

# Capitalist Society and Capitalism



**Alan Macfarlane**

Alan Macfarlane: As you can say for most people, the central theme is liberty, equality, and wealth and how you can combine the maximum amount of each of these things because as you know better than I do, Tocqueville in particular saw liberty and equality as opposed to each other. Well, not really opposed but they aren't the same thing and there is a clash between the two. Adam Smith saw that wealth and liberty are not always the same thing; there's a clash. The other thing I'm interested in is the history of Japan, particularly in that theory that you're interested in; that is of Meiji Japan. I've just published a book that is about the material culture and demography of Japan and then I've compared in the last five centuries the histories of Japanese and English civilization, using in particular some of the foreign people who came to Japan, like Edward Morse. I've just read a book—I don't know if any of you had seen it—a book I just reviewed by a fellow named Eisenstadt. He's an Israeli sociologist, one of the great comparative sociologists of the generation of Talcott Parson's and people like this. He's written a number of comparative works on civilization, and this is probably going to be his last great big book. It's called "Japanese Civilization" and it's an attempt to understand why Japan is unlike China and quite like the West, and he has an interesting theory of it, although it's probably wrong.

These are very interesting glasses that I bought in Kyoto, they are typical English professor glasses.

*Tetsuji Yamamoto: We have a very eminent French historian Roger Chartier, so we are very interested in social history and cultural history, and also I am very interested in your work on individualism marriage and the culture of*

*chose such a point of view from which to analyze history and the capitalist system, not from the point of economics but from the point of emotion, culture, etc.?*

Uh, well I think, I was born and brought up in India, in Assam, on a tea plantation, and so my earliest life and memories are of Asia—non-European civilization—so that when I came to England as a small boy of 6 or 7, and went through the English educational system, there was already a kind of contradiction between my childhood experience and what I saw in England and the West. And this has continued from time to time in my life; my wife and I work in the Himalayas—in Nepal—and we now go there every year from 1 to 3 months, and we have a family there. So we have one foot in the individualistic, competitive capitalist world of Europe and the other foot is in my memories of my childhood and also my experience as an anthropologist working in an integrated society, so to a certain extent what I am searching for in history is an understanding of how—putting it very simply—one kind of world turned into another kind of world. The usual evolutionary theory is that all societies were one time societies that were integrated, wholistic, *Gemeinschaft* societies and then they have become more separated and individualistic and capitalistic. And so as a historian, intellectually I have always been trying to work out the emotional confrontation between two types of ways of looking at the world: an integrated, closed, meaningful world, the world you also find in literature in a poet like W.B. Yeats, for example. I was interested in what the poet T.S. Eliot used to talk about, which he called the “disassociation of sensibility”; the splitting of the mind and the heart, what other people have called the Cartesian dualism, the 17th and 18th century rationalization of the world, what Max Weber talks about in his metaphor of the iron cage and what Wordsworth talks about in his poetry about growing up in an enchanted world; it’s the same problem, the problem of disenchantment. All these things I suppose came out of my own experiences of coming from one world into another and as an anthropologist, what you study all the time are tribal societies or small societies which are in some ways enchanted, everything is linked together emotionally and there’s no separation of the mind and the heart. So in order to understand this, you can’t understand this by looking merely at economics, economics is one part of this. But as an anthropologist you have to look at all of it: the political structure, the economic structure, the legal structure, but also emotions, feelings, kinship, love because they are all tied together. I suppose it’s an approach which you also even find with some supposed economists, with someone like Adam Smith who I’m concerned with. His first book was on morality; the moral basis of capitalist civilization. And he wrote, as of course you know, philosophical essays on literature, art, and aesthetics, on all these things which are all tied together. But in order to understand any one part of the puzzle of how capitalist society has developed, you have to study the whole set of things. I don’t know if that’s too long or vague an answer, but anyway, that’s a start.

*So in England also there are many social historians—Shorter, Roy Porter, Lawrence Stone—but also in England, Hobsbawm, and the influence of Hobsbawm, and also another person, Thompson—Edward Thompson the historian. What is your position or your standing point in relation to such historians?*

my degree, and my post-doctoral work there. I that time I was very influenced by this group of people, particularly by Christopher Hill, who was a 17th century Marxist historian, who was going to be my advisor—and did examine—my PhD. I knew him very well, and I greatly admired his work. In fact, my real hero was a man named R.H. Tsaie who wrote *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* and Christopher Hill was really his successor. So I was very deeply influenced by that whole group of people, most of whom were on the board of the journal *Past and Present*, a number of Marxists and others who were on that board. And so I read with great enthusiasm Edward Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Classes*, and the work of Eric Hobsbawm and Hill and some of the medievalists, Rodney Hilton and others. And that’s the kind of social history I wanted to do. But in order to do it, I felt that I really ought to try and understand how societies worked by actually living in a pre-industrial society, which is why I went to Nepal. And also reading deeply about how such systems worked by reading people who had actually been and worked in them. Historians are

trapped, as you know, by the fact that they have to work through documents and therefore they have to—particularly in the areas of emotion—make large leaps of deduction from what they find, and this can lead them into serious errors. For example, you mentioned Lawrence Stone, his work on the history of the family was along the same lines as a French social historian Phillipe Aries and also the work of various others—Shorter was another—who tried to work out from statistical and demographic facts the emotional structure. So famously, Aries and Stone took the view that because there was very high mortality in pre-industrial societies, therefore people could not afford to become emotionally involved in other peoples lives and particularly in their children. This was partly related to the work of the psycho-historians—people like Lloyd DeMaus. Now it's very difficult to check historically; you only have this fact that people died very young and sometimes people make no comments about it. What my wife and I experienced was that when we went to live in societies in the Himalayas where children died very young, rather than finding that everyone was cold emotionally and that love was a recent, modern phenomenon, and that they rejected their children or took no interest in them because they were likely to die, we found the complete opposite. They were deeply involved in their children even if they were going to die, they showed just the same emotional structures as we do. And what I began to be rather upset about was to realize that historians appeared to be doing the same things that Americans were doing in Vietnam, which was to assume that people of another color or in the case of historians, people of a previous era where somehow emotionally inferior; this is what Edward Thompson talks about as the “monstrous arrogance towards the poor” in the work of the previous 4 or 5 historians. And I felt that this was true of a number of social historians and I actually distanced myself from the work of a number of historians; particularly Americans and including Lawrence Stone. Then, in relation to Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill, in the 1960's Marxism dominated historical research and I accepted the Marxist evolutionary framework which saw all societies progressing through a series of stages; from the ancient to the feudal, to the capitalist, and saw England as going through the same kind of framework, for instance which Perry Anderson uses in his work on the lineages of the absolutist state. I just took this to be very likely that all societies had been like this and England was just the same. For some curious reasons, partly because I had studied anthropology which began to undermine this theory a bit, and partly because my wife and I started to undertake a very detailed study of an English village, and this had never been done before. We looked at all the original documents and put them into a computer, and when it got right down to the original documents, the supposed capitalist revolution which R.H. Thorne and Christopher Hill and other had found, began to disappear. It couldn't be found in the materials, so I suddenly began to question the whole paradigm of evolutionary Marxism of that period. My work in a way to explain to myself why I was misled and why the theoretical framework that grew up somewhere between 1940 and 1970 in Western historiography seems to me to be—a lot of it—misguided. And as you know there has been a reassessment of Marxist approaches to Tokugawa and Meiji Japan, which dominated from the 30's and 40's, but in the last 20 years have been challenged in all sorts of way. So the same thing was happening in my work in England.

*Among the historians of town-city ways, I think there was many remarkable works of historiography realized by the Cambridge group. How do you think about the works of this group? Of course it is not an anthropological viewpoint, rather it questioned generally, and your standpoint is rather the anthropological view. How do you think about the work of the group of historical demography?*

Well as you know the work of the Cambridge group grew out of the work of French demographers and their work has influenced me enormously, not merely because I've become friends with Peter Laslett, and Roger Schofield, and Richard Smith. What they did, they didn't work out the complete implications of. I'm thinking of Peter Laslett's work on the history of the English family and household, but what they showed was that the 19th and 20th century assumption that as you went further back into history, England became more and more peasant-like; that the households were more complicated, that the family structures were stronger, that movement between villages was very restricted. The work of Laslett on household listings and the work of Ridley on marriage and mortality and fertility, showed that as you went back in fact there was very little change. They

found that there was an enormous amount of continuity in both demography and family structures, that there was a great deal of social and geographical mobility, that households were small and families were small, but servants were very important. When for example Peter Laslett's book *The World We Have Lost* came out, I was at Oxford at the time talking to Christopher Hill and he was absolutely furious. He hated this book and wrote a savage review of it and I tried innocently to say that it was an interesting book and he was absolutely opposed; for the Marxists it was terrible. He—Laslett—added insult to injury by writing a chapter called "The One Class Society," in other words he challenged the central Marxist assumption that the history of societies has been a clash between the classes because in fact, as he pointed out, "class" is an anachronistic term. 17th century England was not a class society and the attempt of the Marxists to turn it into a class society was a distortion. So, his work and also the work of John [unclear] and others which showed that the European marriage patterns were distinctive from Eastern Europe, from Asia, and were very long in duration; they went back into the late Middle Ages. All this helped me break free from the Marxist paradigm. I was getting two contrary messages; from the political theorists we were getting a picture of the Marxist revolution; uh, the capitalist revolution. From some economic historians we were getting the same picture. And yet, from the demographers, who were the first really to study social structure, we were getting a picture of much more continuity. So it was the usual Kuhnian problem; there were growing anomalies in the paradigm. You either had to reject the demography—as Christopher Hill tried to do—or if you accepted it, this overthrew a great deal of the other paradigm. I have been enormously influenced by the Cambridge group method—in fact, the French method of reconstitution—and Sara and I have applied this, but we have extended it to Louis Henry and others who did it in France but applied it merely to baptism, marriages, and burials. And Sara and I have made it a total reconstitution method, which applies to all records, so you link them all together. And it was actually through that linkage, and seeing all the different dimensions of 17th century village life, that we began to doubt.

*So you compared the history of Japan and the history of England, the similarities in capitalism and the similarities in the crisis of capitalism so you say that kinship is a very important point to understand Europe and Japan. Also, we can't understand exactly the relation between capitalism and industrialization. So for you what is a different concept of capitalism and industrial society?*

So you want me to link this to the concept of kinship as well?

*First, I want to explain the difference between capitalist society and industrialization? Also what is the relation between the concept of kinship to the capitalist system, or the historical process which resulted in the capitalist society or industrial society?*

Well, industrialism has two components and you can have industrialism without capitalism; the Soviet Union was obviously industrial and was not capitalist. Industrialism refers to the method of producing wealth. And it has two components, well perhaps three components. First, its use of energy. In industrialism you use non-human energy largely to produce things. So originally it was steam power, and then oil and so on, so that's what differentiates industrial from agrarian and that's the opposition: industrial to agrarian. This crosses anything to do with the ownership of wealth; you could have an industrial society which as I said was communist or anything else. So the first thing I say is the use of energy. The second is the organization of the productive process and it seems on the whole that most industrial societies have a high division of labor, Adam Smith's division of labor, so characteristically it was extended after Adam Smith into the factory system. So the factory system which like the Ford method of breaking up the task into small pieces is the second major component, so if you have Fordism or factories plus non-human energy plus later on, you have the application of science to the industrial process. If you have those three components, then you have an industrial society more or less. And this could take any political form; it could be fascist, it could be communist,

a vanced capitalist society and in some senses Japan as well. That is because the two central features of capitalism; uh, one is the ownership of the means of production and if it is privately owned if it is held by one segment of the society—if capital is owned by this one segment of society who employ people to work on that capital, that is often taken to be the defining feature of capitalism. A second central feature is the spirit; what Weber isolated as the spirit or ethic of capitalism. And this is basically the fact that in capitalist societies the major motive for people is economic profit and its pursuit, and out of that profit you then can buy goods or do certain things. In most societies historically you have pursued other things; you have pursued merit in Buddhist societies, or you have pursued ritual purity in Hindu societies, or you have pursued power in some travel societies, or kinship or other goals. But the distinguishing ethic of capitalism is that you pursue wealth/money, and if you have that spirit of capitalism—the acquisitive spirit as it is often described—plus the special distribution of capital, then you have a capitalist society. And there have been anthropologists who have argued for instance that some very very simple societies have certainly the ethic—I mean there was a very famous study of the Manus Islanders, I mean this was just an island of fisherpeople in the Pacific. And their ethic was just like Weber's Protestant ethic; I mean they worked very hard and they were constantly looking at the equivalent of their watches; they were trying to save and accumulate; they were thinking about money the whole time or at least the equivalent of money, and yet they were Stone-Age people living in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. So in some ways they were quite capitalist, but miles away from industrialization, so it's quite important to separate these two things. On the other, historically, by accident Western industrialism took place on the whole in a capitalist society. So historically they have been linked although historically they are entirely different, OK? In relation to cognatic kinship; what is meant by cognatic kinship is the idea that you trace your ancestors through both males and females, not just through males. Now if you do that, and you start with yourself and you trace your ancestors as the Japanese do and as the English do—and the Japanese have done this for a 1000 years and the English have done it for 1000 years—the surprising effect is that you can't create a bounded group, because my ancestors and someone else except my brothers ancestors—my cousins ancestors for example—are different people. So I cannot say “we the Macfarlanes” because each Macfarlane in this group will have different ancestors and will have different kin so you form networks rather than groups. So you can't form what anthropologists call “lineage groups”; universal, uh, unilinear descent groups. In anthropology this is different from the French meaning of “*lineage*” which just means ancestry; it means a special group. Now, in most societies, like China, because they trace descent through one gender, they form into groups, they form into clans. Now once you form into clans, as in China or India, you can then build the whole of the society on top of that clan, because this clan can become the effective unit on which the political system is based. You just have these clans united and all politics is controlled within the clan. It can become the effective unit in the economic system and in the social system and as in China, in the religious system; you have an ancestor shrine belonging to the clan. That means that the whole society as in the Confucian model is based on kinship. So you have an integrated system from the top to the bottom and the bottom is the most important and it's the kinship base. That is the Chinese, the Indian, and many tribal societies, and Rome as well. Now that system makes it very difficult to have a free market system, because as Weber pointed out, the essence of capitalism is the separation of the market from society, from kinship and social obligations. If in daily transactions you want to go sell your house, if you want to transact, in many societies you can't do that because wealth belongs not to you, but to the group, to your kin. Likewise, if you want to take a political decision, you can't just do that freely. You can't have a democratic system where you can just vote for this person, because all the rest of your kin will be telling you you must vote for that person. Likewise, in relation to God, you are not free to choose this religion or that religion, because your kin group has already decided at your birth. These are societies which, in the words of Sir Henry Main, are status based societies. Your birth determines your position in the kinship structure, your position in the kinship structure determines your religion, your political affiliations, your kinship actions, everything. Now what was peculiar about Japan and England and Western Europe was because they had a different kinship structure, which is a network, individuals are free in that network to go in different directions, you don't have to do what your cousin does, or your brother does. You can go elsewhere, so you can move geographically. you can move socially. you can worship who you wish. you can enter into political

beginning of the stranger," the idea that your brother could become a stranger is totally unacceptable and meaningless in somewhere like India and China where your brother is your close friend— not necessarily friend—but the person who you work with the whole time. So, cognatic kinship allow a flexibility for a market economy and capitalism to emerge. It doesn't necessarily mean that it will emerge, there are many cognatic societies where it doesn't emerge; hunter-gatherer societies in Africa, the Eskimos for example have cognatic kinship. It isn't a sufficient condition, but it maybe one of the necessary conditions for the early development of capitalism.

*So, the individual is very related to God, but in Japan such a relationship doesn't exist between the individual and God. What's the relation between the individual and God and the free market?*

Well, it's very complicated as you know. As a general characteristic, Christianity—as with most of the Judaic religions—is based on the premise that there is a personal relationship; that there is a God there—a very strong presence—and that the individual worshipper will have a direct relationship to this God; this is a characteristic of all Judaic religions. Urn, and this immediately sets it off in a different direction from Japan. On the other hand, in most civilizations, even the Christian ones, this direct relationship soon became overlaid with a whole hierarchy of intermediary bodies. So you've got developing in Europe from the early time of Christianity—particularly from about the 12th century—a growing set of intermediaries like priests and the Catholic hierarchy, so that the individual—although in theory able to have a direct relationship to God—had to go through all these saints and clergy so by about the 15th century after the work of the Inquisition, then reinforced by the Counter-Reformation, much of Europe was in theory the place where an individual could have a direct relationship, but in practice they couldn't. So it was noticed very early on by observers—Montesquieu I think was one of them—and it gets noticed in de Tocqueville, and then famously by Max Weber in his essay on "Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism" that there seemed to be an association between liberty, wealth, and Protestantism. That the societies that were Protestant which allowed people to be free in their religion and allowed people to worship as they wished, were also the societies that were free in their political structures and were also free in their economic transactions. And it seemed to be the case that the three were joined together and it seemed to be bom out by the history of America where you had liberty of conscience so people could follow their individual consciences in religion, also freedom of the market, and also freedom of association and political allegiance. So the difficulty of course as with all these problems is it is not easy to decide which is the cause and which is the effect. Are you free in your political relationships and wealthy and then have freedom of conscience in religion? Or is the freedom of religion the cause of the other? So Weber, being a very intelligent and clever man, invented this term "elective affinity," and what that means is that there is an apparent joining together, there is an affinity, and yet the word "elective" doesn't force you to say that one is the cause of the other; they are correlated in some deep way. At the simplest level it was noticed people who were able to pursue their religious freedoms were often the most economically active; the Quakers, the Protestant sects, and so on. But this could be explained in other ways, for instance it's often the marginal groups in society—like the Jewish—who are pushed into the margins and all they can do is carry on with their economic activity, like the townsmen in Tokugawa Japan; they have to because they can't pursue the usual activities, so they concentrate on merchant and productive activities. So it may not be just that, and there is of course the final argument, the most famous Weberian argument which is that what happens if you open a direct line between yourself and God is that it leaves you in a very vulnerable position. There were two famous positions of this; one was the famous Calvinist position, that in theory you were either damned or saved at birth, but of course you didn't know which you were. So in order to prove that you were saved, you behaved in a very ethically proper way, you worked very hard; you tried to prove to yourself and to other people that you were saved. And this was all the wider things that this made you into a very orderly person and self-confident person and so on. And also there is this other feature that if anything goes wrong you are constantly re-examined in your behavior because everything that happens in this world is the result of either God punishing you or you yourself failing in some way. So you are faced with a lot of responsibility; you can't blame anything else. Many societies are very fatalistic; you are bom with karma and this is going to happen to you, so you make no attempt to alter the world and so one of

the central claims of Weber and others was that Christianity—in particular Protestant Christianity—sets up a tension between the supernatural and this world, and out of this confrontation or tension you are constantly trying to transform this world here into something better to lift it up to the level of the supernatural world. So for all those reasons there does seem to be an association, so that's why for instance Robert Bellah tried to apply Max Weber to Japan because if Weber was right, then Japan

*My friend is a professor at Toronto, named Edward Andrew, and he is now thinking about conscience in the texts of Hamlet in Shakespeare, as "conscience will make a coward of us all." So, from this concept he criticized the secularization of conscience in the French revolution and also in the modern age. He asked us what is the concept of conscience in Japanese but we can't really find one. Generally we can find concepts like "good heart," or "good mind," but it's not conscience. But probably, there is another element of individual evil and probably Confucianism is like that, but probably this is only applies to the dominant classes of the samurai and not to the regular people who have another kind of mentality and so I wanted to ask you what is the relation between conscience and capital? Is it a different thing? Conscience is in civil society or capitalist society?*

Well, your talk about the absence of conscience in Japan of course harks back to Ruth Benedict's notion of guilt and shame and that was the basis of her argument that the Japanese don't have guilt, because there's nothing internalized. As you know she has been heavily criticized for that because many Japanese do feel a great deal of guilt although she might now if she was arguing say that they may individually, but there's no universal principles and this is an argument that Gina Handley has said you know, there are no absolute principles of conscience; people individually feel guilt but it is related to their particular position or role or whatever in Japan. But there is no universalized notion of conscience in Japan as there is given by the Christian teaching. The question of Confucianism: I have a friend who is lecturer and a professor at Tokyo University and his special field is Confucianism in Korea and China, Hiroshi Watanabe. He tells me that he refuses to allow his students ever to use the word "Confucian." I may have got this wrong but he says that if they use the word Confucian, and Confucianism in the work in relation to Japan, it often leads to a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion, because when Confucianism came into Japan it was altered very dramatically so that when people talk about "Confucian cultures" for example, it's completely misleading not merely because Thailand and other places are not Confucian, but even Japan is not Confucian in the normal sense. It inverts many of the central theories of Confucianism, particularly it's positioning of the family in relation to political authority; it's a complete inversion of Chinese Confucianism which places allegiance to your father above your allegiance to the State; in Japan it's the other way around which completely subverts Confucian thought. Anyway, I don't think exactly that bushido and Confucianism is really the solution and the fact that Japan has been extremely successful as an industrial society, whether it's a capitalist society or not is a very big, important point. I'm not sure that it is in the Western sense. That's another question that I haven't decided, but anyway. As an industrial quality capitalist society it's been very successful, if you argue that conscience is a very important part of industrial success, how can you account for Japan's success? And likewise if you say that conscience is a central part of Christianity, presumably you have to argue that the Spanish, the Greeks, or the Italians; all the other Christian nations, they're all Christian, and yet some of them were conspicuously unable—at least in the beginning—to be successful capitalist societies. So, conscience in itself guarantees nothing. What seems to be important is a particular kind of conscience, which puts a heavy burden on the individual conscience. One of the arguments often put forward is that Catholicism—in some of its forms—rests the conscience with authority; what the priest says is right and because of the possibility of the absolution of sins at confession, your conscience doesn't need to be closely attended to because you can always rectify it at any point by going. Whereas in Protestantism with the abolition of the hierarchy and with the abolition of any methods of bringing your actions back to a safe position, if you went against

what you considered to be right, then you might be damned eternally and certainly there was no way of cleaning away what you had done wrong. So that the moral and ethical standards of many people became raised, even when no one was watching you; even when it was a slightly ambivalent, ambiguous subject you had to raise your standards very high indeed and therefore if you do that, it certainly one of the things that can help in a capitalist society as for example Fukuyama's book on trust shows. It is difficult to run a capitalist economy if most people most of the time are cheating and lying and deceiving and so on. Capitalism requires quite a high level of conscience and it's probable that some elements of Christianity in a certain situation does help that, because God is always watching you. I mean one of the great novels of conscience is the book by Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, which is about a man who is apparently alone on a desert island, and Karl Marx took this as an epitome of capitalism. He is apparently alone on a desert island but all along he is being watched. There is someone there all the time with Robinson and that is of course his conscience or God, whereas my feeling is that if a Japanese had been on that island he could have had a much better time, because no one would have been watching him.

*In Asian societies, including Japan, the visual nature is very different from vision of European societies I think. It is not God but it is rather the universe or nature who controls human beings. This sentiment was very, very strong in the traditional society in Asia I think. But it was not the naturalist attitude, by this conception of the world, the people in Japan consider the necessity of the development of nature. And by the development of nature, they started a system of not so much industrialization, but the development of technology even in Edo period. This phenomena was the condition for the acceptance for the Western technology in the Meiji period I think. So the religious sentiment was very different of course, but by another type of religious sentiment in Japanese society even before the industrial age, the conditions of acceptance of an industrial system was well realized in this period.*

Well, behind that very interesting question is the main difficulty I have in talking about Japan which is that almost everything you say has to be qualified; the attitude to nature in Japan say compared to England is very different. And yet there are some quite interesting similarities, you can see it even down to detail; the attitude towards gardening for instance. In fact, in that case you can see this illustrated because both the Japanese and the English love gardens and yet the gardens they produce are rather different gardens reflecting their different ecologies. If you had to characterize the difference, in England for example, the attitude towards nature is basically as everything else is, contradictory. On the one hand the Christian God has given you nature to master. Also on the whole you are not frightened of nature. It's quite a peaceful nature that we have in England; no earthquakes, tsunami's, and so on. So from very early on nature was there to be mastered, controlled, and it was possible to do so. Nature was made for man and behind nature lay God, and therefore your task was to master nature for your own purposes. So there is a very utilitarian attitude towards nature. On the other hand, particularly at certain periods, people felt a great emotional bond with nature and some of the greatest nature poetry and literature was of course produced in England, where people invested nature with a great deal of sentiment and here again, the Japanese and the English have a lot in common. So the English on the whole had a mastering attitude towards a rather submissive nature. Japan is complicated because on the one hand, the natural world is quite dangerous and threatening and dominates man. I mean from common experience of over 1000 years the Japanese knew that at any moment some dreadful natural event could shatter their lives, and so they felt quite frail; their technology and their ways of living were quite insufficient to control nature and therefore they felt that in nature there were powerful spirits—*kami* and so on—which could easily overcome them. On the other hand they felt and did control it very, very well; they tool enormous efforts to, in a way, domesticate nature. Much of their art and their religion, even down to binding up plants and trees and so on, and certainly their agriculture is a very precise domestication of the natural world. So, in some ways they made a kind of opposition between wild nature which was uncontrollable and in the hands of the Gods, and domesticated nature which human beings could take enormous control of. I think on



didn't make such an opposition. Now where this relates to the case of Japan into an industrial revolution, it is clear that the Japanese took to precise use of technology much faster than any other civilization has ever done. And this is related to the fact that for over hundreds of years, they had been extremely good at controlling natural forces through small technological gadgetry. Their crafts, their agriculture, their housing, everything was of the very highest standards and showed a deep understanding of the laws of physics and so on. So when the idea came along that you would just change technology and control nature in new way, the Japanese found neither any moral objection to that, nor any practical difficulty in doing so. On the other hand, one of the oddnesses about Japan is that with all this technical skill and ability and interest in producing the maximum result with the minimum of effort in some ways, the Japanese still after 1000 years after knowing about Chinese technology and experimenting themselves were so very far from any vestiges of the kind of technologies which had grown up in Europe. So that when Western technology came to Japan there was a huge gap and indeed it looks as if Japan and Europe had been going in entirely different directions. In many ways it's summed up in a famous distinction made by the Japanese demographer Akira Hayami; the difference between an "industrious revolution," and an "industrial revolution." The Japanese had moved towards industriousness; hard work, social planning, good social co-ordination, small scale technologies, to produce an enormous amount on a very small land service. The Europeans had gone the other way, they had gone toward replacing human labor with machinery and with power, and therefore they were able to go off into an industrial revolution. And these are two different paths but curiously the Japanese path quickly switched into the European one.

*Also your comment reminds me of all the themes of violence and revolution in Asia. Especially we have now a project about the possibility to go beyond violence, and in Japanese case you are talking about it in the bad sense. Probably the notion of a long historical process moving from savage society to civilized society, this is probably a wrong misunderstanding, no? So for you what is the relation between violence and capitalism? Or what is the relation between violence and individual society?*

There used to be a famous philosopher, Joad I think he was, who always used to be asked such questions, and he would always say, "What do you mean by violence? Or what do you mean by whatever the word it is you are using? As I was explaining to the young lady who is photographing me, the English and the Americans use violence mainly in the physical sense. The French, are much more sensitive to symbolic violence—that's why there's a lot of interesting work by Bourdieu and other French—is on the symbols of violence; linguistic violence, violence incorporated into architecture, or into clothing, or into body designs, all these kind of violences. So if you, I think the English obsession with physical violence arose out of an earlier, powerful state which felt that you could control and stop people hitting each other, killing each other, physically assaulting each other, grabbing things from each other by force. If you can create that basic non-physical violence, then you can let the rest take care of itself. That on the whole is alright if you've got a fairly egalitarian society, because if you don't have physical violence, and if you have an equality of genders for example and an equality of the classes, equality between minority groups and others, then the kinds of violence the French are worried about—symbolic violence—between the genders, between the classes, between people in power, is less important. There is not much you can do if you are only slightly richer, or slightly more powerful, or men are considered only slightly stronger or better than women. On the other hand, if you have a society where you got rid of much physical violence, and yet if it's very unequal in other respects, it can be just as violent in the French sense because you just suppress any freedom and initiative and creativity and all these things by indirect means; by for instance the rich can by good medical service and the poor can't. Well that's a form of violence; some people have access to health, others don't. Some people have access to education, others don't. Those are all forms of violence against groups, but they tend to be disguised and rather underplayed in the English and American sense. So in a way, the capitalist system was based on a *trick*—as Marx pointed out—which was to say that people were free, and that meant that they were physically free. There was nothing to stop you—as many people pointed out—if you wanted to go out and transact in the market, or if you wanted to go out and have a good education. or if you want

to take our case to legal court because you are absolutely free to do so; no one is stopping you. But as Marx pointed out, “free” in this sense is meaningless, because if you don’t have any money to go and transact in the market or go and have an education, what does freedom mean in that sense? So capitalism is based on concentrating on the physical side of freedom and rather masking or concealing the symbolic and the other forms of violence that take place. I think that in fact capitalism wouldn’t work if you didn’t allow a lot of violence in the widest sense. And indeed you begin to see once you realize it, that human society would stop working immediately if you didn’t have brutality, pain, and violence. Life is constantly interwoven with this; childbirth, for example has a violent aspect and pain and brutality often associated with it. Sports and games have a violent aspect to them. So if you tried to get rid of all physical or other violence and brutality, then society would probably collapse. Likewise, capitalism would very quickly collapse if you started asking by what right Bill Gates has millions and billions of pounds and you and I have whatever we have. And he can do things which you and I can’t do. You have to tolerate a good deal of that. And indeed that was in some ways the central message of Adam Smith and the whole Enlightenment; which was that capitalism thrives on violence. The famous paradox in Mandeville’s work, “private vice, public benefit,” was an old Greek idea and was taken up by Adam Smith, is that capitalism takes our worst emotions and transmutes them: our greed our selfishness our violence towards others, it takes all these things and it harnesses them into a system which, if properly managed, will be to the benefit of all of us. And if you remember the story of the fable of the bees by Mandeville, he ends up by saying that someone came along and took away all the vices of these bees, made them loving, kind, gentle bees. And within a few days the whole hive had stopped; no one was doing anything. They were all so loving and kind and so on, they didn’t bother to go out and get any honey. So that the whole thing deadened. So capitalism has built into it that kind of violence and of course industrialism does too. The factory system that I was talking about—as Adam Smith and others have pointed out—is an extraordinary violent and unpleasant form of occupation; forcing people to split up their lives, segregate them. This was a point that Tocqueville and Adam Smith both made; you may have more efficiency in the economic sense, but you destroy people; they become atomized. In the famous Charlie Chaplin film *Modern Times*, they just spend their whole time making one object. And so they become numbed as people, so industrialism of the old kind, the 19th century kind, was a very violent activity and many societies would have considered it to be so, and yet out of it came a great deal of wealth and the world as we know it. So there’s always been implicit in both capitalism and industrialism a lot of violence.

*So for you as a historical anthropologist, what is post-capitalist society?  
Is it possible?*

Well post everything is very fashionable as you know. And now we’ve got to the post-post. To put it another way, it seems very unlikely that the kind of civilization that came to dominance between about 1700 and now in one part of the world and then has spread to Asia and so on. I don’t believe with Fukuyama that history has ended, I think it’s a ridiculous notion, and he should have realized that it was ridiculous because as you know he took it from Hegel, who claimed that history had ended in 1819. Well it clearly hadn’t ended in 1819 so why should it end in 1985 or any other time? So all civil systems evolve, and the kind of consumer capitalism that historians will describe as dominating parts of the world between 1750 and 1990 clearly won’t be the same in a century’s time, there will be something different. The one thing you learn though from looking at the experience of social thinkers is that if you try and predict what it will be, you will definitely be wrong; every prediction. Even very short-term predictions are always falsified by events. So, if I tried to tell you what a post-capitalist society will be like, all I know is that there will be one.

There’s one addition to the violence and capitalism thing that I should have said. Although, capitalism and industrialism have a very strong link to a certain kind of violence, it was the hope of the Enlightenment thinkers that growing wealth and growing integration of the society would lead to less violence. At the formal or external level, they all believed that up until about the 18th century, war, famine, disease had dominated all civilizations. But something new was happening in the world which meant that for the first time there was a possibility that—this is called the civilizing thesis—as people become wealthier, their social behavior becomes better. For example in warfare, whereas before it was a very good strategy to go and seize and and destroy your enemies, now it

doesn't make sense. When you invade another country what you want are its assets; you don't go round killing everyone and destroy the infrastructure and take the goods as the Mongols did. You leave it as it is, and you just change the person at the top. Likewise, that people for their own enlightened self-interest will treat each other better. So they began to argue that there was a hope that the world will become more open, democratic, civilized, clean, well-mannered, behaved. And they thought they had noticed this. The leading countries in the world at that time like Holland and England were in many ways more democratic and cleaner and more civil than the less advanced societies. And that of course is the theme behind Fukuyama's book; that in a way only in the last 20 or 30 years has it become sensible to argue that perhaps now it has become possible for advanced capitalist societies will now dominate this globe, at least for the next century or two. And although these societies have within them much violence, are in some ways when compared to certain civilizations that have existed before they have certain things to recommend them. That on the whole they have some acceptance of universal human rights and try to minimize warfare and try to give people the vote and so on. So capitalism and industrialism both incorporate a great deal of violence but also might be the one way you might escape from violence. So there's a paradox.

*So for you what does wealth mean? What's the difference from appraise or richness?*

Wealth? Well when Adam Smith used the word "wealth" he meant it,—unfortunately he was taken to be an economist rather than a moral philosopher which he really was—it was taken to be physical wealth. But in the 18th century, it meant "well-being." It is much closer to what the United Nations is now trying to develop which is a "well-being" index which takes into account things like education, social stratification, literacy rates, health accessibility, and so on, and not just GNP. And you can see this very well and I came upon this in the work of Ruskin, the opposite to wealth is a little known word. You may think; what is the opposite to wealth? and the opposite word that Ruskin invented is "illth." And illth is also a word that Lewis Mumford uses, and it means negative wealth; the opposite of all well-being. So war as he says is the pure form of illth; it is negative consumption. It is destruction. And therefore illth and wealth are a pair; wealth means all the good things—peace of mind, security, happiness, good housing, good food, not just material wealth, but spiritual wealth as well. This means that you could have a society that is materially quite poor, and there are many examples of this, but which is very wealthy. That is to say that people are reasonably happy, they are equal, they are reasonably well-fed, they have decent health, their children are well-brought up, they don't have child sex-abuse. And in many respects what we see in Japan is a wealthy society. In many respects Japan is much wealthier than the United States as we were discussing. Traveling on the Tokyo underground you don't feel fear. Fear is a terrible undermining feature of human beings. If you live with constant fear and worry then that is a great form of illth. The fact that the Japanese on the whole have a very clam and restrained system is a great plus. And even if in other respects they may not be in their personal wealth richer—although I think that they are—they can be much wealthier. And that's why for example in England, in a town like Cambridge where I am teaching I feel immensely wealthy. Now my salary is half or two-thirds of an American professor, but I am immensely wealthier than anyone in America. I have all the good things; I have beautiful surroundings, wonderful libraries, very good students, not too much pressure, a great tradition. So I feel very wealthy. I can't think of feeling more wealthy, although as my wife would tell you I'm not particularly rich. So that is what Adam Smith meant when he talked about the "wealth of Nations," he meant the overcoming of war, famine, brutality, all these things; he just didn't mean becoming rich in money terms.

*Concerning the notion of "equality," I think that the notion of equality is very important as human rights, but from the viewpoint of culture, or society, or religion, there is no real equality, rather in the future society we think that the notion of equity is more important than equality as a cultural and social viewpoint. What do you think?*

to strive for too much absolute equality in any sense has always struck the English as both impossible on the whole, and dangerous. A few people like Godwin and others believed in absolute equality, but they were very severely attacked and most of the best philosophers from Hobbes through Locke to Burke and onward, assumed that in practice the world will be somewhat unequal, even if you guaranteed a basic level of equality. On the other hand the English have always been interested in equity; which means fairness. This meant they made a distinction between what is legally the case—that is the laws and justice—which doesn't necessarily lead to fairness. It was an odd paradox. You could be in a situation where you didn't break the law but you were being unfair to somebody. And this is beginning to recognize the idea of symbolic violence. Where you could have perhaps, someone who could deceive an old person; they go to their house and they deceive them. Well in theory, in law if you try and sell someone something and they buy it by law, that's *caveat emptor* (watch out if you are a buyer), the person has already bought the thing, there's nothing to be done. On the other hand equity and fairness would say that you should treat old people slightly differently; there is a difference between being old and young. So equity constantly took into account the differences; men and women, the poor and the rich, and it tried to balance up all the things which are not balanced by law. So equity, we have thought equitable, fairness. My wife is a magistrate in England and many of her decisions are taken with the idea of reasonable and fair behavior, not just the narrow legal position. And like in what you said at the beginning this is the central thing in de Tocqueville; while he accepted that the New World had to be based on the new principle; he realized you couldn't go back to the old status-based hierarchical principle. On the other hand the dangers of aiming at too much equality as he saw it was a despotism of the majority, was a destruction of culture and religion. Just as life has to absorb some violence it has to absorb some inequalities. And you can see the terrible consequences of aiming at too much equality; the two greatest disasters of the 20th century—Chairman Mao, Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, the 3 greatest dictators of the 20th century apart from Hitler, are people who went out with the aim of supposedly creating an equal society and look where it ended. So an acceptance of the basis that everyone has certain rights, but after that you try to aim for equity rather than equality. I think is a very sensible point of view.

*So a social historian insists on the importance of romantic love and...what is the relation between romantic love, marriage, family and capitalism?*

Well, there are many relations. One is that the family system that has developed in the West is based on romantic love, so this flexible system I was talking about before doesn't give anyone any particular right in your marriage; there is no one who will tell you that you must marry so and so. An arranged marriage can't exist if you don't have these groups. In that situation, how are you going to know who to marry, and why marry at all? So romantic love acted as a kind of emotional and institutional mechanism for creating marriages where there were no groups to create those marriages. So the arranged marriage systems of China and India and so on can only work when you have these groups. But when you have these loose networks you have to have some other mechanism for entering the market. Well, Japan is a sort of half and half case—marriage is both arranged and free—and always has been right to the top level. In the middle level in Japan there has been a tradition whereby parents try to help the young children to marry someone and there will be intermediaries. But on the other hand the young children will make the decision themselves and bring someone to show the parents. And quite often the parents will suggest someone, but if the young person doesn't like that person at all, then they can "no I don't want to marry that person." Now Japan has historically been halfway between a romantic love and an arranged marriage civilization; which is what one might expect given its family structure. Now the association between romantic love and capitalism in the article I wrote there I rather took the same argument as Max Weber on this, which is that at the heart of capitalism and at the heart of the marriage system there is irrationality just as there is violence at the heart of capitalism so there is instituted irrationality; we tend to think of capitalism as very rational but it is also very irrational as well because the urges that lead you to act in capitalism have no rational basis. For instance, when one of us goes down to Mitsukoshi and sees this wonderful computer or something and I feel this overwhelming urge—it wouldn't be shoes in my case, but something like: "I must have this Toshiba laptop no matter what

I do”—now there’s nothing rational about that decision. It’s just a feeling I have toward that object that I have towards that object; it looks beautiful, it works well and it will help my life. Well, Max Weber implied that the feelings that you have in marriage are similar; you suddenly meet a beautiful lady and you think “I must have that beautiful lady, she works well, she will change my life; I must possess her and own her, and I must make her mine.” Now the possessive, emotional drives that lie behind capitalism and the marriage system have a curious similarity. Now this being the case, much of consumer capitalism—not in Japan, curiously—but in America much of the economy is run by romantic love. That is to say if you watch American or English television; you watch the advertisements, you read the magazines, you listen to people talking; what is driving people to consume is sex and romance and love. It is the theme of 80% of our plays, our poems, our novels, are sold on romantic love and sex, in Jane Austen for example. But now shoes, drinks, cars, anything is attached to this drive to mate and procreate. The two have become closely associated in culture.

Interviewer Tetsuji Yamamoto