

**An 'Economic Man' in Every Society**  
**An Overview of Economic Anthropology and its cross-cultural development**  
**as a discipline as it relates to the notion of the 'Economic Man'**

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**Abstract**

This paper will give an overview of economic anthropology both in terms of the history of ideas and the philosophy of science. It will look at how the field has developed from several distinct philosophies in economics to the multifaceted approaches within the field today. The first section will look at the roots of the field and the major philosophies and proponents of those philosophies. The second section will look at the more recent trends in terms of how they draw on the earlier philosophies and the new elements they incorporate. The final section will look at how the multifaceted approaches in the field has allowed for new avenues of study. In particular, this section will look how these multifaceted approaches have made the definition of the "economic man" more cross-cultural.

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## Introduction

Recent trends in economic anthropology have started to branch out from the traditional schools of thought and paradigms. Anthropologists are now finding that the formerly rigid distinctions between the various schools are more flexible than previously thought. The work of a given anthropologist's may fit more within a specific approach, but his work will also reflect the influence of several other approaches as well. This has opened up new avenues of study in formerly ignored areas.

Take the definition of the *homo economicus*, or the "economic man." The idea (as I will discuss later) is that all actions and decisions made by man are made with the goal of maximizing<sup>1</sup> his satisfaction. However, this definition has only recently been applied to non-industrial, non-western societies. Originally, it applied solely to material gain based on an institutional economy. I hope to show how such areas as this can now be analyzed through a study of the history of ideas and the philosophy of science, which have governed economic anthropology.

Accordingly, this paper will look first at the roots of economic anthropology. It will then look at the formalist, substantivist, and Marxist schools and the institutional, formal, and ecological paradigms (Halperin 1988:7). It will focus on how the field has grown and changed from conventional economics to the multifaceted approach it is today. It will then look at how this multifaceted approach has encouraged the broadening of such previously narrow definitions as the "economic man."

## Roots of Economics

The study of economics within the social sciences originated in the field of economics and sought to create explanations for the “patterns and variations” observed throughout all societies (Halperin 1988: 1). The roots of economics lie in the writings of philosophers like Aristotle and in the concept of the household as the basic economic unit (Wilk<sup>ii</sup> 2007). It was not until the seventeenth century that the economy was considered a “separate entity” from the basic unit of the household, when production of goods outside the home increased and exploration of the New World began.

Thus the study of economics derived from questions on the nature of human beings posed by the philosophers of the day such as are humans essentially good or evil? Economic theorists like Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean Jacques-Rousseau (1712-1778)<sup>iii</sup> asked questions about the nature of human *behavior*. Do people naturally behave “selfishly” or “altruistically” (Wilk 2007: 40)? People can behave in either fashion; the question posed by early philosophers is whether people are naturally prone to one or the other. Hobbes and Rousseau exalted “primitive<sup>iv</sup>” peoples because they represented the “natural state” of man (41) in the hierarchy of civilization. The flow of goods from one person to another was embedded in the norms of their societies. Hobbes and Locke saw the motives for this as essentially selfish, whereas Rousseau saw them as being more altruistic.

Later theorists like Adam Smith sided with Hobbes and Locke, seeing human beings as inherently selfish (Wilk 2007: 41; Stuart 2010). Smith explained the embeddedness of human behavior in terms of a moral economy that qualified its self-interested behavior for the betterment of society. The moral economy is most

characteristic of the tribal economy, where “in spite of their natural selfishness,” peoples “divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements.” An “invisible hand” leads these actions, which, unbeknownst to the actor, “advance[s] the interest of the society” (Smith 1759: 630). Exchanges based on moral obligations to kinship relations and rituals are examples of the types of activities guided by the “invisible hand” (Stuart 2010)<sup>v</sup>.

### Early Economic Anthropology

Others like Max Weber and Emil Durkheim agreed with the concept of a moral economy but rejected the notion of human beings as inherently selfish and focused instead on their “social nature” (Wilk 2007: 41). Weber relied more on the individual’s ability to influence the larger group based on their “moral imagination” (41). The cosmology and the institution in which they are raised instill these morals in them<sup>vi</sup> and thus also their behavior. Durkheim, on the other hand, stressed that while people “think and feel” as individuals, when looked at as part of the larger whole of society, they fall into groups. Their behavior changes according to the pressures of the group and their desire to conform<sup>vii</sup> (41). To early economic anthropologists, the degree of embeddedness of the economy was directly proportional to how technologically advanced the society was<sup>viii</sup>. Tribal societies were at the bottom of this evolutionary-based hierarchy of civilizations, and European and Western economies were at the top. Sociologists like Weber and Durkheim worked in tribal societies and saw that the economy was intricately tied in with the culture’s mores and norms in what was termed general reciprocity<sup>ix</sup>.

Bronislaw Malinowski also worked in tribal societies, primarily the Trobriand islanders, looking at how the economy was embedded in the social environment of the society. According to his student Firth (see Appendix 1), Malinowski showed how economic activity is socially motivated and can have complex dimensions depending on the cosmology of the group (1964: 209-228). For example, he showed how with the Trobriand islanders the “magic practices served a positive function in the economic system by instilling confidence and hope in the individual who was setting out on a trading expedition” (LeClair and Schneider 1968: 4). Malinowski had little regard for economic theory. In response to this, economic anthropologists like Melville Herskovits and his student Raymond Firth described a new economic anthropology that trumpeted the benefits of economic theory.

Herskovits and Firth emphasized the “calculus of maximization” of people’s actions (LeClair and Schneider 1968: 6). According to this theory, people rationally make choices according to a set of “determinable” principles (6). These principles could relate to the satisfaction of the individual or to their moral imagination. Thus while economists viewed the economy as isolated from the social system, economic anthropologists like Herskovits and Firth acknowledged the social system’s effect on the economy of a society. The work of Malinowski, Firth<sup>x</sup> and Herskovits rooted the idea of the embeddedness of the economy firmly in the field of economic anthropology and in the substantivist and Marxist schools of thought. This would be challenged by the formal and institutional paradigms in anthropology that analyzed the disembodied nature of the economy in larger institutions and capitalistic societies.

### Formalist-Substantivist Debate

The differentiation between an embedded and a disembedded economy as well as Weber's writings on the difference between the formalist and substantivist definitions of the economy contributed to the formalist-substantivist debate<sup>xi</sup> (Nash 1965: 123). Formalists like Raymond Firth and Marvin Harris argued for an empirically based paradigm. They believed that formal economic theory could be applied cross-culturally<sup>xii</sup> and emphasized the self-interested model of human behavior. Drawing on Smith, formalists saw that individuals make pragmatic choices to maximize<sup>xiii</sup> their own satisfaction according to the labor theory of value (Stuart 2010; Polanyi 1953 as reprinted in Fried 1959, 166; Halperin 1988: 10). In Polanyi's terms, the formal meaning of "economic" is based in the logic of a "means-end relationship" (Polanyi 1953 as reprinted in Fried 1959, 162). The laws of supply and demand determine what the price of a good or service is.

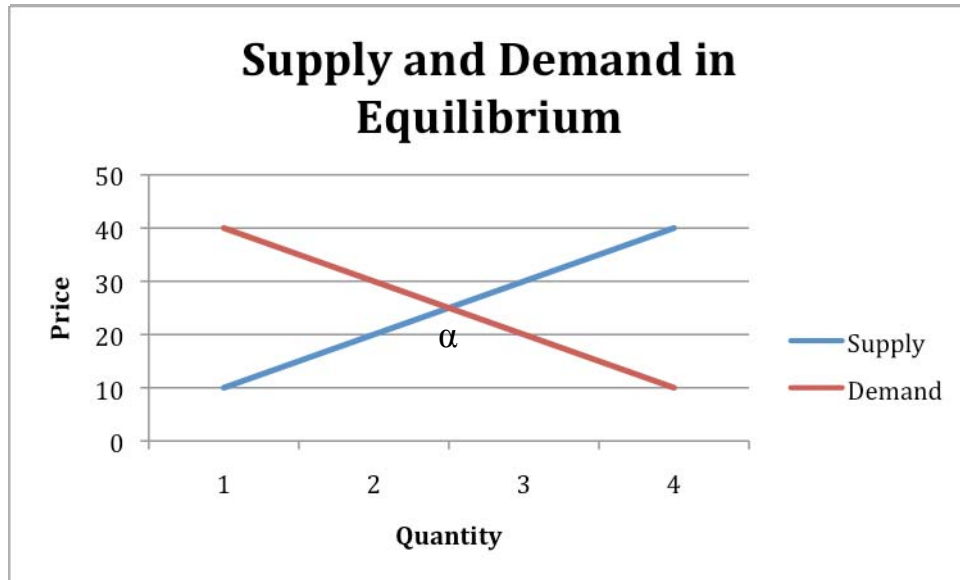


Figure 1 – The Law of Supply and Demand, Shown in Equilibrium

In this exchange of goods (as Polanyi calls the market economy) there is no social component. The price of an object is solely determined based on what the market will bear. In the graph above, the price of the object  $\alpha$  is where the lines of supply and demand cross. An individual who predicts what a market can sustain determines the price, not what society requires the price to be according to interpersonal relationships. The unit of analysis, then, is on the level of the individual.

The substantivists, on the other hand, rejected formal economic theory, saying that, as it focused on the market mechanism, it could only apply to capitalistic societies (Stuart 2010). Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* argued that the modern economy of Nineteenth Century Europe was “disembedded” from the social structure. This created a market that was driven solely by economic considerations (Humphreys 1969: 166-167). In non-market societies, by contrast, Polanyi argued that “the economy cannot be distinguished by reference to an interrelated flow of rational calculations” (166-167).

The economy is too embedded in the social structure to be analyzed using the same theories that apply to capitalistic societies. The social structure thus defined the type of theory that could be applied and what type of economy would exist. The unit of analysis could only be the institutions, since it depended on interpersonal relationships.

In the tribal societies Polanyi studied, the economy is characterized by what he terms reciprocity (what Marshall Sahlins called general reciprocity). Their social structure was defined by gift giving or by “movements between correlative points of symmetrical groupings in society” (Polanyi 1944: 63-64). Along those lines, he suggested four overall patterns of economic activity based on social structure: reciprocity, redistribution, exchange, and householding. These came to be associated with an evolutionary hierarchy of civilization in anthropology so that reciprocity was seen as the lowest level and exchange the highest. The table below summarizes the formalist and substantivist positions in the debate.

	<b>Formalist</b>	<b>Substantivist</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Scott Cook	George Dalton, Karl Polanyi
<b>Ontology</b>	The economy is not embedded in the society. It is a separate entity.	The economy is embedded in society.
<b>Epistemology</b>	The economy utilizes a market mechanism. Society is the central reference for the economy.	Not all markets utilize a market mechanism. The family is at the center of the market and the economy.



<b>Methodology</b>	Deductive method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derives from logic</li> <li>• Set of rules referring to choice between alternative uses of insufficient means</li> <li>• Power of syllogism</li> <li>• Laws of mind</li> </ul> (Cook 1966: 332)	Inductive Method: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Derives from fact</li> <li>• Implies neither choice nor insufficiency of means</li> <li>• Power of gravity (as an empirical reality)</li> <li>• Law of Nature</li> </ul> (Cook 1966: 332)
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**Figure 2 – Summary table of Formalist-Substantivist debate**

After the formalist-substantivist debate, the approaches and paradigms of economic anthropology became increasingly interrelated. The paradigms, according to Halperin, may have developed out of these schools of thought, but the controversies between schools grew out of the “underlying theoretical frames” of the paradigms (1988: 7-8). As such, schools may be associated with a number of paradigms and vice versa. The institutional, formal, and ecological paradigms and the schools of thought that are associated with them are all interrelated. Where they differ is in which elements of the roots of the field on which they draw. The most recent approaches, like practice theory and rational choice theory, as will be discussed later, include elements from both the schools below and new schools.

### **The Institutional Paradigm**

The institutional paradigm consists of models that emphasize the role of institutional “arrangements of organizing production, distribution, and consumption.” (Halperin 1988: 31). This paradigm is considered to be substantivist in approach and a critique of Adam Smith’s formal definition of “economics” (Halperin 1988). Thornstein

Veblen is considered the father of the institutional paradigm, though it also incorporates ideas from Max Weber and Karl Marx. Weber and Marx contributed through their theories that the economy functions based on the institution (Halperin 1988: 55). As intellectual descendants of Veblen, Bronislaw Malinowski, Karl Polanyi, and Raymond Firth (See Appendix A) also contributed to the development of the paradigm. There are several schools of thought that are associated with the institutional paradigm and which derive many of their theoretical positions from the aforementioned ontological and epistemological statements. The Marxist, feminist, and substantivist schools of thought are the most closely associated.

First Marx and then Polanyi in their writings formulated the ontological and epistemological foundations of the institutional paradigm. The basic assumption of the institutional paradigm is that “empirical economies do not exist apart from the institutions that organise [sic] them” (Halperin 1988:45). In other words, the economy in all societies is embedded in the society. It consists of a process of material provisioning of livelihood where the economic systems grow out of specific historical and institutional conditions. These conditions, they postulated, can be explained neither by positing universal psychological traits nor by invoking the “universal logic of rational action” (Halperin 1988:40).

Yet there were points on which Polanyi did not follow Marx. For example, Marx expanded on the primary ontological statements by saying that all distribution processes in an economy share common characteristics that are the result of specific historical and institutional conditions (Marx 1973). Polanyi, on the other hand, had more occasions to study ethnographic accounts, so he narrowed his definition of economy to an “instituted

process of interaction serving the distribution of material wants” (Polanyi 1977:31). Marxist, feminist, and substantivist economic anthropology derive their specific approaches from these ideas and expand on them to suit their own purposes. To achieve this result Polanyi advocated a method that combined thought and experience (Polanyi 1977: liv-lv). That is to say, a person must incorporate the policy and ethnography of a study (the experience) with the theory and history (the thought) of it as well. The table below summarizes the main concepts of the institutional paradigm and how it relates to structural Marxism, political economy, dependency theory and world systems theory (as discussed below).

	<b>Institutional</b>	<b>Structural Marxism</b>	<b>Political Economy</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Karl Polanyi, Melville Herskovits, Thornstein Veblen	Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Claude Lévi-Strauss	Eric Wolf
<b>Ontology</b>	The economy in every society is geared towards material provisioning for livelihood. This is an instituted process that serves to satisfy material wants.	The economy is affected by social change.	The economy is at the center of human interaction.

<b>Epistemology</b>	Patterns and trends are discernable from the economy. These can be associated with a particular framework.	Capitalism affects and transforms every aspect of a society, creating a new blended economy.	The economy can be subdivided into historical groups to reveal exploitation, inequality and conflict.
<b>Methodology</b>	Analysis of market on two levels: General and particular	Based on the ideal mode of production. Uses general and particular analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producers</li> <li>• Non-producers</li> <li>• Means of production</li> </ul>	Looked at the economy on a holistic (general) level. Focused on the symbolism of people's actions economically.

**Figure 3 – Summary Table for the institutional paradigm compared to structural Marxism, and political economy.**

### The Marxist School of Thought

The Marxist school of thought in economic anthropology agrees with the ontological and epistemological statements of Marx and Polanyi above, though its focus in the 1970s took a different angle on Marx's original writings. In this sense, the Marxist school of the 1970s can be considered more of a “neo”<sup>xiv</sup> Marxist approach. Within this neo-Marxist approach there are many directions that competed, including “structural Marxism, semiotic Marxism, feminist Marxism, hermeneutical Marxism, phenomenological Marxism and critical Marxism, and so on” (Jacoby 1981:1). Any neo-Marxist approach looks to define a “formal” economy as an “ideal” one<sup>xv</sup>. That is to say that any analysis of the economy would not only study how products were converted into wealth and distributed among society as a means of examining the functions of power. It

would also look at the historical context of the “observed distribution” for patterns of change over time (Plattner 1989:16-17).

*Structural Marxism* and *political economy*, or as Firth called them “cerebral Marxism” and “gut Marxism”(Firth 1972, 1975; compare Roseberry 1973: 161), were the two approaches within the Marxist school of thought that came to the forefront in the mid 1970s. As will be discussed below, the French and British schools of economic anthropology developed and advocated the structural Marxist approach. The American school of anthropology, on the other hand, favored a renewal of Marx’s idea of the political economy.

### Structural Marxism

Writers like Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s contributions to the development of structural Marxism in the 1950s and 1960s revolved around looking at the deeper structures and functions of society to analyze the economic actions of its participants (Hart 1983: 123; Eriksen 2001: 116). Their method of analysis was based on the “ideal mode of production,” which had three elements: “producers, non-producers and means of production—whose variable combination was realized as concrete modes of production” (Balibar 1970 in Hart 1983: 123).

Althusser and Balibar are considered to be the main influences in the French school of structural Marxism. They were influenced by Marx’s early writings on the “mode of production” and wrote as a reaction to humanist Marxism (Althusser 1965: 11). They tended to focus on capitalism, especially in the colonial era. According to Althusser, capitalism would “capture and transform” other economies, subverting them to

their purposes while retaining elements of the original structure (Wilk 2007: 107). The same processes that affected the social structure would affect the economy. Meillassoux, an intellectual descendant of Althusser and Balibar, demonstrated this with the case of West Africa. The economic and social systems did not completely transform under colonial rule. Rather, capitalism adopted the “pre-capitalist” modes of production into its system. The end result was that capitalism is dominant, and the other modes of production were “determined by the way they articulate with capitalism” (Binford and Cook 1991; Wilk 2007: 107).

The British school of structuralism was less influential in structural Marxism than the French school. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the main anthropologist behind structural functionalism, was also the primary influence behind the British school of structural Marxism. His goal was to be able to look at society as a whole through various “units” like kinship and be able to predict the behavior of the group as a whole using common properties (Wilk 2007:105; Leach 1970). Most of his work revolved around kinship systems, particularly in comparison with the studies of Alfred Radcliffe-Browne, the other main proponent of structural functionalism. As a whole, structural functionalism was more concerned with deriving the units in a society and finding the “laws” that connected them than it was with looking at the individual units, like the economy<sup>xvi</sup>.

In the 1970s, the “descendants” of Althusser and Lévi-Strauss, Claude Meillassoux<sup>xvii</sup> and Maurice Godélier, focused more specifically on structures and modes of production within an economy. For Meillassoux, the main task was to “extricate economics from kinship” (Eriksen 2001: 114). His proposed solution was to look at kinship as a mode of production called “the domestic mode of production based on the

family and the household” (Eriksen 2001: 114; see Meillassoux 1975, 1981).

Meillassoux wanted to look at the economy as it was embedded in social relations, but not in a functionalist sense, which would look at it with a “legalistic empiricism” rather than a thorough analysis (Meillassoux 1981: iii). Much of this was based on his study of the cultural groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the Guro (See Meillassoux 1964).

Similarly, Godélier, who studied the Baruya in New Guinea, focused on the relation of kinship systems to the economy. His analysis of how salt functioned within their society (see Godélier 1971) showed that it played not only an economic role, but also religious, political, and symbolic roles in the society, especially in relation to kinship (Plattner 1989:390). Proponents of the notion of the political economy did not take an opposing position to the work of Meillassoux and Godélier; rather, they worked from a different set of assumptions that were sometimes incompatible with the structural Marxist approach.

### Political Economy

Where the structural Marxists tended to focus on pre-industrial societies, the political economy approach was focused more on the impact of “capitalism” (Clammer 1985: 8; Ortner 1984: 141). It was concerned with long-term change and took a more holistic approach to the study of the economy. The divisions of economic systems into historical types allowed a broader cross-cultural comparison than the structural Marxist approach and brought issues of exploitation, inequality, and conflict to the forefront of study (Wilk 2007: 113; Clammer 1985: 8).

Eric Wolf was one of the most influential proponents of political economy. In part, his work was influenced by Marx's notion of political economy and Julian Steward's concept of cultural ecology (which will be discussed later). Yet his work mostly developed from Raymond Firth's examination of the symbolic nature of people's actions in terms of their effects on the economy. Where Firth examines this on the level of individual gestures and wonders if "each gesture" holds some "hidden meaning" (1957: 2 in Berliner 1962: 47), Wolf looks at larger units of analysis. Wolf was more interested in "how the destinies of localities are intertwined with large-scale processes." More often than not, Wolf argued, "the engine of these processes is economic profit, and the result is capital accumulation in the centre and exploitation in the periphery" (Eriksen 2001:119). His book *Peasants* (1964) demonstrates this by examining the role of peasants in Mexico in the overall economy of the country. They are the victims of economic exploitation, and as such the economic and political actions of the larger society determine their behavior (Eriksen 2001: 119; Wolf 1956).

Anthropologists that advocated this approach in the 1970s tended to agree that people in general were social. As such, they identify with a group and are motivated by "the interests of the collectivity" (Wilk 2007: 42). In order to study the behavior of people and its impact on capitalism, one must study "the norms and the solidarity and continuity of the group rather than individual self-interest" (Wilk 2007:43). Often times this tied into the work of development anthropology and its use of dependency and world systems theory.

At this time in history (1970s-80s), the notion of the political economy as described above was considered a "natural part of any Third World-oriented scholar's



field kit, particularly since social scientists had begun to engage in development issues on a far larger scale than ever before” (Eriksen 2001: 119). Both the approach of political economy and that of development anthropology in the institutional paradigm drew on *dependency* and *world systems theory*. Dependency theory is a reaction against the “modernization” theory of the 1950s; it was developed by economists and historians associated with the Economic Commission on Latin America (Wilk 2007: 107). The “modernization miracle” of the 1950s claimed that there was a “single road from primitive to modern, a pathway of economic change that each country had to follow” (Wilk 2007: 107-108). The economists in the post-World War II era thought that, through a process of acculturation, every country could “follow in the footsteps of the United States,” and become an industrial super power (See Myrdal 1957; Rostow 1960).

### Dependency Theory and World Systems Theory

Dependency theorists like Paul Baran and Andre Gunder Frank exposed the significant problems with modernization theory. Baran argued that “modern” countries actually achieved that status by exploiting the raw materials and natural resources in the Third World (Wilk 2007: 108; Baran 1957). Frank applied Baran’s argument to Latin America and expanded it to look at the role of dualism in it. He argued that dualism, or “the gradual evolution of the primitive into the modern” was only an illusion. Those cultures that seemed most “traditional” were the most impoverished and isolated ones,

which were “*made that way* [sic]” by colonialism and capitalism (Wilk 2007: 108; See Frank 1967, 1969).

Very related to dependency theory was Immanuel Wallerstein’s world systems theory. He saw the history of interaction in the world as cycles of expansion and collapse of economic systems. He explained that “all the modern world’s wars, battles, and conquests, as well as the world’s cultures and political systems, were tied together by the logic of trade and production” (Wilk 2007: 109). Thus when one of the more powerful economies collapses, a chain reaction occurs throughout the rest of the system and affects all other economies connected directly or indirectly to it (See Chase-Dun and Hall 1991).

Dependency theorists and world systems theorists had to study the histories of the people and their economic institutions. In this way they were as much concerned with the long-term as political economy theorists. Yet this created a problem in the type of methodology used. If a thorough study of the development of an economy is necessary, then one person doing fieldwork for one year will not be able to see any long-term changes. This led to a more collaborative approach to fieldwork among economic anthropologists as well as an increase in the use of formal methods (Dalton 1971: 279).

Critics of this method argue that there are fundamental problems within development anthropology as a whole that make much of the work problematic. Some take issue with the assumption that the definition of “development” requires a change in the structure of a society (See Schneider 1975: 273). Others look at the division of the world into “core” and “periphery” as only a “partial deconstruction” of dualist anthropology, which are permutations of the “traditional” versus “modern” and “self” versus “ethnographic other” (Cohen 2002: 189; Kearney 1996: 81). Still others look to

the assumption that people in underdeveloped areas are essentially “rational peasants” (otherwise known as the “economic man”) or “non-materialistic and otherworldly” (Blair 1971: 353). The development approach to economics looks at both the historical and institutional aspects of economic systems and tries to analyze them using formal methods. It is an approach that, like many, fits both into the institutional paradigm and the formal paradigm, the latter of which will be discussed below. See table below for how dependency theory correlates to both paradigms.

	<b>Institutional</b>	<b>Dependency Theory</b>	<b>World Systems Theory</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Karl Polanyi, Melville Herskovits, Thornstein Veblen	Paul Baran and Andre Gunder Frank	Immanuel Wallerstein
<b>Ontology</b>	The economy in every society is geared towards material provisioning for livelihood. This is an instituted process that serves to satisfy material wants.	The economy of a country is a central component of its world status.	The history of the world is a continuous cycle of expanding and collapsing economies.

<b>Epistemology</b>	Patterns and trends are discernable from the economy. These can be associated with a particular framework.	Modern countries exploited third world country economies to boost their own and elevate their statuses.	All wars and battles fought through history are connected through trade and production.
<b>Methodology</b>	Analysis of market on two levels: General and particular	Analyze the market on the world (general) level, and on the individual level through ethnography.	Analysis of the world economies on a large historical scale. Only use general analysis.

**Figure 4 – Summary table of dependency theory compared to the institutional and formal paradigms.**

### **Formalist Paradigm**

At its core the *formalist*<sup>xviii</sup> *paradigm* in economic anthropology is a methodological one. It combines elements from the work of Adam Smith, Max Weber, and Karl Polanyi to create a framework for a method of “analysing [sic] data that may emphasize institution or ecological factors of economic organization, or both” (Halperin 1988: 61). From Smith, it takes the concept “that a market system would be created automatically by self-interested actors pursuing their aims” (Halperin 1988: 39). From Weber, it draws on the concept of formal economic rationality, which is a culture’s ability to calculate or account for its economic activities quantitatively (Weber 1947: 184-5). This does not occur universally, but rather in specific contexts. Weber argued for it primarily in state level societies with market economies based in capitalism. Finally, it incorporated Polanyi’s definition of economics as the “logic of rational choice-making behavior” (Halperin 1988:65).

Proponents of the paradigm range from Marxist anthropologists to ecological anthropologists. The rational choice theory used by recent economic anthropologists had its start in the formal paradigm, as will be discussed later. Some, like Raymond Firth and Melville Herskovits, took the basic aim of the paradigm and tried to incorporate conventional economics into it. For example, in Themes in Economic Anthropology, editor Raymond Firth claims that “primitive” economics requires an “analysis of material from uncivilized communities” so that said material can be “directly comparable with the material of modern economics.” This will allow “generalizations to be ultimately framed which will subsume the phenomena of both civilized and uncivilized...communities into a body of principles about human behavior which will be truly universal” (Firth 1939:29 cited in LeClair 1962:1187). Similarly, Herskovits’ concept of “rational and economizing behavior” in his book Economic Anthropology (1952) incorporates neo-classical economic theory.

Formal economic anthropologists focused on the process of building a model rather than focusing on creating universals as many other paradigms did. They assumed that people’s economic actions become a universal activity (Halperin 1988:66-70), and so those actions will tend to maximize their satisfaction (Herskovits<sup>xix</sup> 1952:18). As a result, the decision-making found on the individual level can explain the operating system as a whole (Salisbury 1973: 91). The methodology they proposed allowed them to study the process of model building and was adopted by many other approaches (like development and ecological anthropology). It involved “establishing a series of expectations postulated under known or assumed conditions and then comparing these expectations with empirical data” (Halperin 1988:71; Dalton 1969: 65). Two of the

models used by formal economic anthropologists are atomistic and processual models (See Halperin 1988: 78-79)

Polanyi's "formal<sup>xx</sup>" approach (as contrasted to his substantivist approach) is an example of an approach that utilizes the formal paradigm almost in its entirety. The formal approach assumes that all decisions are aimed at maximizing production (Salisbury 1973: 85). That is to say that the choices people make are rational or economic. It also tries to incorporate conventional economic models in its methodology (Wilk 2007: 8-16). The unit of analysis in formal approach was a small community whose economic rationale could then be applied cross-culturally to others. For example, David Martin Goodfellow applies the formalist economic theory to Bantu societies. He suggests that the principles of economic theory regarding material production and consumption can be applied outside Western life by "fitting them to different forms" (Schneider 1974:15). He illustrates this with a suggestion that the "value of brides fluctuates with the supply of grain; i.e., women constitute in Bantu society a labor market" (Goodfellow 1939:9 *in* Schneider 1974:15). This type of economic activity could be studied cross-culturally according to Goodfellow. The ecological paradigm, which also tends to also emphasize "quantitative techniques" (Dalton 1969: 65), uses a different unit of analysis. The table below summarizes the major concepts of the formal paradigm.

	<b>Formal</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Marvin Harris, Raymond Firth, David Martin Goodfellow

<b>Ontology</b>	Scarcity is assumed to be a fact of all social life. Individuals act economically by making choices about how to use their scarce resources to the best advantage. The rational calculation of scarce means toward alternate uses became a universal activity, something that derived from the very nature of being human.
<b>Epistemology</b>	On the whole, the individual tends to maximize his satisfactions in terms of the choices he makes.
<b>Methodology</b>	The process involves establishing a series of expectations postulated under known or assumed conditions and then comparing these expectations with empirical data.

**Figure 5 – Summary Table of Formalist Paradigm**

### **Ecological Paradigm**

The *ecological paradigm* in economic anthropology, like the institutional and formal paradigms, does not ignore the benefits of the others. Similar to the institutional paradigm, the ecological paradigm in recent years has examined specific “micro-processes” in a given society and analyzed their impacts. Yet they do so with methods that are empirical and quantitatively based. The paradigm grew out of the tradition of Franz Boas and the work of Julian Steward and Leslie White. Both Steward and White followed Boas’ tradition of taking the “variation in social organization among different cultural groups” as their central issue and seeking the order and reason that would explain the variety found in “systems of kinship, leadership, and settlement among the world’s peoples”. To both, “the key was to be found in the ways that people made a living, in their *subsistence system* [sic]” (Wilk 2007: 20). This led to ecological models based upon “physical and biological variables set often in an evolutionary framework” (Dalton

1969: 65). As such, it tended to consider economics in the “substantive” sense of “economic activities” (Wilk 2007: 21).

More recently it has had an “affinity with the definition of the economic as an embedded process in society concerned mainly with provisioning (production and exchange)” (Gross 1983: 155). It is interested in the “rationality of the system” or the “ecosystem” rather than the individuals (Wilk 2007: 21; Halperin 1988: 17). Here the ecosystem is defined as “consisting of a set of interacting species of organisms and their physical environment” (Halperin 1988:17). It is this ecosystem, which is often analyzed within an evolutionary framework, that is the unit of analysis within the paradigm (Dalton 1969: 65).

The theory of the ecological paradigm is nomothetic and cross-cultural (though critics of the paradigm contest the cross-cultural ability of it. See Halperin 1988:17-18). Proponents of the paradigm say that nature has an economy that is observable in the cultural arrangements to obtain dietary protein (Gross 1975 *in* Gross 1983: 160). One explanation for this, according to ecologists, is that they maximize their “fitness,” meaning their “chances of making a genetic contribution to the next generation” (Wilk 2007: 21-22). Another is that ecologists look to divide the ecosystem into a core and periphery. The core consists of “items which can be identified in any society” like “the physical and biotic environment, the tools and techniques available for using that environment, and the material transactions between the human population and the environment and among people themselves” (Gross 1983: 161). Such cultural items as kinship and religion are relegated to epiphenomena (Godélier 1977; Friedman 1974 *in* Gross 1983: 161). Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer* (1944) is a good example of the



ecological paradigm with its focus on shifting settlement patterns. The table below summarizes the major concepts of the ecological paradigm.

	<b>Ecological</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Julian Steward and Leslie White
<b>Ontology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society is a dynamic system of cultural change that are affected by the outside world.</li> <li>• Theory is nomothetic and cross-cultural.</li> <li>• Nature has an economy.</li> </ul>
<b>Epistemology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People “maximize” their fitness by selecting carefully to make their genetic contribution to the next generation.</li> <li>• Religion and kinship are epiphenomenal.</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses quantitative techniques</li> </ul>

**Figure 6 – Summary table for the ecological paradigm.**

As can be seen, the three overall paradigms of economic anthropology do not exist independently from each other. Rather, an anthropologist who works in one paradigm may pull from another when it best suits his interests. The most multifaceted and cross-cultural approaches to develop recently in economic anthropology are the *feminist* school of thought and *practice theory*.

### Feminist School

The feminist school of thought is most closely associated with the institutional paradigm, though it is more generally a subtype of gender studies and can be applied to almost any branch of anthropology. Feminists argue that “economics is a powerful part

of a modern patriarchy that tends to define women out of positions of power and control” (Wilk 2007: 17). The roots of this philosophy lie in the Greek word “oikos” meaning “house,” from which the word “economy” is derived (17). The management of the household was considered economics, which was controlled by the male head of the house. As was discussed at the beginning of this paper, it was not until the seventeenth century that the separation of “public” from “private” separated the notion of the economy from the household. At this point, the domestic or private sphere was relegated to the women, while the economic or public sphere remained in the hands of the men.

The feminist paradigm is also related to the idea of a dualist economy, where actions that are considered economic fall on the male side, and non-economic actions fall on the women’s side (Wilk 2007: 17). As this dualism affects all societies, including the Western society, feminists conclude that the Western economy is just as “deeply embedded in social (gendered) relations as the Trobriand and Tlingit economies are” (Wilk 1007: 19). Their work focuses on dismantling these dualisms and re-evaluating many of the earlier ethnographic studies in economic anthropology and showing the “economic woman” in them. The book Woman, Culture and Society (1974), edited by Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, has been crucial to the development of feminist anthropology. In a compilation of essays, it asks how male domination came to occur in many societies and how that has affected scholarship, especially in anthropology. It advocates for the need to change the perception that women have always been the weaker sex and questions many of the presumptions about how societies are structured. For example, it looks at not the nature of whether humans are naturally good or evil but whether women are naturally inferior to men.

## Practice Theory

The other major recent development in the field of economic anthropology has been in the area of practice theory. Practice theory is not a cohesive theory like the previous theories looked at in this paper. Instead it is a “loosely defined set of approaches to social theory that takes the human body to be the nexus of arrays and activities” (Postill 2009) that began in the late 1970s and continues through the present.

The first generation of practice theorists sought the middle ground between methodological individualism, “the idea that we can explain social phenomena on the basis of individual actions,” and methodological holism, “the explanation of phenomena by means of structures or social wholes” (Postill 2009; Ryan 1970). Pierre Bourdieu was the most influential of the first generation practice theorists. His later work in particular introduced the notion of the “field” into the vocabulary. Fields are defined as “specialist domains of practice (e.g. art, photography, sociology) with their own ‘logic’ that are constituted by a unique combination of species of capital, e.g. financial capital, symbolic capital (prestige, renown) or social capital (‘connections’)” (Postill 2009).

The second generation of practice theorists included figures like Sherry Ortner (1984), Andreas Reckwitz (2002), and Theodore Schatzki (2001). Ortner defines practice theory as an “outgrowth of several dominant tendencies in the discipline, most prominently the old controversy between actor-oriented and structure-oriented approaches during the 1950s, and the Marxist and feminist work of the 1970s” (Eriksen 2002: 128). Practice theory therefore has the potential to incorporate the institutional, formal, and ecological paradigms as it develops and further refines itself. It combines the

Marxist approaches of the institutional paradigm with some of the formal model building characteristics. At the same time it looks at the controversies between old and new, like the definitions of the “economic man” discussed later. The table below summarizes these two theories. The nexus of old and new provides a variety of new topics to study, which can only be pursued using the multifaceted approaches discussed above.

	<b>Feminist School</b>	<b>Practice Theory</b>
<b>Major Players</b>	Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere	Pierre Bourdieu, Sherry Ortner, Andreas Reckwitz, Theodore Schatzki
<b>Ontology</b>	The economy is rooted in a historically male dominated society. The economy operates at the institutional level. Society as a whole is patriarchal.	The human body is the nexus of all activity and actions. It is influenced by social, political and environmental factors.
<b>Epistemology</b>	Women have been placed on the periphery of the economy due to arbitrary association of the spheres of influence.	Social phenomena can be explained by human actions and behavior. This is reminiscent of the Marxist school of thought.
<b>Methodology</b>	Uses ethnography and archaeology to re-examine traditional assumptions of gender relations, especially in economic activity.	Utilizes formal model building of the formalist paradigm.

**Figure 7 – Summary table for the feminist school of thought and practice theory.**

Both the feminist school of thought and practice theory combined some epistemological, ontological, and methodological elements of earlier paradigms. In doing so, they created new levels of understanding of those paradigms and the issues at hand (see table above). Many of the topics studied by economic anthropologists today use this same multifaceted approach to study new topics. The rest of this paper will look at how

this multifaceted approach has enabled such figures as Scot Cook, David Kaplan, and Harold Schneider to examine the definition of the economic man in new light.

### **The “Economic Man”**

The term “economic man” has been so thoroughly absorbed into the vocabulary of economic anthropology that there are few references to where it originally appeared. Some claim that it originated in Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations (1776) (Rutherford 2007: 106). Others claim that it was in fact Stuart Mill that first came up with the idea of the economic man in his 1836 paper “On the Definition of Political Economy, and on the Method of Investigation Proper to It” (though he did not use the term in it) (Mill 1836; Persky 1995). Regardless of where the term originated, its definition has gone through several permutations over time.

The elements of the economic man described by Smith in The Wealth of Nations that were later echoed by Mill in his essay were:

- Man desires to possess more than the necessities.
- Man desires wealth, conveniences and luxuries.
- Man is capable and willing to do whatever is necessary to obtain his desires with the least amount of work possible.
- Man will act rationally in his own self-interest.

For both Smith and Mill, these qualifications applied to institutional economies (Persky: 224). They both relied on the presence of a market economy with a market exchange mechanism. It was not until the twentieth century that economists attempted to apply this notion to “pre-industrial” societies.

This can be seen in Albert Ernest Jenks' paper "Economic Man – A Definition" from 1902. His definition for the economic man as "one who, for future gain, produces or traffics in consumable goods" (202) contrasted to the idea of a "natural man." Jenk's economic man, therefore has three central components:

- He must produce consumable goods.
- He must traffic consumable goods.
- The production and traffic must be for future gain.

Future gain, as defined by Jenks, means "a gain of more than is necessary to continue life at the same level (Jenks 1902: 202). On the level of a "primitive" society (such as the one Jenks was looking at), production would have been agriculture or zoöculture.

Traffic, similarly, would have been the precursor to commerce. Despite Jenks' application of the term to "primitive" societies, his definition retained some key elements from Smith and Mill. In particular, his definition of future gain aligns with Mill's notion that man wants more than the basic necessities, including commodities and luxuries.

Jenks ignores the philosophy behind the wants and desires of the economic man, however, and focuses instead on the practical requirements of one. In this way, he is able to avoid the market exchange mechanism upon which Mill and Smith rely.

Both of these definitions of the economic man are grounded in classical economic theory. They also utilize the same epistemologies as the institutional paradigm and the political economy school of thought (see Figure 3). These definitions rely on the assumptions that there are patterns and trends in society and that those patterns can be discovered. At the same time, these definitions acknowledge the variety of economies that exist, including what Polanyi termed reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange.

Depending on which form existed in a given society, the economy would be more or less embedded. As such, the application of the economic man to a given society depended on which form of economy the definition included.

Beginning in the 1920s and continuing through the 1960s, the “economic man” took on the vocabulary of “maximizing his gains” (Cohen 1967: 92) or “maximizing his satisfaction” (Firth). These draw upon the theme of scarcity and allocation of resources as utilized by economic anthropologists. The focus shifted away from requiring the market mechanism of Mill and Smith. Yet it also rejected Jenks’, and to some degree Malinowski’s (See Cohen 1967), notion that men in “primitive” societies were driven by social structures and environmental constraints. Raymond Firth was one of the leading scholars in this shift. His basic assumptions for the economic man were (Cohen 1967: 93; Firth 1939: 1-31, 352-365):

- All men in all societies are faced with the same economic problem: how to allocate resources between alternate uses
- Some uses are valued more highly than others

Such assumptions opened non-industrial societies to the same analysis of economic patterns as industrial societies. Proponents of this definition of the economic man generally sided with the formal paradigm and school of thought in economics. They tested the assumptions of Firth and other anthropologists like him against the empirical data they collected from fieldwork. More often than not this was in non-industrial societies. In the 1960s and 70s, the results of such comparisons led to a debate about whether or not people in non-industrial societies could behave economically.

This debate mirrored the formalist-substantivist debate that occurred in the rest of anthropology. At the same time, it arose in part out of critiques of the *neoclassical* paradigm by proponents of the *new institutional* paradigm. David Kaplan<sup>xxi</sup>, in an exchange with Scott Cook<sup>xxii</sup>, critiqued the ability of economic theory, particularly microeconomic theory (from which the “economic man” is derived), to be applied cross-culturally. According to Kaplan, microeconomic theory is so idealized that it has difficulty deciding which reality it should apply to. In other words, it relies so heavily on assumptions like  $2 + 2 = 4$  that it is no longer grounded in solving practical economic problems (Schneider 1974: 180). He argues that theories based off of assumptions, when given empirical content with which to test, have “proved to be limited to market-organized societies” (Schneider 1974: 180; Kaplan 1968).

This applies to the assumptions of the economic man as well. In order to be termed an economic man, the subject must be proved empirically to have shown desire to maximize utility. They cannot be assumed to desire to maximize utility (i.e. be rational). In order to do so, identification of key components that show the maximization must be bounded by rules (Schneider 1974:180; Kaplan 1968). These rules will not be the same for an industrial and non-industrial society. Thus, economic theory that applies to an industrial society cannot apply to a non-industrial society.

Cook retorted “there are no rules for the application of theory to the real world” (Schneider 1974: 180). The researcher, who as a human being makes assumptions, must decide the application of rules to reality. Thus, the validity of the methods of testing the rules and assumptions of the economic man are determined by trying them. At the heart of this debate was the difference in how cultures define economic behavior. How an



institutional, industrial society defines maximization of utility is not necessarily the same as how a non-industrial society does.

Schneider gives a good example of such differences in his book Economic Man (1974). In the 1950s the British colonial government in Tanganyika had to deal with the problem of soil erosion on most of the better farming lands in the area. This was ascribed, according to Schneider, to “overgrazing by African livestock raisers” (214). Their solution was to require each homestead to reduce the number of livestock it owned by 10%. It was thought that the farmers, the Turu, were not economic men because their economy did not function within the same constructs as a European economy. The initial plan did not work because most households had fewer than ten “bovine units,” and were thus exempt from the new rule. As a result, the British government decided to increase the destocking rate to 15% (in 1956), which only increased the gap between the rich and the poor.

The British government tried to impose an economical solution designed to deal with a “non-economical” aspect of the Turu society. Since the Turu did not consider and treat cattle according to the same economic principles that the British were familiar with, they were not economical. To the British, it appeared “the Turu kept livestock, and particularly cattle, more as pets than as economic assets” (215). The cattle were not milked or eaten regularly nor were they well fed. Instead they were employed in ancestral sacrifices (215). In fact, livestock in Turu society, as Schneider points out, are a form of commodity that acts as a type of currency. The farmer that raises grain does so to exchange it for cattle (216), which he will then trade for something else. The 15% decrease changed the supply and demand of the situation and thus affected the “value” of

both the cattle and the grain. By lowering the supply of cattle by 15%, the British government also lowered the value of the grain, which decreased the number and frequency of such exchanges.

Such differences in the understanding of indigenous versus western economies led to numerous cases of failed economies in developing countries during colonialism. There was little room in economic anthropology for the application of the economic man at this time to indigenous cultures. In particular, the definition of the economic man did not allow room for a cross-cultural application. It was not until after the Cook-Kaplan debate that the economic man came to be defined more cross-culturally. Part of this was due to research by anthropologists like Harold Schneider who, in their ethnographic research, looked specifically at the different types of economies that existed under colonial rule.

In addition to such ethnographic work, the broadening of the definition of the economic man has been helped by the numerous reexaminations of the term, especially in the last thirty years. Scholars like Harvey Leibenstein (1976), David Marsden (1986), Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson (1993), Joseph Persky (1995), Harry Blair (1971), and Raphael Sassower (2010), among others, have sought to reexamine how *homo economicus* is defined and what characterizes him, including how gender is assigned (see Ferber and Nelson 1993). More recent examinations (see Sassower 2010; Landa and Wang 2001) have looked particularly at how the rationality of the economic man is more of a “bounded rationality” and how it is connected to behavioral and social factors of the economy. In other words, these examinations are embedding the economic man’s actions in the economy, which could not and would not have been done in the past.

This embedding of the economic man makes him more directly applicable, not only to non-western societies, but also to lower classes in societies that do not necessarily operate within the institutional economy. Some of these people may operate within an informal economy or gray market, like hawala, yet still behave in an economic manner. Such an application of the economic man utilizes the proletariat focus of much of the Marxist school of thought. Yet by stating that the environment influences the decisions of the economic man, scholars like Landa and Wang are also drawing upon the epistemology of the ecological paradigm. Finally, by examining the gender history of the term, Ferber and Nelson are able to apply the feminist school of thought's epistemology to the concept.

As can be seen, the definition and concept of the economic man has become increasingly cross-cultural and multi-faceted in its definition and application since its origins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It started out as a male figure that acts in self-interest, driven to accumulate wealth, luxuries, and commodities according to western standards. Since then it has developed into any person that acts according to what will help them "maximize their satisfaction" or "utility." This means that their actions could be determined not only by what will bring them profit, but also by what the environmental, social, and ecological constraints are on them. Additionally, this definition can be applied to any type of society and any class within it.

### **Conclusion**

Economic Anthropology started out as a tied to the classic economic theory of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It looked at the fundamental

questions of human nature and how that applied to human behavior. Are humans inherently good or evil? Are they naturally selfish or selfless? Does their behavior reflect this? These philosophical questions guided the first generations of economists like Adam Smith and Stuart Mills, from whose work the founding figures of economic anthropology would take the ideas of the “economic man” and the embedded economy. Bronislaw Malinowski, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx laid the foundations for economic anthropology in their fieldwork and theoretical contributions to what the field should believe.

This paper looked at the contributions of these and other scholars to the field of economic anthropology in terms of both the history of ideas and the philosophy of science. It looked at the three major paradigms institutional, formal, and ecological that have guided the field to be more cross-cultural in its scholarship. It also looked at the various schools of thought and theories that influenced this transition. These included the Marxist and feminist schools of thought and the dependency, world systems, and practice theories. The paradigms, schools of thought, and theories all influenced each other and drew upon ideas and concepts of the others, particularly in more recent years. It is this sharing of ideas that has led to the cross-cultural, multi-faceted approach that is found today in economic anthropology. There is no one universal paradigm that dominates the field. Rather, each scholar picks and chooses elements of all the paradigms and theories according to what they believe. Sometimes this places them solidly in one school or paradigm, other times it does not.

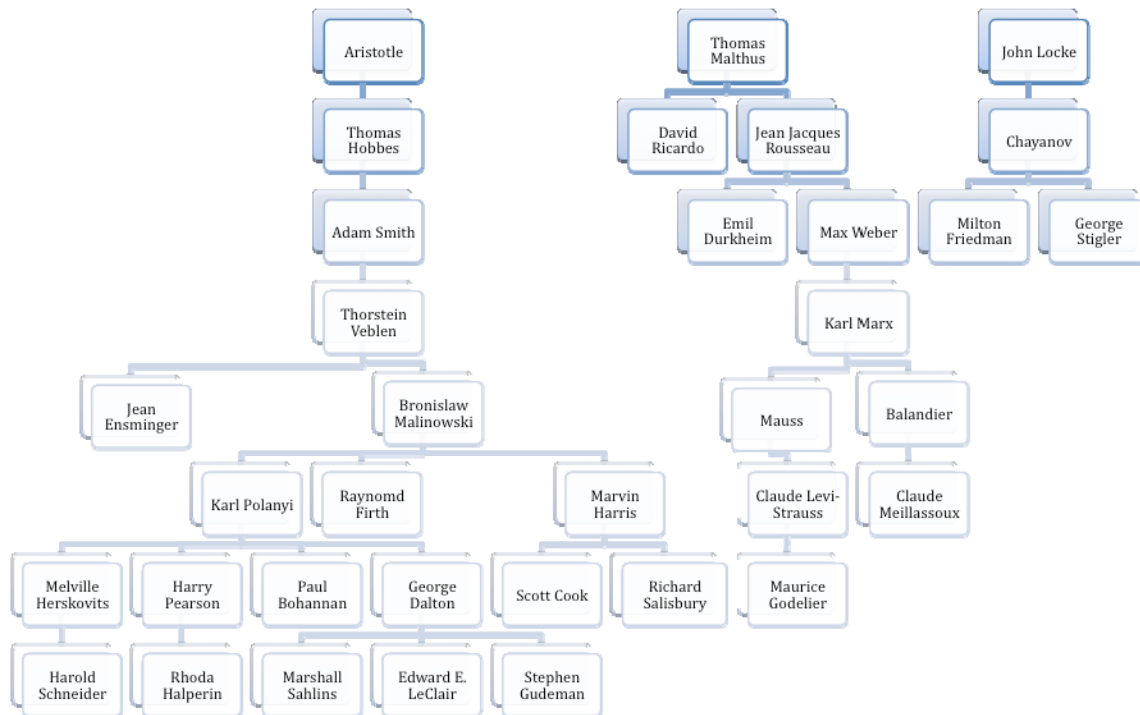
The same is true for the idea of the “economic man.” When it first originated, its definition was narrow and limited only to western, industrial societies. Changes in the

field of economic anthropology have been reflected in the changing definitions of the term. This change is most apparent in the definition that is used now, which can be applied to any economy and class of society. It is not gender-dominated (as much) and it allows for the influence of the environment, social and political aspects of a given culture on the economy and thus on the individual.

Given this cross-cultural trend in the field, I would expect economic anthropology to continue to develop and expand into new avenues incorporating elements of other disciplines like psychology into its theories. Through this process of increasingly encompassing more of the elements of a culture, economic anthropology is moving more away from economics and more towards the general study of the culture. While this opens up some new avenues of study, like the application of the economic man to the informal economy, it also takes the focus off of the monetary aspects of the discipline. It will be interesting to see how economic theory will continue to be applied in this context and whether or not it will also undergo more change to better fit the new cross-cultural discipline of economic anthropology.

***I pledge on my honor that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.***

**Appendix 1: Tree of Intellectual Thought Organized by Date**



**Figure 8 – Some of the influential figures in the history of economic anthropology arranged according to intellectual influence. This is not an encompassing tree as not every scholar has a direct intellectual influence. Rather than have a muddled, convoluted tree, this tree depicts those who have a clear intellectual influence on others in the discipline. Scholars not listed on this tree have also made a significant contribution to the field, however they may not have subscribed to a particular train of thought.**

## Appendix 2: Book Reviews

### Economies and Cultures Book Review

#### Introduction and Synopsis

Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett's Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology (2007) is a textbook for economic anthropology that is meant for upper level undergraduate students and beginning graduate students. Wilk and Cliggett (W & C) present an ample appendix of additional sources and supplements that would be used by the professor of economics anthropology. It aims to give a broad overview of the issues in the field of economic anthropology by looking at three models of human nature that dictate three "fundamental approaches to human behavior" (Wilk 2007: 140). They argue that in regard to human behavior and motivation, most approaches only look at one of the three above while ignoring the common elements between them. They conclude by suggesting that it is possible to create a school of thought that deals with all three, in a hybrid form, in order to examine human behavior in relation to the economies.

#### Analysis

Introducing the entirety of a field in a book that is less than three hundred pages is an ambitious goal. W & C have done a good job in creating a textbook is a useful introductory look at the theories and issues of economic anthropology. It uses a simplistic and easy to relate to style of writing and gives a fairly comprehensive overview of the major issues and paradigms in the discipline. Unfortunately, the organization can

be difficult to follow for someone not familiar with the field and without turning to additional sources.

Many textbooks aim to state the issues as eloquently as possible, often at the cost of the student's ability to understand the underlying concepts. W & C make a conscious attempt to simplify the language of this book to make it easier to get at the major concepts in the field. This makes the book a good resource for students who are just beginning to look into the field of economic anthropology, and at the same time includes the most important terms that people are likely to come across.

As an introduction to the field of economic anthropology, W & C try to simplify the paradigms and present things as clear-cut as possible. They chose to do so by looking at the field through the lens of three different models of human nature: moral, selfish, and self-interested. They situate the major paradigms and players within one or more of these lens beginning with the formalist-substantivist debate in field. As a result, they present a snapshot of each paradigm and its major players, presenting both some benefits and critics of each one. These snapshots are very useful, although in some cases they do not provide sufficient information.

For example, when W & C look at the origins of economic anthropology, they focus on the contributions of Adam Smith and David Ricardo whom they term the founders of economics (pp. 51-57). Yet they gloss over some of the major contributions of the next generation of Thornstein Veblen and Richard Thurnwald in the development of economic anthropology. Similarly, their presentation of Marxist economic anthropology is more critical and short than it could be, and their discussion of the work of Alexander Chayanov and how it relates to the work of Karl Marx is not very in depth



(Pg. 24). In some ways, W & C compensates for these deficiencies by stating in his introduction that this book is meant to be supplemented by additional readings and discussions by the professor (Pp. 199-207). Unfortunately, for the student that decides to read this outside the realm of a structured class, this makes the book both too superficial in some areas and difficult to navigate as a whole.

Textbooks are often structured by overarching themes, however, such a structure only works when the reader is sufficiently familiar with the themes presented and the subjects fit distinctly within the themes. Rather than spend a chapter on each paradigm and issue in economic anthropology, W & C decided to look at them within the structure of the three approaches to human nature described above. As a student reading this text outside of the atmosphere of a structured class, such an organization is more difficult to navigate and in some cases more confusing than a more straightforward one would be. The book lends itself to being read in pieces not necessarily in the order in which they were placed and at times seems to be making several different arguments. Within each section W & C first try to describe the major points of the paradigm or issue and second to orient it within one of the three approaches to human behavior. Lastly, they try to present some critics of the paradigm and argue for a more cross-cultural approach to the discipline. These three arguments at sometimes serve cross-purposes and can confuse the reader as to what the intention is.

### Conclusion

As a textbook for upper level undergraduate or new graduate students, this could provide a useful tool. The models for human behavior that they use to frame the

discipline have a broader application to the field of anthropology, which can be most clearly understood in his last few chapters. It would have been helpful, in my opinion, to more clearly discuss the role of the human behavior models in each paradigm. Another option would have been to relegate a discussion of them to a single chapter. In either case, the book would be simpler to navigate and understand the concepts. Despite the difficulty in navigation this book, Wilk and Cliggett do a good job of providing the reader with a good foundation in the field of economic anthropology. I found this to be a worthwhile read, especially in the context of a research project that would give me access to the sources referenced in the appendices.

## A History of Anthropology Book Review

Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen's A History of Anthropology (2001) is an attempt to present a "sober and balanced account" (vii) of the history of anthropology. It is organized chronologically beginning with the Greeks and ending with the 1990s. Overall, it is a very good overview of the history of anthropology and does a good job of presenting the major theories and debates in the field in a "balanced" and "sober" way. Yet it does not adequately address the institutional developments in the field, nor are all of the intellectual genealogies always correct. Additionally, despite the fact that the authors are Swedish, they present only the limited discussion of the history of French, British and American anthropology.

### Synopsis

The chronology of the book starts in Chapter 1 with how the ancient Greeks understood the "other" and how that developed into universalism and relativism. Universalism looks for the "commonalities and similarities between different societies" (2), whereas relativism looks at each society as being unique and incomparable. E & N connect the universalist vs. relativist debate with the empiricist vs. rationalist and methodological individualism vs. collectivism debates discussed later in the chapter. To do so, they look at the impacts of European conquests, colonialism, the Enlightenment and the Voltaire-Herder debate.

Chapter 2 focuses on social evolutionism, diffusionism and the development of continental sociology. They especially look at the theoretical contributions of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber to anthropology. From there E & N move in Chapter 3 to what they termed the four founding father's of anthropology. They look at the work of

Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, and Marcel Mauss. They pay particular attention to the similarities and differences in the French, American and British schools of thought.

Chapter 4 looks at the formation of the first university departments at Oxford, the London School of Economics, Columbia and Chicago. They focus on the trends developed by the students of each figure. These include the “culture and personality” theory, the Chicago school, and the influence of kinship studies (like that of Evans-Pritchard) on ethnographic research. In addition, they briefly discuss the work of the British “outsiders” A.M. Hocart, S. Nadel, and G Bateson.

The next five chapters clearly and concisely set out the development of anthropology, particularly focusing on the major theoretical debates. They argue that it is these debates intertwined anthropology with other disciplines like sociology. They also claim that each debate added to the theoretical depth of the field. Chapters 5 and 6 outline the debates and the theoretical positions taken. Among those discussed are the formalist-substantivist debate, methodological individualism and systems theory. Though time is also spent looking at the parallels between the work of the Manchester school and that of Chicago.

The last three chapters (7, 8 and 9) look at the more recent developments in the field of anthropology beginning in the 1970s and ending in the 1990s. They concentrate on the Marxist, feminist, and postmodernist critics of the discipline in Chapters 7 and 8, and look at the responses and changes in the field as a result in Chapter 9. Marxist and postmodernist critics dealt primarily with the notion of “us” versus “them.” They were particularly interested in how to address these issues in a post-colonial world. Their

critiques were echoed by the feminists and tied in with the dichotomy between what is modern and what is traditional in society.

The major change discussed in Chapter 9 is the lack of an “us” versus “them” debate currently in the field. Instead, there is a growing debate between “biology” versus “culture.” Such a debate requires a careful examination of cognitive anthropology, Darwinist social theory and evolutionary psychology. The last part of the chapter looks at the nexus of globalization and the production of locality.

### Analysis

E & N do a good job of presenting the material in a balanced and sober way, without bringing in their biases anywhere. Where the book is lacking is in its treatment of the recent institutional developments in the field, its occasional inaccuracies, and the limited scope of the history of anthropology it deals with.

With the plethora of recent graduates in the field of anthropology every year it would be a formidable task to summarize all of their work in the context of this book. Yet E & N almost entirely ignore the most recent institutional developments in the field. That is to say that they ignore the changes in how the discipline is constructed and the types of jobs being pursued. Many graduates today do not go into ethnography; instead they go into applied anthropology or academia.

It would have been very interesting to have a brief discussion of the shift in the context from which the new theoretical debates are arising. The debates discussed in this book arose from the interactions and context in which those scholars were working. It would be very helpful and useful to have an examination of what has changed and why, since it is influencing the type of theories being put forward.

Although most of the information is presented in a very clear and helpful way, there are some inaccuracies that undermine the rest of the book. For example, James George Frazer (1854-1941) may have been in the same intellectual vein as Tylor, but he was not a 'student' of his (25). Little details such as this can be confusing and misleading. It is not incorrect to say that Frazer was influenced by Tylor's work. Nor is it incorrect to say that he is an intellectual descendant of Tylor. Such inaccuracies diminish the reliability of the book as a whole. Any information gotten from it must be checked using other sources.

As Swedish anthropologists, E & N have access to a side of the history of anthropology that is not typically studied. Yet they decided to focus on the three primary branches of anthropology: the French, British, and American. It would have been very interesting to see how these three influenced the development of anthropology in place like Sweden.

### Conclusion

Despite the critiques discussed above, A History of Anthropology (2001) by Eriksen and Nielsen is a useful resource for anyone looking for a concise and unbiased history of the field. In this context, the limited scope of the book and inaccuracies do not undermine the usefulness of the information being presented. It is well worth a read, especially as an introduction to the broad scope of theoretical debates that have arisen in the history of anthropology.

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<sup>i</sup> The idea of “maximization” in part comes from Marvin Harris. Maximization applies mostly to the concept of the economic man, who is said to “maximize” his satisfaction by attaining material goods or profit. Particularly his work on the meaning of India’s sacred cow demonstrates how in an economy outside the west, maximization of utility or satisfaction can take on new meaning. In some respects, it is similar to the work of Harold Schneider on the Turu in Tanzania (see Schneider 1974).

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Wilk is a professor of Anthropology at the University of Indiana who has worked mostly in Belize. “His initial research on the cultural ecology of farming and family organization was followed by work on consumer culture and sustainable consumption, energy consumption, globalization, television, beauty pageants and food. Much of his recent work has turned towards the history of food, the linkages between tourism and sustainable development, and the origin of modern masculinity.” (<http://indiana.academia.edu/RichardWilk>)

<sup>iii</sup> Locke and Rousseau were not self defined “economists.” Locke’s influence lies in his theory of Supply and Demand, which would be picked up by Karl Polanyi and the difference between institutional versus tribal economies. Rousseau’s influence is in his theories on the natural state of man influenced the work of Adam Smith and much later, Karl Polanyi.

<sup>iv</sup> Here I am using “primitive” to illustrate how indigenous and third world populations were characterized through colonialism. I am not using it to describe these cultures as less advanced or less human. Accordingly, whenever the word is used, I will indicate this distinction by using quotation marks.

<sup>v</sup> This type of classification of human behavior is generally associated with the “self-interested” model of behavior. The individual is interested in maximizing their material gains. Thus while their behavior may seem unselfish, there is usually an ulterior motive behind it that benefits them.

<sup>vi</sup> The idea of “moral imagination” is often used in the “moral” model of behavior, although Weber himself tried to combine it with several of the models above. The moral model is based on the idea that each culture has a cosmology, which guides the behavior of the individuals. The way that moral values flow from one generation to the next forms a type of cultural economy that can then be studied.

<sup>vii</sup> Unlike the “self-interested” model, this approach is more associated with the “social” model. According to this model, people identify with a group and the interests of that group will motivate their actions. This is the basis of the approach of political economy, which will be discussed later in the paper.

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<sup>viii</sup> The “economy” at this time was defined entirely in terms of technology. For example, the *kula* exchange between the Trobriand Islanders studied by Malinowski was not considered an economic exchange. It was not based in the system of value determined by money and other technologies.

<sup>ix</sup> General reciprocity is characterized by the act of giving away goods without expectations of receiving something in return. Examples of this include gift giving or ritual distribution of wealth. First used by Marshall Sahlins in *Stone Age Economics*, there is also balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity. Balanced reciprocity involves an equal exchange of goods, such as the barter system, or gray market and still has a moral dimension. Who the barter is with and the type of goods exchanged depends on the group affiliations and moral imaginations of the individuals involved. Negative reciprocity involves an exchange of goods without the benefit of the moral dimension. The best example of this is with supply and demand. The price is determined not by the relation of the buyer to the seller but on what the market will bear.

<sup>x</sup> Even while Firth argued that the economy was embedded (see Firth 1952: 153), he maintained a formalist position when the formalist-substantivist debate arose. Similarly, Herskovits maintained a substantivist approach, while trying to show that economic theory could be applied cross-culturally. The two positions, as Wilk indicates are not mutually exclusive, but rather form a dialectic relationship. Anthropologists that side with one viewpoint often incorporated aspects of the other despite their strong opinions.

<sup>xi</sup> Herskovits’ theories on the applicability of economic theory in conjunction with his embedding of cultural systems relied on a methodology based on the analysis of facts and only facts. An economist, Frank Knight, challenged Herskovits’ methodology in the 1950s saying that “any intelligent or useful exposition of facts imperatively requires an understanding of principles, while the need for facts in connection with the exposition of principles is far more tenuous” (1952: 516). Their debate was essentially one of an inductivist versus a deductivist approach to science (see section on the formal paradigm for more on deduction vs. induction).

<sup>xii</sup> While formalists did believe that economic theories could be applied to economic anthropology, the formalism that Karl Polanyi wrote about was a concealed critique of capitalism.

<sup>xiii</sup> In this case maximization refers only to the economic rationality of a decision.

<sup>xiv</sup> I use the term “neo” here to convey the fact that while the Marxism of the 1970s had its foundations in Karl Marx’s original writings, it was a new look at it. They drew mostly from Marx’s early writings and adapted them to a variety of causes, which Marx would probably have ignored.

<sup>xv</sup> For more information on the misuse of and confusion surrounding the term “formal” see Halperin 1988: 59-60.

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<sup>xvi</sup> It is for this reason that some critics have said that Godelier's work is more in line with structural functionalism than it is with economic anthropology.

<sup>xvii</sup> Meillassoux along with Emmanuel Terray and Pierre-Philippe Rey are the intellectual descendants Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar – the “fathers” of structural Marxist thought. As the name implies, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural-functionalism contributed some to the intellectual material as well. Godéliier initially tried to apply Lévi-Strauss's structures to structural Marxist economic anthropology. He advocated “Marxism can add a specific kind of function to Lévi-Strauss's structures, thereby allowing a complete anthropological analysis of social systems” (Hart 1983: 124). Unfortunately, in practice this resulted in something very much like cultural ecology instead of Marxism.

<sup>xviii</sup> There are many different definitions of the term “formal.” The original definition comes from Weber and meant “quantifiable.” Another definition from marginal utility economics assumed that all people were self-interested maximisers responding to forces of supply and demand. Frank Knight used yet another definition of formal as “ideal”. Generally the definition used in the formal paradigm is Frank Knight's (Halperin 1988: 60, 73; Knight 1952: 510-6). Polanyi's formal approach is more a masked critique of capitalism in substantivist analysis (Halperin 1988:65).

<sup>xix</sup> Herskovits is not a formalist in the sense of Polanyi's “formalists.” Yet his ideas on the maximization of satisfaction have been applied to the formal paradigm within economic anthropology that focuses on model building.

<sup>xx</sup> Here I am distinguishing between the use of “formal” in Polanyi's definition of “formal versus substantive” and the use of “formal” in formal model building and the formal paradigm. The former was defined solely to contrast the substantive approach that Polanyi's proposed. While it did utilize much of the formal paradigms model building theory, it was not meant to be synonymous with it. The latter was defined as described on pages 19-20 of this paper. It had its own ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs that made it unique from other paradigms.

<sup>xxi</sup> Kaplan favored the deductivist method of analysis, which was in line with the formalist paradigm and classical economics.

<sup>xxii</sup> While Scott Cook was a formalist, he did not see the same problems that Kaplan saw with the inductive method of analysis. For example, his proposed solution follows the new institutional paradigm particularly in how it relates theory to reality. For more see Cook 1969.