, and it increases politicization inside each group.

Other demographic data reinforce this idea. Skeletons excavated by archaeologists reveal a considerable disparity in the adult population of the Paleolithic bands, generally indicating that there were two women for three men. In addition, women lived on average eight years less than men did. The shortage of women made monogamous relationships impossible. What's more, such a demographic imbalance between the sexes must have deeply influenced the way sexuality was experienced, especially for men: placed in a chronic state of shortage and insecurity, they were obliged to adapt their aggressiveness and their capacities for socialization for the sole purpose of securing their sexual survival. The anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon who studied the Yanomamö (Brazil) noted that the wars this people waged almost always had women for object. Raids were organized to kidnap the women of another village, the rest of its inhabitants being simply slaughtered. The captured women were first raped by all the members of the expedition, then by all the men who had remained at the village, before finally ending up being incorporated into the community and taken as wives.

It does not belong to our present scientific capacities to reconstruct the daily life of a period that has only left us bones, sets of teeth, and a few usual objects for inheritance. Closer to us, however, within reach of contemporary scrutiny, communities have lived, and for a few, still live today isolated from the civilizing current, throwing a more direct bridge between our time and our distant prehistory. The lifestyles, traditions and beliefs they have maintained throughout time give us a potential picture of the world of humans before history, before civilization erased most of its traces.

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