

## **REFLECTIONS ON PEASANT AND CAPITALIST MORALITY**

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### **Introduction: presumption**

It is obvious that whether we regard it as superstructure or infrastructure, the moral world of a society will have to fit with the economic, social and political worlds. If we believe that there **is** a real difference between peasant/capitalist social formations in their socio-economic structures, we **should** find a difference in their moral systems - which, of course, deeply influences their economic and social behaviour & particularly their 'strategies'.

In this paper I will first provide a very brief 'ideal type' sketch of a few of the features of peasant and capitalist morality, distilled from a number of monographs and analyses of peasantry, and our own work on English villages from the C15 to C18. Then I will throw out a few suggestions as to what might explain the differences. Two ways in which one might approach a sketch of moral systems are by considering the levels of morality and the boundaries of morality.

### **1. LEVELS OF MORALITY**

#### **a. The embeddedness of morality; economy and society unified.**

The 'embeddedness' of morality (Polanyi), not exactly the 'moral economy', but more the morality of the economy. In other words the questions of whether people are to be treated as means or ends, whether the ends of behaviour are economic or social etc. The basic message of Chayanov is really that the ends in peasant societies are social, the productive efforts are the means to those ends. Only capitalist societies have turned the means into ends: "the transvaluation of values in modern times is also apparent in the habit of regarding the means to any end as the end itself." (Sombart, Quintessence, 330). This is part of the association of social/economic, the breaking of which Weber thought one of the major features of capitalism. The pursuit of economic ends, profit, as an end in itself is immoral in a society where the separation of economy and society has not occurred.

#### **Impressions of economic morality of early modern England**

One general impression that comes through strongly if we look at the English evidence from the fifteenth century onwards is the degree to which from a very early period there is a moral system governing economic behaviour, certain actions and attitudes are just, right, praiseworthy, but this morality changes in only small ways through the centuries. That is to say, it is difficult, certainly at the local level, to find evidence of a revolutionary transformation of economic

morality.

We might have expected at the start of the period (say 1400) to have witnessed economic behaviour embedded in social and religious constraints. We would have expected many 'capitalistic' practices and attitudes to be forbidden and penalised, for example the central feature of interest and acquisition. Gradually, as in the analyses of Weber and Tawney, the rules should be changed so that people were now 'free' to pursue their economic objectives.

E.P.Thompson tried to resurrect this notion in a mild way in relation to the eighteenth century. "It is difficult to re-imagine the moral assumptions of another social configuration. It is not easy for us to conceive that there may have been a time, within a smaller and more integrated community, when it appeared to be 'unnatural' that any man should profit from the necessities of others" (Thompson, *Moral Economy of Crowd*, P & P,50, p.131). As the rules changed, so we might have expected a shift in the nature of the game. People who had before tried to maximize social and ritual goals, perhaps, would now try to maximize economic profit in a 'rational' (Weberian) way. At the same time we would have expected a transformation of a moral economy appropriate to peasantry, with communal and family restraints, to one based on the individual.

Yet, in so far as we can see behind the documents, there is little trace of this revolutionary shift. It is difficult to see any obvious universal movement, with all the rules and ends of behaviour changing dramatically. At the start, it would seem, land and labour were treated as commodities on the market. Their use and acquisition were, of course, subject to rules about what was acceptable, and hence economics, as it always is, was embedded in morality. But it was not an embedding of a different kind from that today. In other words, there was not a 'sea' of kinship or religion which prevented accumulation. The same rules that governed behaviour in the fifteenth century, as far as we can see, were those that governed it in the eighteenth or nineteenth.

#### **b. Embedness of morality; natural and supernatural joined**

According to Sombart, in capitalism "the natural world with its fullness of life, has been shattered to atoms; on its ruins an artificial world of dead matter has been erected by human ingenuity" (Sombart, *Quintessence*, 331). This is again related to Weber's "disenchantment of the world". Basically this is about the relations between economics and religion, or between the everyday world of practical action and the supernatural world.

As M.Mead (*Cult.Patterns*, p.217) puts it, "in many cultures throughout the world man is continuous with his environment...". There is an idea that the universe cares, is morally significant (Redfield, *Primitive World*, 106). Put in another way, "There is no sharp line of demarcation between gods, men, and animals..." in an Indian village (Beals, *Gopalpur*, 48). This almost universal belief in an interpenetrating moral world is believed to have existed in mediaeval Europe; as M.Bloch put it (in *Royal Touch*,42), there was an absence of natural and supernatural barriers in mediaeval religion; in the middle ages "the two worlds interpenetrate one another".

A very frequent correlate of this is that social discord brings divine retribution. This almost

universal belief, found in Greek thought (Dodds, *Greeks*, 34), and many areas of the world where, for instance, it is thought that quarrels will disturb the crops (F-H, *Nepal*, 108), that disease and social tensions are linked (Horton, *Trad Thought*, i., p.54; Forde, *African Worlds*, 13; Epstein, *Craft*, 198). There are hints of such beliefs in C17 England, as there are today. Thus clerics warned that swearing might bring illness and plague (Whitforde, *Householder*, ciii (or liii?)); others thought that thunder and lightning might be sent by God to prevent a man sending his beasts onto the commons (Tawney, *Agrarian*, 148) Keith Thomas has given other instances of the way in which the material environment and man's moral behaviour were linked (*Religion*, 89,91).

Yet if we look at local evidence and literary evidence from the C16 what is most striking in England is the degree to which natural and supernatural had become separated and morality was a thing of this world. There are hints of a link in Ralph Josselin's diary, but he was a pious man. In the extensive court records and other sources, there is little evidence of a linkage.

While Hogbin (*Chance*, 138) argues that the concept of the morality of the universe disappears in periods of great social change, and one might apply this to the C16 to C18, it seems more likely that already the nexus between nature and man had been cut by the utilitarian attitudes towards the natural world. The disenchantment of the world had already set in before the period which are covered in our records. This is very far from the world which Redfield describes in 'The Peasant View of the Good Life', p.316: "for him (i.e. peasant) divinity is in all nature, and the farmer walks on holy ground...farming is practical action suffused with religious feeling..." There is little trace of this in Josselin or other C16 or C17 English sources.

### **c. Individual embedded in group: limited good and conformity**

It has been noted for a long time by anthropologists and others that envy, jealousy, the idea that one person's gain is another's loss, is a central feature of peasant societies. Margaret Mead noted that "titles, powers, prestige and wealth, are considered quantitatively finite. Hence the gains of one person are viewed as reducing the prospects of others." (*Cult. Patterns*, 132; cf. also *Male and Female*, 197). We are told that the concept of limited good is intrinsic to Chinese thought (Freedman, *Chinese Mge*, 15; Douglas, *Nat. Symbols*, 131), is widespread in India (Lewis, *Indian Village*, ch.8) etc. It manifests itself in a number of ways, as Foster in his well known article has shown. (Foster, *Limited Good*).

There is fear of praise; to praise something is bound to be insincere, since one does not feel it in one's heart and hence close to an admission of envy and hence close to witchcraft" the person who compliments is, in fact, guilty of aggression; he is telling someone to his face that he is rising above the dead level that spells security for all, and he is suggesting that he may be confronted with sanctions." (in ed. Potter, *Peasant Society*, 314). (e.g. Kardiner, *Psychological*, 307; Foster, *Ltd Good*, 304).

Furthermore, There is a fear of ostentation; there is a systematic understatement of wealth (Bailey, *Caste*, 165) and a belief that the rich must have become so through evil means, through a

stroke of good fortune (finding a pot of gold e.g. ) at the best, through the help of the Devil at the worst (Bailey, Caste, 106; Campbell, Honour &, p.336). ' Large accumulations of wealth may cause death without apparent cause' (Kardiner, Frontiers, 114). "To be much better off than his fellows would be dangerous" and must have been achieved by witchcraft (Richards, Land, 215). It is believed that the interests of unrelated families are mutually destructive; if one rises, another must fall (Campbell, Honour, 204,272). Summarising this, Redfield notes that in the peasant 'view of the good life' "wealth is to be held within decent limits; it is not to be thrown about or too obtrusively vaunted." (p.315)

Now it would not be difficult to find hints of this idea today or in the C17; envy, relative deprivation, a fear of being exposed, are always present, even in affluent capitalist societies. Thus, for example, one finds at the higher theoretical levels, in the philosophy of money implicitly in the mercantilist period of the C17 and C18, one country's gain was another's loss (as Smelser, Economy, p.5); as Francis Bacon wrote of trade, "for whatsoever is somewhere gotten is somewhere lost" - Essays, 45). It was Adam Smith's achievement to show that this was not necessarily so; the economic charter for unlimited good and competition leading to an ever-expanding economy.( cf. Carr, The Sexes, 232) But the change came late.

There were signs of a belief that resources were limited and one person's prosperity was always linked to the bad luck of others (e.g. Hunt, Parents and Children, 120). Envy was a powerful and widespread emotion (Bacon, Essays, 24-5; cf. also Piers Plowman, p.69-70). Even in small ways, people had to be careful; too much mirth and laughter could lead to misfortune (Whythorne, Autobiog, 127; Nashe, Terrors, Diii verso). This is clearly linked to a central theme in Greek thought, namely that of 'hubris' or pride before a fall (see Dodds, Greeks, p.30; and nice quote from Oresteia, Klein, Adult World, p.29).

But what is strange is relatively how little evidence there is of a zero sum mentality, a world of limited good. Of course it continued in force on the Celtic fringes of the British isles (e.g. Moryson, Itinerary iv,200 on Ireland; Graham, Scotland in C18, 192), or, as De Tocqueville pointed out, in much of Ancien Regime Europe (Ancien, 134): "they were all trained to envy, delation, and hatred." It may have re-asserted itself in the depopulated villages of nineteenth century Britain, for instance in the Oxfordshire villages described by Flora Thompson where "their ideal for themselves and their children was to keep to the level of the normal" (187); "there was nothing they disliked more than seeing one of their number doing better or having more of anything than themselves" (p.216). This led to great conformity - "you can't afford to be on bad terms with anybody in a small place like this" (p.281). They remind one of the "frogs in a well" of Indian proverb, who pull each other down if they try to escape.

Yet if we turn to the diaries, letters, court cases and other evidence for the C16 to C19, for the majority of the population, there is singularly little of this. Of course there is back-biting and scolding in some of the court cases, but ostentatious differences of wealth were encouraged and tolerated, the high social mobility of different members of the family or community was widespread. People were keen to become richer and better educated and to show it. It is a different world from that of what we hear in backward peasantries.

## **2. THE BOUNDARIES OF MORALITY**

Morality stretches as far as social relations. A shared moral universe is usually limited to the boundaries of particular arenas. Thus most societies have a system of separate moralities. As Simmel puts it, "the earliest phase of social formations found in historical as well as in contemporary social structures is this: a relatively small circle firmly closed against neighbours, strangers or in some way antagonistic circles..."(Sociology,416). The most obvious invisible boundaries are as follows.

### **The morality of kinship**

While in the majority of societies there is some form or variant of "amoral familism", that is the idea that the boundaries of morality end with kin, in early modern England there is a singular lack of evidence that the boundaries of family were the boundaries of the moral universe. Of course, in a clash, one put family interests before those of a stranger, and of course people were fond of some of their kin. 'Advice' to the sons of aristocrats no doubt warned people to beware of non-kin. But such books of advice also warned people not to borrow from kin; a strange piece of advice in many societies.

It is also true that the relationship between parent and child and particularly between husband and wife was the model of the trusting, confident, open one, upon which the relationship with God should also be modelled. But though this was one's deepest area of trust, it did not exclude others. There appears to be little evidence that it was widely believed that outside the nuclear or close extended family there was a world filled with deception and intrigue, where lying and cheating were the order of the day. There is little impression of a world where it was one's duty, in shielding one's family, to undermine one's neighbours and 'friends'; where proper 'friendship' was impossible and disinterested altruism inconceivable; a war of all against all with each family competing against all others. One of the most surprising features that strike one from the records is the minimal degree to which the moral world was confined to the family. Soon the children would grow up and depart and perhaps live elsewhere. Josselin's moral universe, for example, like ours, contained many more non-kin than kin.

### **The community boundary: trust and strangers**

Related to this was the strange and rather uncharacteristic assumption that people could, on the whole, be trusted; the expectation of good rather than evil in social relations; that a man was what he seemed; that a man's (or woman's) words were to be believed. It appears that friendship could grow between people who did not know much about each other's background. It was clearly possible for an easy familiarity to grow with complete strangers.

It is difficult to think of any type of behaviour which was considered legitimate within the family as a whole and considered illegitimate outside and vice versa. There was not a moral world boundary at the edges of this particular social world. This helps to explain to explain some

of the features of the perviousness of the nuclear family.

In one sense, the nuclear family is absorbed into and obliterated by the wider forces of market and State. It has been conquered almost entirely from the outside, though a few of the harshest bargaining features of the capitalist system are dropped outside its door. On the other hand, the morality which has never crept out from the hearth in the beleaguered families of much of the world has, to a large extent, conquered society. To a certain level, everyone who comes within sight is a member of the family. Universal politeness, respect and even trust are marks of the true 'gentleman' or gentlewoman. No person has entirely forfeited their humanity. All require a minimum of fairness and decency and respect for their rights and liberties.

In other words, kinship and morality are not co-terminous; we are very far from a world of 'amoral familism', of 'cosa nostra', of such a desire to put the family first that kinship enters into everything through nepotism and other channels.

### **The morality of country and town**

The morality of towns and country are particularly strongly opposed in the majority of societies. As Redfield put it, "the rustic sees the gentry and the town as sources of dangerous new ideas, places where doubt is cast on what the peasant believes and where new cults and corruptions occur..."(Peasant View...321) or, as Foster writes, "The city, with its glitter and opportunity, holds a fascination, like a candle for a moth. But at the same time, and for good cause, peasants hate and fear cities and city dwellers..." (in ed. Potter, Peasant Soc, p.10).

London in the early modern period, of course, had a special flavour, but on the whole there is little evidence from the quite extensive studies we now have of many cities and towns that the morality of town and country was very different. It is a matter of interpretation as to whether one believes this is **urbs in rure** or **rus in urbe**, the conquest of the country by a bourgeois mentality, or vice versa. I incline to the former. What is clear is that as people moved from town to country, they did not get that shock of moving between different moral universes which is recorded for so many European and other peasantries.

### **The morality of strata or estates**

Again there appears in England to have been a rather curious absence of different moral universes as between economic strata and occupational groups. Of course, if one goes to the very extremes of the wealth hierarchy, one does get a sense of difference. Thus the world of the very poor wandering vagabonds did, in a sense, form a sub-culture with a separate moral code. The accounts of the language and lore of wandering rogues in the Elizabethan period shows this, just as later the language and lore of schoolchildren would show a similar difference. Likewise, the very rich and powerful no doubt had their own moral codes in which honour and shame played a larger part.

Yet restricting ourselves to the 99% of the population who lived between the two extremes,

two preliminary points can be made. Firstly, it is true that there are signs of a growing divergence between the moral worlds of those at the upper and lower levels and this can be seen in a thousand features of the material and non-material culture. Yet certainly in the earlier period and even towards the end of the eighteenth century, the society is still a long way from the rigid divisions one observes in most 'estate' societies.

One cannot see in the evidence opposed moral worlds of the bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the lords and the clergy. The basic premises of morality, both the rules of what was fair and reasonable and equitable, and also the feeling that all people, whatever their wealth and background, should be treated by the same rule, were widespread. The poor might be inferior in one respect, but they were still humans and it was sinful to cheat and lie to them. The rich might be oppressive, but it was not immediately assumed that they were entirely without scruple. The idea of **noblesse d'oblige**, of the public duty of the gentry (cf. Taine), of public offices, of duties to the commonwealth etc., are all expressions of this.

### **The morality of the genders.**

When we consider the village evidence in England, the most striking fact is the absence of two moral universes. This could be documented in relation to the ideals of female behaviour and male behaviour, in dress, language, sexual morality and so on. What is striking is that the secluded and differentiated world of women and men, each with their own moral rules and scarcely touching each other, which is a central feature of societies from the New Guinea Highlands through to Hindu and Muslim peasantries, and even to Catholic and Celtic ones, seems conspicuously absent in England.

The explicit opposition of men and women in symbolism (e.g. the sheep and goat metaphors of the Sarakatsani) and the constant war of the sexes, is minimized. Of course, in witchcraft, in fears of the 'monstrous regiment of women', in the strutting and sexual innuendo of courtiers, we find traces of some opposition. But from Chaucer to the Brontes, and from high to low, what is unusual about this civilization (as De Tocqueville noted for America as well), was the easy and relaxed attitude between the sexes.

Just as in law, unmarried women were equal to men, and in religion they were equal before the Protestant God (despite gibes that they had no souls), so in morality they lived on the same moral plane as men. There was not one moral law for men and another for women, and the 'double standards' were restricted to pragmatic matters of inheritance and the confusion of heirs, as in the question of adultery.

### **The geographical variations of morality**

The morality of different regions is usually very different in peasant societies; what is praiseworthy in the fenland, is not necessarily what is right in the upland or the champion country. The morality of shepherds is not the same as that of settled farmers. One might, therefore, have expected the moral universe of upland Kirkby Lonsdale to be different from that

of lowland Earls Colne.

Though this is difficult to prove, there is little indication in any of the quite extensive documentation that this was ever the case. Unless it is the homogenizing effect of the records themselves, there is little trace in the various local histories of various parts of England, nor in contemporary accounts such as the **History of Myddle**, that there were deep moral differences between parts of England. A patchwork quilt of small geographical areas, each inhabited with half-closed moral worlds, is not applicable to England. There is a curious homogeneity.

Just as the wider geographical world seems to have been spread out with a more or less even morality, so, at a lower level, morality seems to spread itself evenly over the space of the parish. We can see this, for instance in the contrasts of sacred and profane space. Although there were, of course, mildly sacred spaces, like the altar, the heavily emphasized differences which one finds, for example, in Catholic or Celtic societies, with their grottoes, holy wells and fountains, dangerous areas where spirits prowl, is almost totally absent. Folklorists have found slight echoes of the enchanted and magical other world which usually interpenetrates with this material one, but they are very slight (cf. K.Thomas). If one had asked a contemporary whether there were certain areas of a parish where it was permissible to do certain things, and others where it was not, it would be difficult to find examples. Space was largely uniform, the flat and morally neutral setting for man's existence.

### **Temporal boundaries of morality**

Likewise, time was largely without moral heights and depths. Despite attempts to find traces of a Durkheimian ritual calendar which gives different periods of time an uneven character, there is little evidence for this in the village records. Of course the church calendar did give a different quality to the times of feast and fast, to Lent and to Easter and to Christmas, to the holy days and to the Sabbath. There is something in this. But when we contrast this with the peaks and troughs of time in many traditional peasantries, whether in India, Europe or china, the nuances in England are restrained and mild. It could be argued that this was a result of the Protestant purging of the 'superstitions' of Catholicism and certainly they emphasized this tendency. Yet it would seem that time had already been evened out well before the Reformation.

In order to relate this directly to morality, it does not seem that certain behaviour was morally permissible at certain times and not at others. An interesting index of this is the almost total absence of ritual and moral inversion. For example, the times of moral licence, when the normal rules do not hold; the 'feast of love' or holi in India, or Lent and Carnival in southern Europe, are conspicuous by their absence. There is no trace of the feast of fools, the boy bishop, times of licence etc. in either of our parishes. Probably the closest to these phenomena were the muted celebrations at May; erecting of the May Poll and dancing, with the notorious (though as yet demographically unsubstantiated) sexual excesses. Josselin complained about this in Earls Colne, but there is little evidence of riotous behaviour in other sources. Also at Christmas there is some evidence that the usual rules were a little modified; but as today, only slightly.

### **CONCLUSIONS AS TO NATURE OF THE PHENOMENON**



Characteristic                    "peasant" "capitalist" EC

LEVELS

Economy "embedded" in society	yes	no	no
Man "embedded" in nature	yes	no	no
"Limited good" widespread	yes	no	no

BOUNDARIES

Social:

Family the boundary of morality	yes	no	no
Community the boundary of morality	yes	no	no
Town/country morality opposed	yes	no	no
Social orders opposed	yes	no	no
Male/ female genders opposed	yes	no	no

Geographical:

Regional differences large?	yes	no	no
Sacred/profane space in locality?	yes	no	no

Temporal:

Strong variations over time?	yes	no	no
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**SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENON**

1. The deeper question then is, how does one explain the 'set' or cluster of features of morality which seem to generate such contrary answers to the questions above? This is where I could seek help from the seminar. Among my first guesses would be:

a. Moral rules **tend to stretch as far as the boundaries of effective communication**. In the majority of societies, this tends to be the family or little community. But by the C15 in England, through high mobility, a common language, a common law, widespread use of money and paper, etc. the flow of communications at every level was quite considerable. Hence the moral communities tended to be bounded by the nation, or even Europe. Today, with global communications, the expansion has been from the nation to the whole globe.

b. Moral rules have an entirely different set of features **depending on the basic units of the society**. Archetypically, peasantries are based on the DMP, which is based on a familial basic unit. The moral rules are co-terminous with this basic unit, or the slightly higher level unit of a group of co-residing units, the little community. This is a world where the social and economic (and ritual and political) boundaries are still the same. In such a world, it is not surprising that the moral boundary, which supports the interconnections, should be aligned with this.

But in a situation where the disassociations have occurred; where, in theory at least, the family is one thing, the economy another, the polity a third, and religion a fourth, one enters an entirely different moral world. Here one has the individual as the only locus of the interconnections; only the individual is the focus of all the different spheres. And thus, only the individual is a moral

being. On the other hand, the surprising trade-off, is that if the individual is a moral being, to be treated as such, he/she must treat others in the same way. "Do as you would be done by" becomes the philosophy. It is not possible to envisage a moral hierarchy. This is carried to its furthest extremes in America, as described by De Tocqueville.

c. The nature of morality is also altered very much by **the separation off of the supernatural from the natural world**. If the two are interfused, as in the magical universes of most societies, then a moral lapse will reap a mystical punishment. But the disenchantment of the world is one of the basic features of capitalism, and hence in a single-dimensional world, without miracles, without proper ritual, without taboo, with only the blind clock-maker, moral lapses can only be dealt with as forms of breaches of etiquette (i.e. social relations) if minor, or criminal offences against the State, if serious.

d. The nature of morality must be deeply affected by '**commoditization**'; this is the burden of some of Marx/Sahlins' work. When land and labour are directly linked to the worker, then one can see how they are endowed with morality. Perhaps this is the basic requisite for the magical world view, the interpenetration of spheres. Once the intervening layers of private property, paper, money, high mobility and all those features which lead to 'alienation' have been inserted, then the umbilical chord, which is what, no doubt, Marx would call it, is cut.

e. Perhaps the clue lies more in **the ways in which the productive and consuming units are linked**. In swidden cultures, there is usually a finite ceiling on wants (Sahlins' affluent society), and plenty of means to attain them. There is little sense of constriction.

Developing some of Sahlins' and Foster's ideas and putting them together, we might distinguish three major situations (which sounds somewhat like the Dickensian equation about income/expenditure, on a large scale!)

Social formation ends means outcome

Hunters/ swidden limited unlimited "affluence in simplicity"

Peasant/ herders limited limited "limited good"

Capitalist unlimited expanding "scarcity in plenty"

(Communist) unlimited limited frustration/ revolution)

In peasant, landed, societies, already there is a shortage of means to attain the goals of the society; extra effort and cunning often do not pay off as the landlord creams off surpluses. It is a moral world of watchfulness etc. Furthermore, since much of our thought is relative, the advance of one neighbouring family or group is a relative deprivation, even if not an absolute one.

The situation changes in several major respects in a capitalist/ modern society. Firstly, the wants are still infinite and unattainable, but they are moving away, like the rainbow's end, rather than being fixed. And individuals are in hot pursuit of them - also moving. For example, with modern technology, the amount of energy available per person increases year by year, so that each person feels richer/ is richer - even though relative to others or to his goals, he or she never seems to progress. It is a moving escalator situation, rather than the peasant standing on the bottom rung of

a ladder.

Secondly, with high geographical mobility, and increasing compartmentalization, it is possible for there to be sufficient social distance for people to be allowed to move. In many societies, the success of one family member, or one family, causes distress to others; one's nose is rubbed in the mud. The cost of no man being an island, and that all are part of a continent, is that if a part of the continent shifts, the whole continent shifts. If we decide to toll the bell, to advance dramatically, then the sound deafens and irritates those around one and various measures are used to bring the individual back into line - as in a school.

Of course, all societies groups have these pressures. But the morality of conformity, attack on greed etc., is particularly strong it would seem in the middle-stage societies, which are in the worst of all positions. Tribal peoples can attain most of their goals, because their goals are limited. Capitalist people can feel that if only they strive a little harder they will attain their goals. Only peasants know that they are condemned to a life of eternal deprivation and that the best they can do is to stop anyone from escaping from the mud, a mentality which we found also in prisoner-of-war camps, bad schools etc.

3. Specifically turning to the problem of "limited good", there are several possible explanations. One theory is the materialist one. The 'good' really is limited and everyone can see it. Hence their morality reflects a real situation; like Bacon, they thought that one person's gain was another's loss. In this interpretation, it is sustained economic growth and the application of new technology and power which will give peasants the confidence to break out of such a world view. A little of this applies to England. It is obvious that from the C16 to C18, with some blips, people were year by year, on the whole, getting richer as economic performance outstripped population growth. This is an unusual situation in most societies, and it is particularly unusual that the benefits should have gone to the mass of the population, rather than being creamed off, as in India, China etc. by the elite. So there were grounds for expansiveness.

Another theory is a social structural one. One's feelings of limitation are linked to the nature of social groups and individual ties. Basically, in a society based on status groups and real communities, each movement of one person affects the others. The bell that tolls for others at death also tolls at their promotion, the birth of a boy son, the high productivity of a field, a windfall. Hence we all feel involved, and people feel ambivalent at other's success.

Furthermore, within the community, even though wealth may be expandable, other things are definitely finite - for instance power or reputation. Much of the fighting within a zero sum game atmosphere of bounded groups emerges from this (see McKenzie, *Politics & Soc. Sciences*, 220). Another's rise in power or prestige is necessarily one's own loss; hence the obsession with honour and shame, with aggressive protection of reputation of the group.

For strange reasons, as yet unexplained, C17 villages were a long way away from this. We do not find it in Gough's Myddle or Josselin's Earls Colne. The political community did not overlap with the residential community, the religious community did not overlap with the family etc. As a result, people could move up one without threatening the other. A person could be a dutiful

younger brother, and yet Lord Mayor of London. There was moral space for movement and individuality. Even women were given a certain amount of space. This is all very unusual. My hunch is that the only other major civilisation where we shall find it is in Japan.

Put in other words, a contractual society (Maine) will not suffer from the image of limited good, a status society will. Thus it is as much the social organization as material world that determines this - as we can see with Hunters and Gatherers, who often live in an 'Original Affluent Society' unafflicted by the image of limited good.

## **CONCLUSION**

Whatever the reason, standing towards the end of the C20, if we peer inside the moral worlds of a number of "peasant" societies, whether in the Third World (as summarized by Redfield, Foster et al.) or in Europe (e.g. Horse of Pride, Christ Stopped at Eboli, People of Sierra, Pig Earth, Irish Countryman etc.), we do get a sense of shock, of "otherness". They are indeed a "foreign country" from our capitalist standpoint, which need a leap of imagination to understand.

But when we turn to C16 England onwards, not just local but also national sources, though we notice differences, of course, we are not in a "foreign country" in morality. On the continuum between the two extremes we have outlined, Earls Colne is quite far towards the "capitalist" end - obviously less so, say, than a commuter suburb town now, but much more so than many a continental village or even Celtic community still is today.