On first glance, this work seems to be a straightforward presentation of one among many
conflict approaches to analyzing the patterns and processes of modern social living. On closer
examination, this work offers a richer, more thoughtful socio-biological account of human evolution and
the growing disjuncture between this evolutionary process and the socio-cultural tendencies of modern
and post-modern societies.

Beginning with the premise that ninety percent of human history was spent in hunting and
gathering and simple horticultural societies, when coupled with the fact that this vast expanse of human
existence has been relegated to “prehistory,” suggests that many potentially valuable lessons to be
learned from these forbearers have regularly been ignored, rendered null and void. The growing
disjuncture between our past – our social and biological heritage as a species – and our present patterns
of living in ever more mass, complex, impersonal societies, leads the author to conclude that men and
women are “increasingly ill-suited” for living in modern and post-modern settings. This is not to suggest
that the author is a biological determinist. He is not, for he carefully avoids the use of the term “human
nature” a term so freighted with meaning that it seems incapable of resisting virtually any definition one chooses to associate with it. In the process it becomes a “catch-all,” used to explain virtually any and all human behavior.

In tracing the evolution from solitary bands which are classless, to tribes characterized by factions, to chiefdoms marked by conflict, to states where a ruling class and class conflict emerge, the author arrives at a position consistent with that of Desmond Morris when he contends that the law only forbids men/women to do what the “artificial conditions of civilization drive them to do.” A world of personal networks and face-to-face interaction has evolved into a world of hierarchy – of organizational pyramids characterized by complexity and impersonal relationships. Within such settings, modern man and modern woman face the twin dilemma of powerlessness and loneliness. Not surprisingly, the search for meaning becomes problematic in this context.

The author portrays the leading ideology of the day as extolling a combination of freedom, democracy, and material prosperity. This is so even though power and wealth remain securely in the hands of the few. As the author indicates, the ideology of freedom and democracy specializes in fostering its own image, not the greatest good for the greatest number. Similarly, the ideology of wealth and prosperity must be seen against the backdrop of enormous differences in material well-being. On the one hand, the author asks, with wealth (and prosperity) so unevenly distributed, how could there not be fundamental and lasting conflict? On the other hand, he provides something of an answer to his own question when he recognizes that American culture so effectively “indoctrinates” people that alternatives to current social arrangements can scarcely be seriously considered. The hierarchical social structure is so deeply entrenched, so part of the world taken for-granted, that it is unthinkingly seen by the masses as “natural” or “normal.”
As seen in any number of examples, such as the withdrawal from politics by growing numbers of Americans, there is scant evidence of class-consciousness in America. As Christopher Lasch maintains, “the propaganda of commodities” reigns supreme. In an increasingly specialized, complex and rapidly changing world, individuals can no longer derive an ongoing sense of meaning and fulfillment from their productive or creative activities. Rather, as Marx would remind us, in capitalistic societies whatever measure of meaning, fulfillment, and self-worth exists is largely experienced through consumptive rather than productive activities.

The author sees ideology as a veiled threat that formally promotes a society’s highest values and informally enforces conformity. As such, it is understandable that the values of freedom, democracy, and prosperity (rather than that of capitalism) – linked as they are to hyper consumption – are called forth to promote and to reinforce current social arrangements; for in the hyper-competitive world of globalizing capitalism the critics of capitalism remain, not only in the street demonstrations protesting against the WTO, but in office buildings and factories throughout the world. In contrast, who among us can question the worth of “freedom” “democracy” and “prosperity,” no matter how illusory they may be for the overwhelming majority of Americans?