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F. ENGELS

**THE ORIGIN
OF THE FAMILY,
PRIVATE PROPERTY
AND THE STATE**

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

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PREFACE
TO THE FIRST EDITION
1884

The following chapters constitute, in a sense, the fulfilment of a bequest. It was no less a person than Karl Marx who had planned to present the results of Morgan's researches in connection with the conclusions arrived at by his own—within certain limits I might say our own—materialist investigation of history and thus to make clear their whole significance. For Morgan rediscovered in America, in his own way, the materialist conception of history that had been discovered by Marx forty years ago, and in his comparison of barbarism and civilization was led by this conception to the same conclusions, in the main points, as Marx had arrived at. And just as *Capital* was for years both zealously plagiarized and persistently hushed up on the part of the official economists in Germany,

so was Morgan's *Ancient Society*¹ treated by the spokesmen of "prehistoric" science in England. My work can offer but a meagre substitute for that which my departed friend was not destined to accomplish. However, I have before me, in his extensive extracts from Morgan², critical notes which I reproduce here wherever this is at all possible.

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefore; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.³ The social institutions under which

¹ *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery Through Barbarism to Civilization.* By Lewis H. Morgan, London, MacMillan & Co., 1877. This book was printed in America, and is remarkably difficult to obtain in London. The author died a few years ago. [Note by Engels.]

² The reference is to Karl Marx's *Abstract of Morgan's "Ancient Society,"* published in Russian in 1945. See *Marx-Engels Archive*, vol. IX.—Ed.

³ Engels is here guilty of inexactitude by citing the propagation of the species alongside of the production of the means of subsistence as causes determining the development of society and of social institutions. In the text proper of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and*

men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other. The less the development of labour, and the more limited its volume of production and, therefore, the wealth of society, the more preponderatingly does the social order appear to be dominated by ties of sex. However, within this structure of society based on ties of sex, the productivity of labour develops more and more; with it, private property and exchange, differences in wealth, the possibility of utilizing the labour power of others, and thereby the basis of class antagonisms: new social elements, which strive in the course of generations to adapt the old structure of society to the new conditions, until, finally, the incompatibility of the two leads to a complete revolution. The old society based on sex groups bursts asunder in the collision of the newly-developed social classes; in its place a new society appears, constituted in a state, the lower units of which are no longer sex groups but territorial groups, a society in which the family system is entirely dominated by the property

the State, Engels himself demonstrated by an analysis of concrete material that the mode of material production is the principal factor conditioning the development of society and of social institutions.—*Ed.*

system, and in which the class antagonisms and class struggles, which make up the content of all hitherto *written* history, now freely develop.

Morgan's great merit lies in having discovered and reconstructed this prehistoric foundation of our written history in its main features, and in having found in the sex groups of the North American Indians the key to the most important, hitherto insoluble, riddles of the earliest Greek, Roman and German history. His book, however, was not the work of one day. He grappled with his material for nearly forty years until he completely mastered it. That is why his book is one of the few epoch-making works of our time.

In the following exposition the reader will, on the whole, easily be able to distinguish between what has been taken from Morgan and what I have added myself. In the historical sections dealing with Greece and Rome I have not limited myself to Morgan's data, but have added what I had at my disposal. The sections dealing with the Celts and the Germans are substantially my own; here Morgan had at his disposal almost exclusively second-hand sources, and, as far as German conditions were concerned—with the exception of Tacitus—only the wretched liberal falsifications of Mr. Freeman. The economic arguments, sufficient for Morgan's purpose but

wholly inadequate for my own, have all been elaborated afresh by myself. And, finally, I of course am responsible for all conclusions wherever Morgan is not expressly quoted.

Written by Engels for the first edition of his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which appeared in Zurich in 1884

Printed according to the text of the fourth edition of the book
Translated from the German

PREFACE
TO THE FOURTH EDITION
1891

The previous large editions of this work have been out of print now for almost six months and the publisher has for some time past desired me to prepare a new edition. More urgent tasks have hitherto prevented me from doing so. Seven years have elapsed since the first edition appeared, and during this period our knowledge of the original forms of the family has made important progress. It was, therefore, necessary diligently to apply the hand to the work of amplification and improvement, particularly in view of the fact that the proposed stereotyping of the present text will make further changes on my part impossible for some time to come.

I have, therefore, submitted the whole text to a careful revision, and have made a number of additions, in which, I hope, due regard has been

paid to the present state of science. Further in the course of this preface, I give a brief review of the development of the history of the family from Bachofen to Morgan, principally because the English prehistoric school, which is tinged with chauvinism, continues to do its utmost to kill by silence the revolution Morgan's discoveries have made in conceptions of the history of primitive society, although it does not hesitate in the least to appropriate his results. Elsewhere, too, this English example is followed only too often.

My work has been translated into various languages. First into Italian: *L'origine della famiglia, della proprietà privata e dello stato, versione riveduta dall'autore, di Pasquale Martignetti*; Benevento 1885. Then Rumanian: *Origina familiei, proprietatei private si a statului, traducere de Joan Nadejde*, in the Yassy periodical *Contemporanul*, September 1885 to May 1886. Further into Danish: *Familiens, Privatejendommens og Statens Oprindelse, Dansk, af forfatteren gennemgaaet Udgave, besørget af Gerson Trier*, København 1888. A French translation by Henri Ravé based on the present German edition is in the press.

* * *

Until the beginning of the sixties there was no such thing as a history of the family. In this

sphere historical science was still completely under the influence of the Five Books of Moses. The patriarchal form of the family, described there in greater detail than anywhere else, was not only implicitly accepted as the oldest form of the family, but also—after excluding polygamy—identified with the present-day bourgeois family, as if the family had really undergone no historical development at all. At most it was admitted that a period of promiscuous sexual relationships might have existed in primeval times. To be sure, in addition to monogamy, Oriental polygamy and Indo-Tibetan polyandry were also known, but these three forms could not be arranged in any historical sequence and appeared disconnectedly alongside of each other. That among certain peoples of ancient times, and among some still existing savages, the line of descent was reckoned not from the father but from the mother and, therefore, the female lineage alone was regarded as valid; that among many peoples of today marriage within definite larger groups—not subjected to closer investigation at that time—is prohibited, and that this custom is to be met with in all parts of the world—these facts were indeed known and new examples were constantly being brought to light. But nobody knew what to do with them, and even in E. B. Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, etc.

(1865)¹, they figure merely as "strange customs" along with the taboo in force among some savages against the touching of burning wood with iron tools, and similar religious bosh and nonsense.

The study of the history of the family dates from 1861, from the publication of Bachofen's *Mother Right*. In this work the author advances the following propositions: 1) that in the beginning humanity lived in a state of sexual promiscuity, which the author unhappily designates as "hetaerism"; 2) that such promiscuity excludes all certainty as regards paternity, that lineage, therefore, could be reckoned only through the female line—according to mother right—and that originally this was the case among all the peoples of antiquity; 3) that consequently women, who, as mothers, were the only definitely ascertainable parents of the younger generation, were treated with a high degree of consideration and respect, which, according to Bachofen's conception, was enhanced to the complete rule of women (gynecocracy); 4) that the transition to monogamy, where the woman belongs exclusively to one man, implied the violation of a primeval religious injunction (that is, in actual fact, the viola-

¹ E. B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, London 1865.—Ed.

tion of the ancient traditional right of the other men to the same woman), a violation which had to be atoned for, or the toleration of which had to be purchased, by surrendering the woman for a limited period of time.

Bachofen finds evidence in support of these propositions in countless passages of ancient classical literature, which he had assembled with extraordinary diligence. According to him, the evolution from "hetaerism" to monogamy, and from mother right to father right, takes place, particularly among the Greeks, as a consequence of the evolution of religious ideas, the intrusion of new deities, representatives of the new outlook, into the old traditional pantheon representing the old outlook, so that the latter is more and more driven into the background by the former. Thus, according to Bachofen, it is not the development of the actual conditions under which men live, but the religious reflection 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. Bachofen accordingly points to the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus as a dramatic depiction of the struggle between declining mother right and rising and victorious father right in the Heroic Age. Clytemnestra has slain her husband Agamemnon, just returned from the Trojan War, for the sake of her lover Aegisthus; but Orestes, her son by Agamem-

non, avenges his father's murder by slaying his mother. For this he is pursued by the Erinyes, the demonic defenders of mother right, according to which matricide is the most heinous and inexpressible of crimes. But Apollo, who through his oracle has incited Orestes to commit this deed, and Athena, who is called in as arbiter—the two deities which here represent the new order, based on father right—protect him. Athena hears both sides. The whole controversy is briefly summarized in the debate which now ensues between Orestes and the Erinyes. Orestes declares that Clytemnestra is guilty of a double outrage; for in killing *her* husband she also killed *his* father. Why then have the Erinyes persecuted him and not Clytemnestra, who is much the greater culprit? The reply is striking:

*“Unrelated by blood was she to the man
that she slew.”*

The murder of a man not related by blood, even though he be the husband of the murderess, is expiable and does not concern the Erinyes. Their function is to avenge only murders among blood-relatives, and the most heinous of all these, according to mother right, is matricide. Apollo now intervenes in defence of Orestes. Athena calls upon the Areopagites—the Athenian jurors—to vote on the question. The votes for