

## *Introduction*

The descriptive-explanatory dimension of my theory of social change wrought by the perpetual struggle between hierarchs and resisters is an account of how change occurs. It makes no judgments as to whether changes are progressive or otherwise. The normative dimension evaluates the changes produced by the struggle, identifying some of them as morally progressive. This chapter has two goals: to clarify the nature of the descriptive-explanatory dimension of the theory and to defend its normative dimension against two assaults on the very idea of moral progress.

Before proceeding, I want to make it clear why understanding social change is of exceptional importance. The first reason is that humans are historical beings: To understand who and what we are now, it is necessary to know where we came from; that requires understanding the changes that have shaped the social environment that shapes us. The second reason is forward-looking: If we understand the processes and patterns of past social changes, we may be able to exert more control on future changes and perhaps even increase the probability that they will be progressive. Or at least we may be able to avoid the most regressive changes.

Some social changes are more important than others. Those I examine in this book are among the most important. They are changes in the concepts and norms we use to evaluate the unequal power relations that hierarchies include and changes in the institutions that constitute and regulate hierarchies. I will explain how major changes in moral concepts, norms, and institutions are produced by the struggle between hierarchs and those who resist hierarchical power. That struggle is a contest for extremely high stakes. It is, among other things, a battle for freedom. So, there are two ways to look at this book, more generally, as a study of social change; and more specifically, as an examination of the nature of the struggle for liberation.

Resistance – by which I mean deliberate efforts to control, lessen, or depose hierarchical power – is not the only cause of the destruction of