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Editorial

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David Graeber delivered the Department of Anthropology Distinguished Lecture on April 5th, 2011. In 2007, Professor Graeber published his essays *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion, and Desire*. Apart from the inherent stimulation in the essays themselves, his introduction especially caught my attention. He opened in this manner:

I decided to call this collection *Possibilities* because the word encompasses much of what originally inspired me to become an anthropologist. I was drawn to the discipline because it opens windows on other possible forms of human social existence; because it served as a constant reminder that most of what we assume to be immutable has been, in other times and places, arranged quite differently, and therefore, that human possibilities are in almost every way greater than we ordinarily imagine. Anthropology also affords us new possible perspectives on familiar problems: ways of thinking about the rise of capitalism from the perspective of West Africa, European manners from the perspective of Amazonia... (2007:1).

His point of view was especially refreshing after 25 years or more of self-criticism in the discipline following the colonial period, a time that might have appeared to end with the creation of new and independent political states during the first half of the 20th century. While I myself participated in such disciplinary criticism, beginning in my 1969 paper "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up," I believe the criticism went beyond self-criticism and navel gazing to self-destruction at a time when anthropology has much to give in the way of knowledge. In this overspecialized academic environment, Graeber was optimistic.

Before Graeber, others also wrote and researched anthropology in search of Possibilities. Recently I had occasion to re-read Carleton Coon's magnificent overview *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East*. Coon describes the peoples of the Middle East as "organized into a complicated social system based on an ethnic division of labor" (1951:4). Coon points out that this division of labor may have started through a series of accidents but that it was no accident that it grew and perpetuated itself: "It was and is the most efficient way for people to live in a lean environment." He speaks about racial consciousness being not as marked as he compares the autonomous guilds with the Western idea of a factory, the social mechanisms that provide a measure of order as with mutual relationships, what he calls automatic controls. To study in order to learn what lessons we can learn is useful to remember.

Both Coon's and Graeber's work are applicable to my work on contemporary problems in energy in their recognition of the environmental limitations prior to the de-

velopment of Western industrial practices that seemingly changed possibilities, that is, for a blip in time. As contemporary peoples worldwide address “the energy problem,” steady state societies have much to teach about possibilities past, present, and future.

This volume celebrates KAS’ 100th Issue – *Anthropology, Revisited*. It looks back at anthropology’s discoveries in order to look forward to future disciplinary transformations. The papers and commentaries reflect the creative eclecticism forever present in anthropology, as well as schisms that have been present since the early turn into the 20th century, and commented on by Franz Boas in 1906: “There are indications of [anthropology] breaking up. The biological, linguistic, and ethno-logic-archaeology methods are so distinct” (1906:482). By 1930 Seligman notes: “The anthropologist’s way of thinking has reached beyond his formal contacts with the social studies, and like psychoanalysis and relativity has entered into the main stream of twentieth-century thought...Such an approach heightens the metabolism of our minds and breaks down our parochialisms” (1930:203). Two tendencies, fragmentation and holism, move us back and forth. With increasing specialization, we divide and subdivide and still call it anthropology, while the anthropological perspective continues to permeate the social sciences and humanities, other disciplines, intelligent lay people, people in high places. It is the anthropological perspective that people relish – a perspective that sees what others often do not see, that makes connections that are not made elsewhere, that questions assumptions and exoticizes behavior that is normalized.

Anthropology has the capacity to generate the kind of introspection that can influence the future role of human beings on earth, to impart the lessons of history, the experience of *Homo sapiens* on the planet. Anthropology will be much needed in this 21st century as we transform the planet to fit with nature’s conditions.

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