

# Louis Dumont and a Holist Anthropology

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Holism has at least three distinct uses in anthropology: (1) anthropology as a holistic discipline in which potentially all branches of human knowledge may be engaged to understanding the specific practices of human beings, (2) the study of human society and communities as wholes in which all practices are interconnected and mutually influential, and (3) holism as a search for the principles whereby assemblages or forms of human social realities take shape. I will chiefly focus on the last sense, although the other usages will be addressed, and mainly with reference to the work of Louis Dumont. His anthropology is distinguished by an attempt to go beyond holism as a mode of description (e.g., the presentation of societies as institutionally integrated wholes) and to make it into a methodology for anthropological analysis. For Dumont, a holist analytical orientation is vital to anthropology as a comparative project through which anthropology is able to develop both general and specific theoretical understanding.

Although I will concentrate on Dumont's holism, my discussion will also place his approach in the context of more recent holistic approaches upon which Dumont's has some bearing. Here it must be stressed that Dumont is committed to the idea that social and cultural anthropology has a distinct contribution to make among the social sciences. He is what might be called a "social constructionist" in that he focuses on the principles which are engaged in the conception, formation, and practice of social relations. Central to his social constructionism and holism is the understanding that all orientations of human beings toward existence are in some way or another social constructions, formed irreducibly in their social relations.<sup>1</sup> Above all, this is the case concerning the action of human beings and their interrelations with other human beings and with other material objects (animate and inanimate). Dumont's holism is sociocentric and, as well, grounded in the concern for the values embedded in relations, integral to their conception and practice. There is some similarity in spirit, if not in execution, with other holisms recently achieving attention in anthropology extending from the influence especially of the poststructuralist Deleuze (e.g., see Latour 2005; DeLanda 2006). They

share with Dumont a focus on relations, an attack on concepts of the individual and the subject, and their antirelativism, which are aspects to which I will return briefly in later discussion. However, the major distinction of the new holism from that of Dumont is its decentering of concepts of the cultural and the social in anthropology and a corresponding attempt to overcome a disciplinary narrowness which Latour (2005: 9), for example, sees as primarily a legacy of Durkheim's "science of society" perspective. The new holism expresses a concern to open anthropology to the insights of other disciplines, particularly the sciences, and to conceive of the social, in a relational sense, as not limited to human beings (hence Latour's use of the concept "actant")<sup>2</sup> and tied to human consciousness. The idea of anthropology as a discipline with a distinct subject matter, the social, and a particular methodology specific to the social would be anathema, I suspect, to some of the new holist directions. Dumont, whom I will describe as in many ways the last modernist (behind his arguments are the specters of Durkheim, Marx, Toennies, and Weber), would have disagreed profoundly with aspects of these current directions, especially their flattening out of the concept of the social and their anticonstructionist realism (Harman 2009). Moreover, it is likely that he would have seen in them shades of the limitations of what might be called an individualist presentism born of their particular modernity, which Dumont would have seen as undermining the potential of the anthropological contribution founded in its comparativist orientation and recognition of the theoretical significance of human diversity.

### Dumont's Holism: Beyond Marcel Mauss

Dumont's anthropology takes much of its inspiration from Marcel Mauss rather than from Emile Durkheim, who is widely conceived as the main influence on social anthropology (in France and Britain) and to a significant though lesser extent North American cultural anthropology, distinctions which have some historical importance but are of little worth nowadays. Mauss's appeal, for Dumont, is his commitment to ethnographic detail and that anthropological concept and theory should be grounded in ethnography. Theory is to emerge from the complexities of ethnographic material, with such theory to be rigorously tested through comparison. Durkheim tended to establish his conceptual and theoretical orientations prior to the material. Moreover, Durkheim assumed the universal validity of logically deduced concepts that refused a thorough connection to a particular historically constituted reality. The comparativism of Durkheim took the character of sorting what on the surface appeared to be differences into conceptual boxes on the basis of which he noted a range of correspondences leading to various generalizations (e.g., suicide). However, Mauss, as in his celebrated study *The Gift*, took up a particular relational principle as it appeared in one context and then pursued its different permutations in a diversity of other ethnographic contexts. Through

his comparisons he devised a general theory arising from the different understandings that diverse ethnographic knowledge facilitated. It is Mauss whose method of comparative analysis is central to Dumont's own development (see Dumont 1986a, 1986b). Most crucial is Mauss's emphasis on practice and value in relation to the whole whereby through the whole – the totality, the gift as the total pre-station – various value relations are defined.

Dumont's holism is one which asserts that the understanding of particular human social phenomena should be grasped in relation to the larger totality or whole in terms of which they are defined. "Holism" in Dumont's usage refers to the relational value that encompasses all others that can be conceived of as part of its set. The whole or totality is relative to issue and problematic, which may be relevant only to a particular segment of practices in a named territory (e.g., America or India) and may be seen, through comparison, to apply to practices in otherwise separate political and social territories. Dumont's holism is not expressed in the concepts of Society or Culture as bounded, enclosed totalities.

As I have already implied, in Dumont's vision social science (and especially anthropology, for it to be worthy of the name) must be founded in the fact that human being is through and through a being formed out of social existence, which is the premise upon which any general or even universal claims to understanding can be built. The unity of human being is in the social nature of human being per se from out of which human consciousness in all its manifest diversity in thought and practice is formed.<sup>3</sup> As such, the social is not reducible as an essence within human beings nor is the social to be derived from their consciousness but rather the other way around. The social is the condition or plane of human existence (the presence of others is the sine qua non of any biological individual human being) so that human beings are first and foremost oriented to other human beings and come to act in relation to them. In other words, Dumont stresses human beings as originally relational through which the social foundation of human existence is enduringly affirmed.

Here I note that Dumont would be opposed to reductionism but, I suggest, in a way that attempts to avoid dualism. Dumont's holism is avowedly antidualistic and is engaged to conceive of the parts as being defined and produced out of the principles that govern the whole as an encompassment of its parts. Thus a common understanding of reductionism can be described in the following string of oppositions:

holism is opposed to reductionism::whole:part::society:individual::structure:agency

The distinction of Dumont's holism is in his avoidance of such contrasts or his subsumption and differentiation of them within a relational structure of value encompassment. His argument indicates his distinction from other avowedly anti-reductionist and overtly holist approaches in the social sciences which, nonetheless, he shows are caught in a paradox of dualism grounded in an oppositional logic whereby the parts have values independent of the whole which otherwise unites them. This kind of holism is founded on reduction.

Dumont's holism finds some of its demonstration in a critique of Marx and Durkheim. It constitutes a powerful discussion of their modernism which Dumont argues defeats their generalizing scientific aims. The roots of this failure are the grounding of the social either in Universal Man (e.g., Marx) or in the individual being of humankind or in a transcendental notion of the social or Society (e.g., Durkheim) that logically places the individual as being prior to the social (indeed, presumes the question of how human being became a social being). These are conceptions that are grounded in a European and North American modernity which, Dumont argues, must limit the generality of the sociologies that stem from Marx and Durkheim. This is so in relation to not only what might be grasped as modern societies (those of Europe and the Americas, for example) but also what are called "traditional" societies (i.e., societies whose value configuration is not that of European and North American realities), often the provenance of anthropology. Here I should stress that although Dumont would appear to be asserting a dualism (traditional versus modern), this is not necessarily the case, for his position is that both (what are defined as traditional and modern) in effect are distinct value configurations with the traditional giving expression to a hierarchical scheme of value encompassment that is suppressed in modernity.<sup>4</sup> The traditional cannot be reduced to the terms of the value configurations of modernity. Moreover, the analysis of modernity in terms of its own value scheme simply affirms taken-for-granted assumptions without, in effect, sufficiently deconstructing their emergence in a historical process and hence their limitation despite being accorded generalizing and even universal worth.

Dumont's (see 1977) critique of Marx's perspective is precisely that it takes the material and the relation of human beings to the material as being primary (see Sahlins [1978] for a similar critique that Dumont acknowledges approvingly). The material is not constituted in the relations between human beings; rather, it is the conditionality of these relations. The full realization of the social nature of Human Being (which for Marx is in individual human being rather than in the relations between human beings) is, Dumont claims, a projection for the future. (For example, *The Communist Manifesto* [Marx 1969 (1848)] may be read as linking an ideal prehistorical past – primitive communism – with an ideal communist society of the future mediated by a desocialized historical material process.) The understanding of social processes is not in and through the nature of the social. Marx's concern for the freedom of the individual in society, the achievement of the formation of a communist society, not only is an ideal founded in the modernity of a particular history but also expresses dimensions of the individualism of modernity. Marx's social holism reveals, for Dumont, individualist underpinnings that are linked also to its materialism.

Another holism that distinguishes Dumont's is that of Durkheim. Durkheim's famous distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity is, in Dumont's perspective, an expression of individualism for all the emphasis on the transcendent force of the social, Society. Durkheim (in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*; 1995 [1912]) conceives of the origin of society to be in the collectivity of individuals

who have the spark or effervescence of the social (society as the sacred) ignited among them in the course of intense contact. His notions (in *The Division of Labour in Society*; 1933 [1982]) of mechanical and organic solidarity are for all their holism individualistic conceptions.

Thus the homogeneous small-scale society of mechanical solidarity establishes its cohesion on the basis of the similarity between individuals. The individual is submerged in the social. However, the social itself is conceptualized as a totalizing individual, the society of mechanical solidarity being the individual writ large. Organic solidarity is one in which the specialization of tasks places individuals into interdependence within the larger whole of society, in effect liberating individuals within a heterogeneous order. It is this heterogeneity and the differentiation as well as complementarity in roles and tasks among individuals that are, for Durkheim, the principle of cohesion in societies of large-scale modernity. One implication of the individualism of modern systems that Durkheim describes is what might be understood as the partibility of individuals through a diversity of tasks as a key dimension of differentiation which functions as the cohesive force of society in its entirety.

Overall Dumont's critique of Durkheim (and Marx) is that his holism and especially the distinction between tradition and modern are equally grounded in modernity. The individualism integral to Durkheim's position realizes the whole as an expansion of the part. Furthermore, in Durkheim and in Marx there is an implicit simple-to-complex opposition or progress, whereas in Dumont there is rather a shift between different orders of complexity. Dumont's holism eschews that simple / complex dualism that bedeviled much anthropology and is still implicit in more recent anthropological discourse concerning globalization.

I should add that in Dumont's holism relative to Durkheim especially, the force of the shift from the complexity of the traditional into the complexity of the modern is effected historically through reconfigurations of value embedded in social relations. The social relational and value are inseparable and are in continual historical process, though not along a single trajectory (the modern and the traditional are not unitary invariant phenomena). In Dumont's (1986a) discussions, the movement toward modernity is already apparent in what can be regarded as pre-modern societies in Europe where the political, for example, moves into a value-encompassing relation over the religious or status or else enters into unification with it, as in the warrior papacy of the Renaissance. Moreover, notions of the individual as value – once evident among marginalized groups (e.g., among the Epicureans or the Sophists) – begin to emerge in greater dominance as a function of Christianity (that expands, of course, within an individualism already apparent in ancient Greece) and schisms developing within it (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholicism). All this occurs well before the major industrialization or urbanism of modernity vital to Durkheim's distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. Dumont's holism, more historically sensitive than that of Durkheim, sets out the ground for the emergence of a particular modernity, that of Europe, from within the hierarchy of tradition.<sup>5</sup>

Here I should underline, via recapitulation, Dumont's assertion that the holism that he champions is founded in a particular universalism that is foundationally social. Holisms that are based in notions of Universal Man, or the essential unity of humankind, effectively discover such unity at the level of the individual, usually the biological individual (conflating the biological with the social). Such an approach is implicit in the perspectives of Marx and Durkheim, for example, despite the overriding emphasis they place on the social and upon the individual conditioned in relation to the whole. Although Dumont is in agreement with their emphasis on a holism relative to a reduction, for example, he discovers in them what might be called a disguised reductionism/individualism which not only reveals their modernity but also further constrains any claim toward universal understanding. Thus Dumont distinguishes his approach not only because of its insistence on the foundational nature of the social but also because his orientation asserts the indivisible unity of the social with value, a value that is always relational.

Dumont's holism is thoroughly holist in the sense that human beings both at the apex and at the base of the systems that he envisages are embraced and conditioned by what can be grasped as a relation of social/value. The Part is through and through encompassed by the Whole, and the Whole, as well, is generative of the Parts which are infused by the Whole. The difficulty with other holisms in Dumont's perspective is that many, as with Durkheim and Marx, contradict their otherwise holist positions by founding them upon a nonholistic base and by conceiving the Parts in a way as independent of the Whole or as segments of the Whole, as in organismic notions of society, society as a Body.

I stress a discomfort in Dumont with the common anthropological concepts of Society and Culture on the grounds of their holistic inadequacy. That is, they are formed within the assumptions of the individualism of modernity (e.g., Dumont 1994: 3–16). They operate as superficially holistic. Coherence and unity are asserted rather than demonstrated. The assumption is often of an organismic kind: the social as a body, or an order of parts in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism based in his interpretation of Durkheim is of this kind. Of course, the notions of Society and Culture involve a separation of the social from value and in anthropological relativism involve their bounding in an individualistic sense (i.e., cultures and societies take on the order of individualized totalized wholes).

### Dumont's Universalist Orientation

Dumont's orientation is expressly civilizational. That is, what might be conceived of as particular societies and cultures are diverse formations or assemblages<sup>6</sup> within larger encompassing processes, which inform dimensions of their differentiation. The concept of encompassment in Dumont's conception is a value principle where one

term in a relation is valued above another. In so far as such value principle is dominant in a set, it constitutes that which is encompassing. Thus, in Dumont's (1980, 1986b) work on caste in India, the Brahmin is valued over the king/warrior (in relation to outcastes) and is the encompassing principle in the organization and practice of caste relations: it is the relation of value which governs the relations of caste as a whole. Dumont's concept of encompassment should not be confused with other kinds of holism of a more closed, bounded, and system integration kind such as commonly attaches to anthropological notions of culture and society. The holism that Dumont pursues is open to differentiation and variation and is relative to the issue or problem addressed. It is not directed to the characterizing or essentializing of culture or society as orders of social relations independently of specific issues or questions addressed.

Dumont is concerned, in his usage, with the relations of encompassing value which he develops through both an analysis internal to the particular social phenomena that he is concerned with (e.g., kinship, caste, and the relations between the religious, political, and economic; see Dumont 1980) and a broader understanding of their significance through comparison. It is the manner of encompassing processes that is Dumont's focus. Thus he locates different logics of encompassment in India rather than in Europe, which Dumont's critics would detect as being at the root of his Orientalism<sup>7</sup> in connection with the shift in value that emerges in the context of the emergence of the individual *as value*. In this discussion, Dumont, as I have already intimated, conceives of India and Europe, for example, as themselves variations within more general processes of hierarchy which he considers gives his approach ultimate legitimacy as the central method for an anthropology with universal scientific claim. By hierarchy Dumont refers to what he takes to be virtually a universal whereby human beings rank their values in relation to that value(s) that commands the totality.<sup>8</sup> He does not mean by hierarchy what is frequently understood in commonsense and sociological literature to be inequality or stratification (see Iteanu 2009; Tcherkezoff 2009). While hierarchy is general, it is the most overtly expressed in realities where the religious is dominant; hence, he uses a term thoroughly cognizant of its origin in ancient Greek etymology (*hierarches*), where it has strong religious connotation.

Europe and India, for Dumont, constitute an underlying unity. His central empirical interest is how they diverged. Thus he concentrates on the fulcrum or point of differentiation where the idea of the Orient and of the Occident and, as well, where the modern (i.e., the configuration that achieves its unity through the individual as value) began to separate from the traditional, or where individualism (the individual as value) began to emerge from one kind of ranking of value into another. Dumont in Genesis I and Genesis II in *Essays on Individualism* (1986a), for example, explores an argument that has strong resonance with much intellectual discourse in Europe over the long term. The point of divergence is Greece/Turkey, where Europe becomes Asia, and this like so many other scholars is where Dumont concentrates on demonstrating that what overtly appears as a contrastive or oppositional difference is a transformational differentiation within a more embracing universality. Perhaps as

an overall project, Dumont's approach has some parallel with that of André Malraux who starts his *Voices of Silence* (1974) with the observation of the similarity and difference between, on the one hand, the stained glass windows of a Gothic cathedral and, on the other hand, the patterns and color of Persian carpets. They express as difference what is underlying both, or as in holist Gestaltist psychology different figurations upon a common ground. There is an affinity, I think, between Dumont's position and that of the so-called perennialists (e.g., Schuon 2007; Burckhardt 2003) who explore the motifs and practices of the major civilizational religions as transformations upon underlying unifying themes.

I stress then that Dumont conceives of Individualism in its Western or Occidental form as a transformation or shift in value from within general traditional or hierarchical holistic processes, which India continues to express as a complex, if diverse or highly differentiated, example. The reason I emphasize this is to underscore Dumont's intention to avoid a dualism that his critics routinely accuse him of, possibly because they are dualists which, from a Dumont perspective, is born of their own modernity. The criticism of Dumont is one from within a modernist position of dualism, as Dumont might see it. Here, incidentally, Dumont differs from other "traditionalists," as they might be called, such as the perennialists to whom I have just referred and, of course, Hegel. These do see a major cutoff point marking tradition from the modern. In relation to aesthetics, for example, Hegel conceives of art to be in radical decline in the circumstances of modernity. Civilization is lost. The perennialists mark the Renaissance as the beginning of a decline with its initiation of secularism (modernism), mourning the secularizing separation of art from the religious even in the most apparently religious of paintings. There are certainly traces of a similar devaluation of modernity in Dumont. However, this would take away from his prime concern, which is to comprehend the full nature of what may be conceived as the modern as a social-value configuration which realizes its truths as particular complexities of distortion (see Rio and Smedal 2008). Thus, Dumont argues that a feature of the individualism of modernity is that it actively suppresses the hierarchy of value and its relations, yet upon inspection is founded in its persistence. His example is his interpretation of Marx, whose concept of production – as one of the four basic elements of Marx's system (consumption, distribution, exchange, and production) – is encompassing (i.e., the commanding value) of both the whole and also a part (Dumont 1977).

### The Hierarchy of Individualism

Dumont distinguishes what he calls "hierarchical systems" from those that are marked by individualism, for example, traditional civilizations such as precolonial India as distinct from the modernity of Europe. Dumont's comparative discussion involves their examination as different formations within a universal logic of hierarchy.

Societies of individualism are no less constituted in hierarchical processes as in India, except the former (individualist societies) overvalue the part at the expense of the whole (or realize the part at the expense of the whole) and are oriented to totalize at the level of the part as in the relative homogeneity of Durkheim's societies of mechanical solidarity or in the imagined societies of modern nationalism.

In the instance of state nationalism, Dumont (1980) indicates, hierarchy insists itself in a logic of exclusion whereby the unity or holism of the part is achieved by the rejection or devaluation of difference, which is typically exiled to the margins as in racism. The systematic exclusion practiced in the apartheid regime of South Africa is the outstanding example. The racism of apartheid and elsewhere in the West is a paradoxical property of the egalitarian suppression of hierarchy, as it were, that manifests at the boundaries of its order (see too Dumont's essay, "The Totalitarian Disease," 1986a; also Kapferer 1988).

The assertion of equalitarianism in recent nationalisms, in policies of multiculturalism that argue for the equivalent social position of different ethnic communities (conceived as homogeneous unities; Kapferer 1988: 205–7) as well as contemporary identity politics, is among many other features of modern societies that exemplify individualist assumptions. They are thoroughgoing shifts in value ingrained in the production of relations, and are not to be grasped as merely surface expressions of the overt liberalism of much modernity. In Dumont's terms they are more deeply embedded in the very logics of the social dynamics of modernity. In particular, they subordinate (flatten and suppress) the hierarchy of value to the equalitarianism of individualism, which effects its emergence in a diversity of morbid forms, for example in racism and prejudice (see Rio and Smedal 2008; Kapferer 1988). The exclusionism of apartheid is an instance of hierarchical value emergent at the boundaries of difference. Much human rights discourse driven in an overt desire for individual equality disguises hierarchical value and produces it as exemplified in many current criticisms of Muslim minorities in Western Europe. It may, in fact, be instrumental in the establishment of boundaries it otherwise refuses.

Agamben's (1998) discussion of shifts in state processes in European and North American contexts – the continuity of authoritarian, totalitarian dynamics in modernity, and the subversion of social contract notions of the liberal nation-state – has resonance with a Dumontian holist understanding. In *Homo Sacer* (1998), Agamben addresses a process evident in the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the carceral situation of Guantánamo Bay (itself an excellent example of a Foucauldian surveillance state) in which it appears that power (sacral power?) has achieved a value outside of and superior to the law. Agamben sees in contemporary circumstance a repetition with a difference of that which occurred in the ancient Roman Imperium with the sacralization of the power of the emperor, the realization of the emperor as a god both above the law and institutive of the legal regulations integral to the production of political society. In Agamben's argument, society and its order (the structuring of its values) are encompassed by two externalities in dynamic tension, on the one hand the emperor (who is outside and above society), and, on the other

hand, those beings who are effectively below and outside society, without value or the epitomes of negative value, and are not protected by the laws of society, whom he calls “bare life.” Those who are regarded as bare life are hardly even conceived as being human: they have no rights in relation to those who are members of society and exist at its perimeters. They are abused, scorned, and exposed to torture and death at the will of those who, in contrast to those defined as “bare life,” are members of the political order of society and governed by its laws. This conceptual understanding of the continuation of the past in the emergent present (as a reinvention and not necessarily as a historical extension) parallels, if it does not replicate, the hierarchical structure of the India that Dumont discusses. Brahmin (sacred and pure) and Outcastes (the impure) are externalities whose relation defines the nature of the relations of the Parts within the Whole and which achieve a particular morbidity in the circumstances of Indian modernity, as exemplified by the situation of Dalits.

What Agamben describes is the emergence of a rearrangement of the relation of values within the social order of contemporary states. This is acutely exemplified by a US presidency (and perhaps neoimperial moves of a Western origin) that appears (in the hands of George W. Bush) to be outside the law that the president protects, a president who defines the order of the social through his opposition to “bare life,” that is, terrorists who are intensely epitomized by the carceral situation of Guantánamo and who have no or little protection of the law that governs everyday life. In other words, changes in the processes of allegedly democratic states and their social orders reveal shifts in the hierarchy of value that is embedded within them that a holist analysis of the kind that Dumont urges may reveal.<sup>9</sup>

### Ideology, Value, and Comparison

In some ways Dumont’s approach – especially with his usage of ideology and his claim for the universality of hierarchy – parallels Heidegger’s (1962) notion of Being as that which lies behind practice or, for instance, the ordinary realities of human existence (Existenz) which conceal Being. Heidegger’s project is to overcome philosophical metaphysics and to reground philosophy as the investigation of Being or that which lies behind human practices and which is always implicated within them. This is at the crux of Heidegger’s deconstructions which inform such followers as Derrida. I should stress here that I do not wish to suggest that Dumont is doing the same as Heidegger (I think Dumont would have distanced himself from Heidegger’s project) but to draw attention to the strong ontological and ontic themes in Dumont’s approach.

In my interpretation the social and the hierarchy of value are virtually ontological in Dumont. These are the universal ground of all human existence. It is this assumption that underpins Dumont’s indication of the general validity of his

holism as a methodology appropriate to anthropology as a comparative discipline. This is so both in anthropology's exercise of ethnographic description and in its concern to build more general abstract understanding on the basis of its ethnographic descriptions. Human existence is differentiated as the grounded fact of human existence and is constantly differentiating in history. Integral to this differentiation, also as a fact of human existence, is the diversity of the social and the various arrangements of value hierarchy with which the social is inseparably linked.

The differentiation and diversity of social-value arrangements are what Dumont's methodological holism is oriented to explore and present. Thus, what he describes as the individualism of Western modernity and the hierarchical value arrangement of tradition in India are the ontic – historically produced – schemes that emerge from ontological ground. Individualism is a particular forming of the hierarchy of value (even as this may be refused, for example, in the ideological constructions of individualism and egalitarianism concerning the nature of the social as primordially equalitarian).

I note that for Dumont, in my interpretation, there is no specific/universal opposition. Human Being is at once universal, and all humans are social beings founded in the hierarchalization of value, out of which distinct arrangements of social/value are historically constituted. Ideology in Dumont's explications comprises ontic expressions upon ontological ground. That is, ideology is created in historical processes: Western individualism and, as well, the specific expressions of the hierarchical in contemporary India. However, a distinction is evident in that Western individualism rhetorically asserts itself to be fundamental, and the flat and homogeneous realities it calls forth (as in recent modern state nationalism; see Kapferer 1988) asserted to be natural and foundational. This is contra Dumont's argument whereby he sees hierarchy as fundamental and Indian hierarchical ideology to be no less ideological than Western individualism in the ontical sense though more continuous or extensive from a hierarchy of value that is present among all human populations. In this sense, in Dumont's sociology, the development of theory from historically formed traditional societies (i.e., relatively marginal to Western history, once the provenance of anthropology) is likely to be more generally valid than the philosophies and sociologies developed from a highly specific Western and relatively recent historical experience.

Furthermore, I should comment that Dumont's notion of ideology as this develops historically is embedded as value in social relations and their ongoing production. His usage of the concept is different from that of Marx. It is thoroughly ingrained in practice and is not the inverse of the real or its superstructure; rather, it is integral as the materiality of social/value and vital in organizing the action of human beings. The ideological in Dumont's orientation assumes particular configurations of relations in practice that are defined and differentiated in relation to the dominant value that embraces and infuses the whole. He engages this holist idea as a method whereby he both analyzes and explores ethnography in the course of which he establishes the terms for comparison and the limits of the

theoretical understandings that he develops. What defines the whole, or the limits of the whole, is effectively where his dynamic logic of Whole encompassing Parts (that are differentiations of value through the Whole) reaches a limit as the organizing and generating principle(s) of social relations.

This is to be analytically discovered and demonstrated rather than assumed or asserted, although Dumont's critics might claim that this is precisely what he does not do. The method of defining the parameters of the whole is effectively hierarchical. That is, the dominant or key principle or value – that which defines or determines the whole, including that which appears contrary or oppositional to it – is the encompassing principle. In this sense, the operation of the logic of hierarchical encompassment can be conceived as leading to the definition of an individualist society where the part is the whole, having implications for all value and social relations formed within it. Marilyn Strathern's (1988) discussion of Melanesian systems could be said to follow a Dumontian orientation, although it more overtly expresses features of the orientation of Dumont's critic, McKim Marriott (1976).

Here it might be noted that Dumont's definition of society is that which is encompassed according to his principle of hierarchical value. Society is not defined independently of this, and thus, for example, the India of his argument in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980) excludes certain societies or communities or practices within the subcontinent. India is not totalized in his conception and, as his own analyses show, is highly differentiated. All that is Indian is not included in the hierarchical scheme wherein he understands the relations of caste. Not only are many contexts within India excluded from his analytical understanding, but also so are some regions such as Hindu Nepal and Buddhist Sri Lanka that are engaged to the cause of some of his critics. More broadly through the logic of his hierarchical holism directed to comparison, Dumont's method is oriented to detect different configurations of encompassing hierarchical value. So different configurations of the relation of status to power in Indonesia, where power seems to encompass or precede the former (although Geertz in *Negara* [1980] would appear to present a case close to Dumont's India example), are not necessarily contradictions of Dumont's general approach but perhaps confirmation of its utility. That is contra those critics who base their work on Indonesian ethnography, Dumont can be seen as presenting an argument that would exclude the Indonesian materials from the kind of analysis he has developed for contexts in India. To put it another way, while Dumont's method of concerning himself with the hierarchy of value and the determination of encompassing principles may be relevant to Indonesia, it is so as a method through which the distinction of specific processes in various Indonesian contexts can be discovered. Dumont would thus not discount the ethnographically grounded claims of anthropologists of Indonesia but might assert that his method should establish the analytical grounds of such a difference or distinction.

In Buddhist Sri Lanka power might be regarded as being in a more ambivalent relation to the sacred than in India. The sacred and power are not in complementary opposition, in the same way as in India with power as the contrary being

encompassed by the sacred. The representatives of the sacred, the Buddhist clergy (Sangha), are in tension (opposition) with the representatives of power (the kingship, or Raja). They are so, however, on the plane of power or the political. Both the Sangha and the King may be conceived of as in complementary opposition, and effectively the King appropriates (as a form of Divine Kingship) the sacrality of the Buddha ideal into himself. The Sinhala hero-king Dutthagamani is described in the ancient chronicle, the fifth-century CE *Mahavamsa*, as a World Renouncer (see Tambiah 1976) who effectively transcends both the kingship and the Buddhist clergy entering into the position of a bodhisattva. This he does as his forces conquer the Tamil overlord, Elara, reestablishing Sinhala political and religious hegemony (see Kapferer 1988: 63–4). In the Dutthagamani story, power is conceived to be in unity with the religious and is the critical agency in the coming to dominance of Buddhism. It is the value-encompassing principle, the conception which conditions the order of sociopolitical relations as a whole. Other principles are also relevant – notions of purity and pollution, for example – but these are subordinate to the divine power of the king.

Undoubtedly, principles other than those alluded to here might be detected in terms of a Dumontian holistic orientation. Thus, major village rites in Sri Lanka project a vision of the whole. That is, their dynamic is in relation to a virtual reality (i.e., a mythical real within the bounds of ritual practice) that is not the reality of ordinary nonritual existential circumstances but nonetheless relevant to them.<sup>10</sup> One important such rite (known as *Suniyama*; see Kapferer 1997) expresses, as well as the logic of divine kinship discussed above, a thoroughgoing human-centric schema consistent with the idea of the Buddha. The rite I refer to involves a passage from the one extreme (human being as thoroughly given over to self and self-interest) to another wherein all such interest and concern with self are exhausted, the key participant in the ritual occupying a position of self-transcendence at the axial center of world existential realities.<sup>11</sup> Within the span of this progress (from absolute self-interest to absolute selflessness) is the space for the ritual emergence of differential multiplicity of the orders of existence, including human social existence.<sup>12</sup>

Egregious misconceptions of Dumont's perspective are those which seem to assume that he is presenting a universal and undifferentiated view of hierarchical systems, the Indian contexts he explores being ideal-typical of others (e.g., see Appadurai 1986; Berreman 1971; Parish 1996). While there is debate based on Indian materials that questions the particular logic he expounds in relation to the understanding of caste (the complementary opposition of Brahmin and Kshatriya, or the encompassing value of the pure as opposed to the impure), such does not generally invalidate his methodological holism as a strategy for anthropological analysis. A great advantage in the method is that it enables the establishment of the limits of an ethnographically based argument. It is sensitive to variation indicating the grounds for exception, for example, within a hierarchical universe. His appendices in *Homo Hierarchicus* provide demonstration.

Clearly, his understanding of the principles underpinning sociopolitical relations, specifically caste, concerning India do not apply to Buddhist Sri Lanka, a universe, nonetheless, where hierarchical logics are at work and at some ideological depth. As Dumont himself argued (personal communication), his own analysis indicates the limit of the Indian case and its logical distinction from that of overtly similar processes in Sri Lanka.

One common misconception of Dumont's approach should be dismissed immediately. This is that it can be countered by ethnography from other contexts which on the surface appear to be similar. This is only so after an analysis of the ethnographic evidence using the strategy of methodological holism has been conducted and the case shown to be of the same sociological order. The strength of Dumont's methodological holism is that it indicates the specificity of his Indian case and indeed the nonrelevance of his particular ethnographic argument to contexts in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere (Fox 1994). The established difference of these ethnographic contexts does not invalidate what I have termed his analytical strategy of methodological holism, one great advantage of which is its capacity to determine the logic of difference and similarity without engaging in prejudgment – a characteristic of so much anthropological comparison which continually hampers the anthropological ability to arrive at more general understanding. Dumont's methodological holism enables the delineation of ethnographic distinction while simultaneously pursuing a more generalizing rather than relativizing course.

### Holism and Potentiality

Dumont's holist methodology is not necessarily static, or dependent on notions of homogeneous or consensual value. The approach that Dumont recommends is distant from others with which it risks being confused such as those based in the study of systems as normative or as organized around a coherent set of agreed beliefs. Meaning, so central in the North American cultural anthropological or hermeneutic senses, is not critical to his approach. Rather, value is relational and its meaning, interpretation, and the way it operates through practice are open. Dumont expands a structural approach certainly extending from Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. However, his distinction, as should be evident from the foregoing, is to focus on the ranked encompassing relations of value – a methodological orientation that assumes that values in relations are never balanced or equivalent (implicit in structuralism) but hierarchical when conceived through and defined in relation to the whole. The plane of immanence that is the universality of human existence and upon which the different constructions of human existence arise is not flat but always uneven and originally so. It is hierarchical, even essentially so, as Dumont expresses this with reference to Hertz and the universal dominance of the right over the left in relation to the human body as a whole or totality. What I now wish

to stress is that the holism of Dumont based on the hierarchy of value specifies a system which is open rather than closed, fixed, or static, thus defining a space of multiple potentiality. Here we can return to the Indian example, where Dumont's perspective is most vulnerable to being criticized as depicting a stagnant, traditionalist, conventionalist approach ignoring the facts of an obviously complex, changing, and diverse reality (Appadurai 1986; Parish 1996).

Much has been written on modernization processes in India that demonstrate the transforming force of, for instance, egalitarian energies often of a class and ethnic kind. But the fact of this does not necessarily contradict Dumont's approach oriented to uncovering a particular hierarchical scheme and dynamic. Thus, the phenomenon of Sanskritization in India has been widely discussed as a response to modernization whereby the inequalities of caste are objectively realized and circumvented by depressed castes appropriating the Sanskritic practices and value normally associated with Brahmins. Sanskritization, if an attempt to offset inequalities, in effect also does so in accordance with hierarchical value. In other words, what can be seen as an equalization of caste, or negation of a hierarchical caste order through Sanskritization, is not against hierarchy in Dumont's conception but is, rather, a potentiality within the hierarchical schema he proposes.

Much has been written of the apparent resilience of caste in India despite the inroads of capital, as if the holism of hierarchical value integral to caste is necessarily contradicted and erased by contemporary processes. What may be called the hierarchical holism that Dumont describes for Indian caste is capable of absorbing a diversity of changes or new relations and repositioning of relations. It is a scheme that is not merely oriented to totalities of the past but also one that can gather within its holistic rubric dimensions of a future that is continually in formation in the course of human action. Undoubtedly class forces connected to capitalist production (mediated through colonialism and postcolonial forces of the market, for instance) are crucial in contemporary dynamics. But there are indications that the rearrangements of caste relations and the modern sociopolitical importance of caste as identity do not necessarily contradict the hierarchy of value associated with precolonial configurations of caste (the precolonial appearance of things itself being an expression and realization of a potential). The effects of contemporary economic forces are legitimated through the continuing dominance of the holistic value framework (of the dominance of the Sacred over Power) as implicit in processes of Sanskritization and even in modern anticaste movements such as the Dalit protests where the appeal to Buddhism rather than Hinduism indicates, nonetheless, the prevailing encompassing potency of the Sacred.

The holism of the hierarchy of value in which caste relations are defined can be conceptualized as always in process, opening constantly to new modes of expression. This is exemplified in the caste and kinship dynamics that surround *teyyam* rites and their relevant communities in Malabar in the Indian state of Kerala. Here I draw on the research of Vadakkiniyil Dinesan (2009). Malabar, of course, has historically manifested the more extreme examples of the kind of hierarchical holism with which

Dumont is concerned. The pure/impure opposition is very much in observance as is the sacred encompassment of the political. But in the *teyyam* rites, which are situated at the shrines of matrilineages within defined caste communities, forms of political domination are challenged. That is, sacred potency is dislocated from Brahmanic possession and becomes engaged by outside, impure castes. What may be conceived as a part within an encompassing whole itself takes on an authority and a potency as if it itself were the whole – which it is for the duration of a *teyyam* festival.

Thus in Malabar the shrine festivals of matrilineages within specific caste communities transform the communities from parts into wholes expressed in the local apotheosis of deities who manifest the whole (or, in this case, the cosmic totality). That is, those who gather to a shrine of a specific caste matrilineage, who may come from a range of castes within the pure/impure scheme, will in certain instances through the course of the rites be repositioned in relation to the caste who owns the shrine. The principles of the hierarchical scheme are not altered but for a moment at least the caste that owns the shrines is effectively in a position of preeminence (which is facilitated in that the relevant caste is in possession, for the duration of the festival, of brahmanic potency – the sacrificial fire).

*Teyyam* are deities that attach to specific matrilineages and may be conceived of as manifestations of more encompassing divine forms associated as well with dominant religio-political communities. They are often divine-human hybrid forms that are highly volatile, capable of shifting allegiance relatively easily. They can move across territory, often transgressively, and their myths describe them as frequently shifting allegiance from the dominant to the subordinate or affiliating themselves to the powerful via the mediation of caste members low in the hierarchical scheme of things. *Teyyam* can be dislodged from their shrine affiliations by acts of human devotion and ally their power with other matrilineages. They can shift allegiance not by upsetting the hierarchical scheme of things, or the relations of value that organize it in reference to a sacred totality that they can also express, but by effecting or manifesting different accents upon reality or unfolding possibilities of relations and shifting sociopolitical positioning continually emergent within the sociopolitical contexts in which a hierarchical scheme of value is in operation.

The context of the *teyyam* is one in which the complementary opposition and encompassing relation of the sacred to power (as a Dumontian analysis conceives the order of hierarchy) describe a relation that is unstable, that is, the encompassing relation of the sacred to power is at any particular moment not unquestionably established or set. In Malabar, Kshatriya groups have been in contest with Brahmanic dominance and this is sometimes reflected in the pattern of *teyyam* territorial movement and changing shrine allegiance. This tension can be observed as being motivated in the hierarchy of value of the totality in itself. That is, the challenge to Brahmanic dominance and the conflicts between Brahmin and Kshatriya groups are motivated in accordance with the principles defining the whole, the conflicts sustaining the whole even as they may appear at any point in a continuing process to subvert it.

What I have described does not threaten Dumont's holistic argument as much as insist on a great flexibility in its interpretation. *Teyyam* asserts not only the value of the encompassment of power by the sacred but also the tension of this encompassment. The sacred can move out of such a relation and re-manifest as the potency of the part (the part as an emergent whole), threatening the entire sociopolitical order and becoming an agency in the repositioning and revaluing of particular castes within the larger configuration of castes. In Vadakkiniyil Dinesan's description during the *teyyam* for a specific caste shrine, the members of the caste capture the essence of Brahmanic sacred and sacrificial potency (they force the gift of fire) which is crucial for the performance of the festival. They effectively take what the Brahmins possess, gain control of their sacred potency, and by so doing achieve a ritual autonomy in the Brahmanically dominated hierarchy to which they might ordinarily be seen as subordinate. Through this action, the performers of *teyyam* effectively alter their position in the wider sets of caste relations, at least during the period of the *teyyam* festival. They can be seen as circumventing an inferior ritual status by, nonetheless, working with the potentiality of the system of which they are a part.

Overall, *teyyam* performances in Malabar express flexibility which resists an overly rigidified view of hierarchical logic that a Dumontian approach may otherwise indicate. The terms of the scheme – the encompassing of power by the sacred, the pure/impure opposition – do not necessitate a view of the whole that is closed and rigid but rather one that is open and labile. The system does not need essentially to transform into an individualistic one (the view from outside) for reconfigurations of caste relations and repositionings of status to occur.<sup>13</sup> The kinds of process that *teyyam* rites describe suggest a diversity of potential trajectories in practice and understanding, some of which may actively subvert conventional interpretations of Brahmanic domination. Indeed, *teyyam* has long been valued by communities in Malabar in this subversive sense. *Teyyam* has been an agency in the resistance to state control supported by a Brahmanic, Sanskritic ideology, and was a ritual institution engaged in political resistance to rigid views of caste hierarchy used during colonial rule and interpreted through European ideology involving stratificational understandings of the caste system.

One reason for concentrating on Indian material in the context of a discussion of Dumont's holism is because Indian caste has conventionally been taken as emblematic, from a Western perspective, of stasis, stagnation, and dehumanization. His perspective enables a contesting of such a stereotype as well as a fuller understanding of the forces that gives contexts of the relations of caste resilience even where they appear to be changing. There is a tendency for his approach to be tainted by the frequently unexamined assertions concerning caste in India, his method infused with the same kind of stultification of attitude as the conservative antimodern reality to which it appears to be applied. But as I have indicated, Dumont's approach not only can comprehend another modernity, not necessarily reducible to the Western kind, but also can engage with its diversity and constant creative possibilities. Furthermore, as I have indicated, Dumont's holism and stress

on the hierarchy of value can also comprehend dimensions of egalitarian and individualist realities and their potentials. What are frequently opposed are united through a common methodological orientation that is not locked within the prejudices of one or the other ideological persuasions.<sup>14</sup>

### Dumont the Last Modernist?

Dumont pinned Hegel as being on the cusp of modernism whose profound works intermingled a traditional holism defined by religious value with a modernist individualism. Hegel's emphasis on the state as the absolute was an instance of the emergence of power and the political as separate from the religious and in dominant relation to it. If Hegel expressed in his own work a turning point in thought, so, in a similar way, does Dumont. Dumont bridges what is characterized as a modernist approach to social thought with what is often conceived of as a poststructuralist movement aimed at overturning modernism and opening up novel ways of comprehending social realities. Thus Dumont, critical of much social and philosophical theory vital within anthropology, is yet committed to the kind of grand narrative schema of those modernists of whom he is critical (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, and Lévi-Strauss). His vast methodological holist project for anthropology is an alternative within modernism. But there are intimations of poststructuralism in his approach. I refer to that poststructuralism that in itself is indicating a holism but in a spirit of critique of modernism and certain postmodern trends that distinguishes poststructuralism. However, I emphasize that while Dumont anticipates certain aspects of poststructuralism, nonetheless he would see current developments as bound in modernism (see Ranciere 2006) and as compounding its difficulties for a comparative anthropology. Regardless, it is worth considering some of the directions in a poststructural anthropology-sociology to highlight Dumont's distinction and his continuing relevance in an exciting climate of new critical debate affecting anthropology and the social sciences.

The major figure in poststructuralism is the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, whom I will briefly discuss here, and increasingly Alain Badiou (2000), his sympathetic critic. Deleuze advocates a holism of a kind that attempts to create an approach to the existential processes in which human beings are located that draws together perspectives from diverse areas of human knowledge involving the arts, humanities and philosophy, and the sciences (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1994). Deleuze aims at a synthesis of a plethora of perceptions and orientations to human realities, including the questions asked as well as the practices engaged. This holism tries to synthesize different orientations to phenomena and simultaneously to overcome erstwhile antagonisms and divisions. Effectively a new kind of anthropology of a holistic kind is being invented that is vastly different from that of the

late European Enlightenment idea of anthropology (see Kapferer 2007), although we are in a time when there is some attempt to revive even its spirit (see Parkin and Ulijaszek 2007).

In poststructuralist approaches, evolutionist and rationalist assumptions embedded in past orientations are discarded. Most vitally, human beings are displaced from their erstwhile centered, privileged position as dictating the terms of discourse. There is an assault on social constructionist positions, and this would be a major point of disagreement with Dumont. Above all, this is so in the case of some poststructural directions where the primacy of value is denied if not excluded altogether. I will return to this shortly. However, I note here that the disregard for value is not the course of Deleuze, whose concepts of coding and overcoding attend to value in the nonnormative usage of Dumont.

There are other parallels between Dumont and Deleuze's radical poststructuralism. Among these is avoidance of subject-object dualisms and of the concept of the individual as the elemental unit for analysis, and associated with this is a concern with relational processes whereby different potentialities of structures (or assemblages in poststructuralist conceptualization) are emergent at any particular point, moment, or event. In connection with this approach, the concept of "singularity" is frequently employed, which comes instead of an emphasis on overarching structural forms or paradigms (such as those of Lévi-Strauss or Dumont), or the concept of society. Events in this perspective are singularities taken as a complexity of different dynamics and potentialities with many trajectories that cannot be reduced to a determinant preexisting structure. This is an idea that is carried to an extreme in poststructuralism (associated with a stress on constant creativity) and that I have indicated is not necessarily opposed to Dumont's holism, if the relational scheme is seen not to be fixed but rather as a domain of potential realized differentially *in practice*. As I have described, the ritual events of *teyyam* provide some illustration, as they can be effectively seen as singularities realizing innovative potential. The practice of the value scheme always opens to new directions that are not reducible to a fixed interpretation of the value scheme independent of its practice as event. Dumont's holism, I suggest, allows for creativity and innovation and the production of the new. (Deleuze's two general relational frames of the arboreal or tree-like hierarchical and the lateral spreading networks of the rhizome, which are given foundational and almost primordial qualities by Deleuze, bear some similarity with Dumont's schemes of hierarchy and individualism.)

With Deleuze, Dumont does not place human consciousness, interpretation, and meaning as being linchpins from which general understanding is to be developed (clear in his work on cinema; see Deleuze 1986). The hermeneutic turn in anthropology (underpinning much North American postmodernism) is not Dumont's concern or that of Deleuze. Rather the aim is to explore how the relational processes from within a variety of consciousnesses and perceptions of reality are generated. In both thinkers there is an anti-organicism, for Dumont particularly that flowing largely from Durkheim's focus on the institutional order of

society. Moreover, in Deleuze especially, there is a shift away from the body as image or metaphor of either totalities or their parts – a concern with “organs without bodies” (see too Zizek 2003) that can form an abundance of different connections of a nonembodied character or breaking beyond bodily limitation.

Deleuze and his followers have departed from the notions of contradiction and dialectic and the powerful dualism that they demand. For Deleuze, his concept of the fold is designed to overcome a dualism (implicit in his twin processes of the arboreal and the rhizomic). Thus the arboreal and the rhizomic in different ways are conceived of interpenetrating, enfolding each the other, without either realizing a synthesis or necessarily being in contradiction although their dynamics are irreducible to the other. The idea of the fold is crucial, I think, to the kind of post-structural holism that Deleuze announces. This holism, of course, is distinct from that of Dumont, but the latter’s concept of encompassment merits comparison. Through it, Dumont departs from a Hegelian or Marxian dualism, for example, demonstrating how relational opposites (the pure and the impure, for instance) are intertwined constituting the dynamics of the whole (the manifold differentiations and variations of its practical working out).

Overall, the poststructuralism of Deleuze and the orientation of Dumont develop on the basis of a radical critique of Western modernist approaches, although the former does so from within its context (revolution from inside), whereas Dumont goes outside the Western context in line with his firm commitment to anthropology as comparison and a transcendence of Western value.<sup>15</sup> My brief comparison of Deleuze and Dumont is intended to show some of the parallels and, more importantly, to highlight some of the significance of Dumont’s project and the fact that he is breaking outside many of the terms of conventional anthropological discourse that many of his contemporary, often postmodern, critics still appear to be embedded in, even despite their counterclaims. This observation is not designed to shield Dumont from such criticism but rather to clarify the grounds of engagement. Often they seem to be at cross purposes.

While there may be similarities between Dumont and certain aims in poststructuralism (more in spirit than in substance), Dumont, I am sure, would be thoroughly critical of certain directions in poststructuralism as this applies to anthropological and sociological practice. Poststructuralism aims at a thoroughgoing reinvention but as radical difference of perspectives on the human situation in general and, for anthropology and sociology, a complete shift away from the established conventions and traditions of the past. Major figures in such a redirection are Bruno Latour and Manuel DeLanda, whose similar, if not the same (see Harman 2009), approaches extend from the Deleuzian project. Dumont, I imagine, would be deeply critical of them, conceiving of their approaches as subverting the anthropological contribution born of comparison. But more than anything else, he would see in much of their work a demonstration of the faults of a Western modernism and, moreover, an extreme individualism that can only lead to distortion and a systematic failure to comprehend differentiating processes, indeed the

creative capacity of humankind to generate forms of life subject to distinct as well as changing relations within wholes that themselves are continually transforming (a potential, in fact, of Deleuze's program).

Both Latour and DeLanda start their reinventions with reality conceived, at least initially, as a horizontal plane (perhaps overdetermined in Deleuze's rhizome). The concept of value along Dumont's lines is excluded; there is little notion of a variegated plane of hierarchical difference in a Dumontian sense to begin with. In other words, general understanding must start with the fact of comparison and difference, although the nature of such is to be demonstrated and not assumed – hence the significance of Dumont's holism. Latour (2005: 16) is quite explicit on the suggestion of an antiholism in such a perspective in his statement that his actor-network theory (ANT) “has tried to render the social world as *flat* as possible” in order to explore the formation of new social assemblages. DeLanda is even clearer on the matter, who, with Latour, posits an empirical realism.

DeLanda's realism, which borrowing from Deleuze he calls assemblage theory, aims “first of all [to] account for the *synthesis* of the properties of a whole not reducible to its parts” (2006: 4). DeLanda's assemblages are “wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts, [and] can be used to model any of these intermediate entities: interpersonal networks and institutional organizations are assemblages of people; social justice movements are assemblages of several networked communities” (2006: 5). His work, he declares, involves taking

the reader on a journey that, starting at the personal (and even subpersonal) scale, climbs up one scale at a time all the way to territorial states and beyond. It is only by experiencing this upward movement, the movement that in reality generates all these emergent wholes, that a reader can get a sense of the irreducible social complexity characterizing the contemporary world. This does not imply that the ontological scheme proposed here is not applicable to simpler or older societies: it can be used in truncated form to apply it to societies without cities or large central governments, for example. (2006: 5)

DeLanda closes off his claim for his social realism (the target being a postmodern moralism) with the following:

I make no effort to be multicultural: all my examples come from either Europe or the USA. This simply reflects my belief that some of the properties of social assemblages, such as interpersonal networks or institutional organizations, remain approximately invariant across different cultures. (2006: 6)

I won't bother to deconstruct the foregoing. But in DeLanda's development from Deleuze, it looks like modernist individualism has transmogrified with all the dimensionality and more that Dumont critically investigated. Notwithstanding, in my opinion, many of the exciting directions for anthropological analysis that a Deleuzian direction does proffer, DeLanda outlines a potentiality that smacks of an expansion

of European and North American hegemonic sociological thought together with many of the gross limitations that Dumont highlighted. It is ironic that the cover of DeLanda's book is illustrated by a hive of bees. Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1988 [1732]) was examined by Dumont as an expression of the individualist turn at the beginning of northern European modernism that continued through into contemporary anthropology, derailing its potential. DeLanda might appear as a Dumontian nightmare. In this regard, Dumont's direction out of a modernist anthropology and his still radical critique may be sustained both as a sobering consideration of certain poststructural developments and enthusiasms as well as still offering potential for a comparative anthropology.

A concluding thought. There is a renewed orientation in contemporary anthropology, often highly influenced by poststructural realism and, as well, a certain continuity of Enlightenment scientific rationalism to the models of science as ways into the investigation of sociocultural realities, a direction that in various ways has always been with anthropology. Much may be gained and it may be increasingly relevant in realities of possible ontological shift, where the separations between human being and machine, for instance, might be becoming less distinct or in zones where the boundaries between the human and nonhuman are being blurred. There is no doubt that attentions to the worlds of science and its ways of conceptualizing reality are likely to be valuable in anthropology – a rich source of conceptual metaphors as with much of Deleuze. But it is possible that some of the attention is not innocent. That is, as Dumont himself noted, the orientation to human beings through scientific models (as the models themselves) is likely to be driven in the cosmological and ideological (in Dumont's sense) realities of human social and value relations. For all the objective truth they may seem to reveal in the areas of human action, they nonetheless demand reflective attention to the very human realities within which they are produced. It is entirely conceivable that some of these models and their apparent veracity (as well as the attraction of anthropologists to them) comprise a function of the very modernism and individualism of the worlds in which they are invented.

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### Notes

- 1 Here I should stress that Dumont is not a subjectivist in his social constructionism (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1966) but treats the social as a given. It is the sine qua non of human existence. Through the concepts and values that are embedded in social relations and are continually being formed in their process, human beings come to both reflect

- upon and comprehend the various dimensions of their existence. The social is integral to the shapes of human comprehension and understanding of their realities.
- 2 Deleuze (see Deleuze 1986) employs the concept of actant in the context of his post-structuralist development.
  - 3 In other words, *social* being determines or is the ground upon which human consciousness develops.
  - 4 Dumont in my interpretation uses the concept of “tradition” as a value configuration that precedes modern, contemporary value configurations. In my understanding of his work, the traditional can also be a value configuration in contemporaneous (i.e., modern) circumstances. In this sense, the traditional is produced in history and its import can be thoroughly contemporary even though the schema of its value configuration can be established as being of great historical depth.
  - 5 Dumont’s perspective could be compared with that of Max Weber, who treats Europe and China, for example, as ideal-typical polar opposites. They manifest a different rationality. Dumont conceives them as distinct configurations of hierarchical encompassing value. His approach is holistic rather than fixing on a distinct value element and effectively essentializing and Orientalizing it.
  - 6 Here I use the concepts of “formation” and “assemblage” together; that is, the modernist, largely Marxist notion of formation that breaks out of the notion of society as an integrated totality while maintaining the idea of commanding centers and, the poststructuralist concept of assemblage, which is thoroughly outside the idea of society as an enclosed, bounded totality in which there is no notion of center at all. Whether the concept of formation or assemblage is used, should, I think, be relative to empirical context.
  - 7 If Dumont’s approach is Orientalist, it is not of the romantic idealist or negative kind (see Said 1995). Dumont has attempted to explore India not from within a Western, usually moralist, standpoint. The concepts that he develops, especially that of hierarchy, are intended to be of general applicability and to be devoid of a judgmental moral kind. Dumont attempts to keep his own moral values out of his analysis, values which he indicates are sympathetic to Western socialist ideals.
  - 8 Dumont illustrates his universal claim for the hierarchialization of value in relation to the whole with reference to Hertz’s (1909) study of the privileged value of the right hand over the left defined in relation to the body as a whole.
  - 9 Buck-Morss (2007) has made an important criticism of Agamben in regard to his ahistorical logic upon which he asserts that democratic systems are doomed to degenerate into dictatorial and totalitarian systems. Buck-Morss debates this, arguing that in democratic systems sovereignty ideally rests with the people and that the recent attempt by oligarchic interests to represent the people’s sovereignty, to be the icons of populism, is the danger. It is not a logical inevitability. Dumont (1986a) does not argue for a logic to individualism independent of an understanding of its historical production.
  - 10 Rituals such as the *Suniyama* can be understood as projecting an imaginal totality or what I (Kapferer 2005) have described elsewhere as the virtual, developing from Deleuze. In this sense the virtual, or the totality as the virtual, operates as the whole in terms of which the differentiated relations of existence in their actuality and potentiality can be (re)generated.
  - 11 It is more accurate to conceive of the passage of the patient as going to a point external to existence, or at the threshold of nonexistence, from which point the patient can

- reconstitute self and world. The patient effectively comes to occupy the position of the World Ruler or Mahasammata – the world-originating Cosmic King.
- 12 In the Sinhala Buddhist universe to which I am referring, it is possible to see the concepts of self and nonself that are integral to the ritual process as supplanting the impure/pure opposition in Dumont's Indian cases. It is a similar hierarchialization of value that changes register. As many have often noted regarding Buddhism, including Durkheim and Mauss, there is a human-centric individual as value thematic. But this is not an individualism that necessarily reduces to the Western individualism kind, but rather one that is systematic with the Hindu/Brahmanic universe of Dumont yet markedly distinct from it. Alternatively, Buddhism demonstrates a potential within the caste dynamics of India of breaking free from the oppressive determinism that often seems to mark it. This is a message of the current anti-caste Dalit movement in India.
  - 13 There is a widespread sociological assumption that individualist societies are creative and innovative because of their stress on the individual. Certainly it is individuals who are creative, but this is likely to be true for everywhere and is not necessarily a consequence of individualist ideology. The view of individualism as being creative is, in itself, an ideologically fueled opinion. This may also be so with the concepts of change and stasis. The very idea of change, and change as a particular problematic of individualistically self-conceived societies, also may be linked to individualist ideology. All situations of human existence are in constant change and transformation. What may distinguish them is the way this is conceptualized either, for example, as reproduction of the same or as a difference.
  - 14 Although Dumont may not have succeeded (e.g., hierarchy as a commonsense and ideologically loaded term in Western egalitarian individualist discourse), Dumont's analytical concepts for anthropological comparison are intended to be independent of moralizing judgment.
  - 15 This should not overlook Deleuze's own attempt to go outside Western frameworks of understanding. Of all philosophers, Deleuze (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994) makes prodigious use of ethnographic materials often collected by anthropologists in an effort to demonstrate the widespread applicability of his concepts as well as some of the grounds for their derivation.

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