INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1

THE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The papers collected in this volume are focused on human reproduction and survival over the full span of mankind’s existence. The decline in the last two centuries of fertility and mortality from moderately high, and often very high, to lower levels is called the “demographic transition.” This book examines the determinants of fertility and mortality levels and their balance, from the time when the world’s people were solely hunters and gatherers to when an increasing number live in cities undertaking work far removed from producing food. Although the focus is on reproduction, the search for explanations crisscrosses the work of others whose central concern is production.

The background for the ideas expressed here is almost half a century of experience and research in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Australia. Early experience with fertility attitudes and behaviour in rural West Africa convinced me that, in the circumstances of the population there, uncontrolled reproduction was just as logical as was highly controlled reproduction in industrial society. The reason clearly lay in the economic system, which for the great majority of West Africans was family farming. Nevertheless, it was work in South Asia (rural South India and Bangladesh) from the late 1970s that demonstrated the inner workings of family farming. The progressive expansion of my concept of modes of production can be found in Caldwell (1976), “Towards a restatement of high fertility…” (1977) “The economic rationality of high fertility…” and (1982), Theory of Fertility Decline; Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1982) “The causes of demographic change in rural South India” and (1988), The Causes of Demographic Change: Experimental Research in South India; Caldwell and Caldwell (1992), “Family systems: their viability and vulnerability. A study of intergenerational interactions and their demographic implications;” and Caldwell (2004), “Demographic theory: A long view.”

Much of what I learnt can be summarized from the work on the South Indian farming family at the beginning of the 1980s, supplemented by a study of individual labour inputs in rural Bangladesh (Caldwell et al. 1984). Land tenure was freehold held by the older male farmer. There was not really a free market in land, because, although it could be sold in a crisis, most family farmers regarded land tenure as being descended from ancestors and as needing broad agreement from relatives before the land could be sold. Indeed, when the land was divided between married sons, it was not only relatives but also members of the broader