

Section 4 Module 1 Response

Reflection of Clastres

Clastres had an extremely large effect on the political atmosphere in France. He helped French intellectuals find an alternative to Marxism and laid the foundations for both left-wing political and neo-liberalism in France.

Clastres was initially a Communist. He was heavily influenced by Levi-Strauss and structuralism who he ended up studying with. Clastres wrote his first ideas about South-American Indians under Levi-Strauss, even though Clastres had not witness South-American Indian society first hand. His main argument about the society, which he stuck with his whole life, was that the leader had no real power and symbolized peace for the tribe. Clastres believed in 'sociological intentionality' or that there was a reason why the leaders in the tribes he studied had no real power.

After doing the main field work for *Society of the State*, Clastres changed views and stopped using structuralism in his work. This move opened up the field of political anthropology, which Clastres believed filled the holes in structuralism. In 1969, Clastres updated his belief about power and that modern societies differed from primitive societies because power became coercive.

The timing of Clasteres work happened to be at a turning point in the thinking of French intellectuals who were rejecting Marxism. They were focused on rejecting 'the totalitarian state.' Clastres intelligentially used evidence about language, production and violence to enforce his views. The way he dealt with violence was impressive as he argued that it was 'internal and essential.' In his writings about torture, Clasteres would admit the situations were torture but would then go on to say that they were necessary for the state. He used a similar strategy with war by saying that it was necessary to prevent more violence.

Clasteres work showed that he believed the primitive world was better than the modern world. Through various works and interviews, Clastres claimed that Western society would eventually lead to fascism. The author claims that part of Clastres hate of the state was the fact that he was an ex-communist.

Clastres thought that by visiting tribes that were soon to be extinct, he saw one of the few remaining societies that are not centered on the state. Many of the tribes soon died out after Clastres visited them. He found a way to tie the death of the tribes to ethnocentrism and blamed that on the state as well.

The author believes that Clastres ideas were similar to Rousseau. Both had were concerned about freedom, equality and happiness and both searched for a 'story' about how the disaster of current society occurred. He was never able to find a good answer for why the state started to exist so he used some answers from his predecessor, La Boetie.

Clastres' views about society ended up as a hinderance to finding a compromise to society and the state. Generally, his views led to fundamental changes about the role of the state. People became wary of the state and being too present in their lives. They began seeing totalitarianism everywhere. His work also led to the rise of the 'theory of the importance of civil society.'

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