

Talk to J.C.D. Clark seminar, All Souls, Oxford, 3rd November 1986. Alan Macfarlane

**'Individualism Reconsidered: the use and abuse of comparative models for the study of early modern England.'**

**Prefatory note:** Thank for inviting.

My advice to paper-givers is, never apologise; I will not do so, but perhaps I may explain a change of plan. When Dr Clark invited me to give this paper I somehow had the notion that the seminar was early modern - i.e. fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. I therefore offered to talk about my attempt to probe the origins of English individualism and the reactions to that. The main reactions were from medievalists and the talk I had already in mind was a consideration of what was left of my model of a non-peasant England from the C13 to C16.

Two things then happened.

a) I was sent a copy of the programme, and a note from Dr Clark inviting me to 'reflect on the implications of your individualism thesis for the latter part of the early-modern period.'

b) Dr Clark had kindly sent me a typescript of his latest book and I read this and his **English Society** for the first time, and been greatly stimulated by both.

I have therefore decided to take considerable risks - namely to give you some much less polished reflections on subjects which have only recently occurred to me, trespassing on a century which is not my speciality. But innovation, risk and excitement are probably better ingredients for a seminar than polish and a closed argument.

**What I want to do:**

1. Note a puzzle - namely that starting from a basic identity of view as to the non-revolutionary nature of the C17 and C18, Dr Clark and I should come to apparently totally opposed views on the nature of that continuous society. How can that be?

2. I will look at the use of implicit and explicit comparative models in our work to show how we may have come to opposite conclusions and explore the value of 'ideal types'.

3. I will then try to provide a synthesis whereby a modification on both arguments could lead to a more accurate representation of English society through the C17 and C18s.

Naturally, my remarks on Dr Clark's ideas will be over-simplified and largely based on guesswork, but he is here to expose my errors.

**The basis of Agreement**

The very deep premise upon which Dr Clark and I agree is that the supposed 'revolutions' of the C17 and C18 have been wildly exaggerated; that the striking feature of English society, say between 1500 and 1800 is continuity. I will cite only two of Dr Clark's **many** sensible remarks on this:

'If little changed in English society in his (P.L.'s senses between the reigns of Elizabeth 1 and Anne, it is difficult to see that much changed, in those senses, before the end of the C18 in most areas.'<sup>1</sup>

or

'We may indeed wonder whether England has ever experienced revolution in the extensive terms of the social scientist's definition in the 1640s, 1688 or 1714, or even under the later impact of Industry.'<sup>2</sup>

Absolutely. I could not agree more.

But what **was** it that persisted and changed in a non-revolutionary way?

If there was no Tawney-Hill watershed in the C16-C17, then two roads can be taken from that fact.

### **AM's argument**

The road I took in **Individualism** was to argue that many of those 'modern' features - encapsulated in words like 'capitalism', 'market economy', 'individualism' etc., which I had been brought up to believe were the result of a revolution in the C16-C17 were **much** older. I thus pushed them back and found no evidence of a properly 'collective' or 'pre-capitalist' or 'traditional' or 'peasant' society giving way to a new social formation, no watershed etc.

This led me to a second conclusion, that England was very peculiar - structurally unlike other 'ancien regime' societies back into the middle ages etc.

Implicitly, there was a third conclusion, that being 'non-traditional' etc. by the later middle ages, there was no need for any 'revolution' whether in the C16, C17, C18, or C19. There was constant change, but no great divide or watershed.

### **JCD's argument**

Curiously, the same premise led Clark in exactly the opposite direction. If nothing radical happened in the C17 and C18, he argued, the great divide must be later - he located it in 1828-32. If that was the great divide, then there were two implications.

a) England before that was 'non-modern', i.e. to use the adjectives which occur very frequently in his work, it was an 'ancien regime' society - patriarchal, hierarchical, aristocratic, deferential, soaked in religion, dynastic, the 'confessional State', by implication still feudal where people inhabited a magical, duelling, gemeinschaft, status-based world. This was the 'world we have lost' and we lost it in 1828-32 through the overthrow of the Anglican-Aristocratic hegemony.

The explicit concomitant of this was that England was just another 'ancien regime' like France, Spain, Germany, or whatever. His **English Society**, for instance 're-emphasizes the similarities

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<sup>1</sup> □English Society, 88

<sup>2</sup> □Revolution, 76

between England before 1832 and other European social systems of the ancien regime...<sup>3</sup>, for instance 'England and France...both were **ancien regime** societies...'

The **puzzle** is, how is that people starting with so much basic agreement have come to completely opposed views on the basic issue of a) what England was really like b) whether there was a revolutionary divide c) whether England was just like, or very different from, other European societies?

There are likely to be many explanations of the differences of interpretation, but certainly part of the reason lies in the comparative models we have used. If we examine these, I think we can see a little more how the divergence took place.

### **My use of models and the comparative method**

One of my major reasons for interest in anthropology has been for its use of the comparative method, which is basically an expansion of De Tocqueville's remark<sup>4</sup>, 'no one, who has studied and considered France alone, will ever, I venture to say, understand the French revolution.'

The comparative method operates through the use of 'models'. What do I mean by models? Well, basically, I mean what Weber meant by 'ideal types'. Perhaps I may be allowed a short digression on this.

### **Weber's Ideal Types**

Weber argued that the deductivist, positivist approach to history was no longer sustainable after the Kantian revolution, or what Collingwood termed the 'Copernican revolution'. We need theories to construct reality as well as the other way round.

1. 'Hundreds of words in the historian's vocabulary are ambiguous constructs created to meet the unconsciously felt need for adequate expression and the meaning of which is only concretely felt but not clearly thought out.'<sup>5</sup>

Such words would be Christianity, capitalism, peasants, individualism, patriarchalism, 'confessional' State, ancien regime etc.

2. 'If the historian...rejects an attempt to construct such ideal types as a "theoretical construction" .i.e. as useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable uses other similar concepts without formulating them verbally and elaborating them logically or that he remains stuck in the realm of the vaguely 'felt'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> □ p. 6

<sup>4</sup> □ Ancien Regime, 21

<sup>5</sup> □ Methodology, 92

<sup>6</sup> □ Methodology, p.94

The objectivity of the social sciences, including history, lies precisely in the magic of turning subjectively created models into devices for exploring the past and present.<sup>7</sup>

The greater the need for 'a sharp appreciation of the significance of a cultural phenomenon, the more imperative is the need to operate with unambiguous concepts which are not only particularly but also systematically defined.'<sup>8</sup>

So what is an 'ideal type'? It is a conceptual construct which is neither historical reality not even the 'true' reality...It has the significance of a purely limited concept with which the real situation or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of certain of its significant components...<sup>9</sup>

'The ideal-type is an attempt to analyse historically unique configurations or their individual components by means of genetic concepts.'<sup>10</sup>

'The construction of abstract ideal-types recommends itself not as an end but as a means.'<sup>11</sup>

'This procedure can be indispensable for heuristic as well as expository purposes...it is no 'hypothesis' but it offers guidance to the construction of hypothesis.'<sup>12</sup>

Another way of conceiving of part of what he meant is the concepts of benchmarks - ends of a continuum (hence often binary as status/class, charismatic/bureaucratic, irrational/rational).

How does one construct an 'ideal type' - through a mixture of intuition and scholarship. An ideal type is 'a conceptual pattern' which brings together certain relationships and events of historical life into a complex, which is conceived as an internally consistent system. Substantively this construct in itself like a **utopia** which has been arrived at by the analytical accentuation of certain elements of reality.'<sup>13</sup>

Weber points to two particular dangers in this necessary operation. **Firstly** we may confuse the two senses of 'ideal', reading in moral judgments and values into a theoretical exercise: 'the only way to avoid serious and foolish blunders requires a sharp, precise distinction between the logically

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<sup>7</sup> □Methodology, pp.110-11

<sup>8</sup> □Methodology, p.93

<sup>9</sup> □Methodology, p.93

<sup>10</sup> □Methodology, p.93

<sup>11</sup> □Methodology, p.90

<sup>12</sup> □Methodology, p.90

<sup>13</sup> □Method, p.90

**comparative** analysis of reality by ideal-types in the logical sense and the **value-judgment** of reality on the basis of ideals.<sup>14</sup>

The second **danger** lies in the confusions that occur when using real materials when clothing the model. A comparison of the ideal type and the 'facts' as a procedure which 'gives rise to no methodological doubts so long as we clearly keep in mind that ideal-typical developmental **constructs** and **history** are to be sharply distinguished from each other...'<sup>15</sup>

'The maintenance of this distinction in all its rigours often becomes uncommonly difficult in practice due to a certain circumstance. In the interest of the concrete demonstration of an ideal type...one seeks to **make it clear** by the use of concrete illustrative material drawn from empirical-historical reality. The danger of this procedure which in itself is entirely legitimate lies in the fact that historical knowledge here appears as a **servant** of theory instead of the opposite role. It is a great temptation for the theorist to regard this relationship either as the normal one or, far worse, to mix theory with history and indeed to confuse them with each other...there is an almost irresistible temptation to do violence to reality in order to prove the real validity of the construct.' (e.g. in Marxism which is ideal typical, not historical).<sup>16</sup>

We can end by giving perhaps Weber's clearest definition of the ideal type:

'An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent **concrete individual** phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified **analytical** construct (Gedankenbild). In its conceptual purity, this mental construct (Gedankenbild) cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality. It is a **utopia**. Historical research faces the task of determining in each individual case, the extent to which this ideal-construct approximates to or diverges from reality, to what extent for example, the economic structure of a certain city is to be classified as a 'city-economy.'<sup>17</sup>

### **My model of peasantry**

In order to understand English society over a long period I created a model of peasantry, which I explicitly stated was a Weberian 'ideal type'<sup>18</sup>, 'a model, a simplified abstraction from reality'. As a result it would be absurd to expect any particular society to fit all the features exactly; nor would we expect any specific feature to be entirely 'pure'.

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<sup>14</sup> □Methodology, p.98

<sup>15</sup> □Methodology, p.102

<sup>16</sup> □Methodology, pp.102-3

<sup>17</sup> □Methodology, p.90

<sup>18</sup> □p.16

How I constructed the model is laid out in **Individualism**; a mixture of the use of general models propounded by people like Redfield, Wolf, Thorner, Nash, Sahlins, Shanin, Galeski and Chayanov, with clothing taken from specific studies of peasantries throughout the world and in particular Eastern Europe.

When I created the model ideal type, I looked at the English evidence, fully expecting to find that England moved rapidly in the C15-C18 from one end of the continuum (peasant/traditional etc.), to the other. The explosion in my mind, surprise and amazement that the data did not fit the predictions of an ideal type which I had largely unconsciously accepted over the years, is what is captured in the book. Later I would employ the same method in relation to models of violence, demographic structures etc.

I had intended to devote most of my talk to examining the ways in which this approach was attacked, and my answers to these attacks. But since this mainly concerns the medieval period, perhaps I can just list the criticisms:

Some said that the model of peasantry was based on too few instances; to my mind this fails to realize the wide-ranging work of anthropologists and sociologists I have already named. It is certainly a distortion to say that it depends on Eastern Europe alone.

Others said that I should have clothed it from western rather eastern Europe and there are arguments for such an approach.

Others thought that I should not have foisted modern definitions of 'peasantry' onto the past; there is again a danger of anachronism, but it seems that to make our models as explicit and careful as possible is the only way to partially escape from this danger.

Others argued that the model was not complete enough - that I should have added other elements, e.g. more about production systems. And so on.

Out of this it emerges that I could have improved the ideal type, but as a method it appears to retain some validity.

Others questioned the factual accuracy of the sources I used for eastern Europe, Shanin, Galeski etc. There may be some truth in this criticism but it only trivially affects my argument, mainly suggesting, if it is right, that east European peoples were not as near to one of the bench than books about them had led me to believe.

The fact that many historians had thought that England was a peasant society (with all the connotations of that world) up to the seventeenth century at least, and that this could not now be argued, does not seem to have been shown to be wrong.

Basically what I did was this:

Contemporary foreigners

Historian/AM -> -> -> -> 'The past'

A second strategy to supplement this was to consult those who had in some ways done the same thing, but during the period under observation. I will only mention one of these. De Tocqueville constructed a superb model of what an 'Ancien Regime', 'Traditional' society looked like, namely France in the C18. In doing this, he made a number of comments about England, comparing it to such an ideal-type of *Ancien Regime* society.

What did he find? I can only quote two passages here: speaking of the C18.

'In England, where at the first view it might be thought that the ancient constitution of Europe was still in full vigour', this was not the case. 'Shutting your eyes to the old names and forms, you will find from the seventeenth century the feudal system substantially abolished, classes which overlap, nobility of birth set on one side, aristocracy thrown open, wealth as the source of power, equality before the law, office open to all, liberty of the press, publicity of debate...Seventeenth-century England was already a quite modern nation, which has merely preserved in its heart, and as it were embalmed, some relic of the Middle Ages (Ancien Regime, p.21)  
or again:

'Wherever the feudal system established itself on the continent of Europe it ended in caste; in England alone it returned to aristocracy. I have always been astonished that a fact, which distinguishes England from all modern nation and which can alone explain the *peculiarities* of its laws, its spirit, and its history, has not attracted still more than it has done the attention of philosophers and statesmen, and that habit has finally made it as it were invisible to the English themselves...Montesquieu visiting Great Britain in 1739 wrote correctly 'I am here in a country which hardly resembles the rest of Europe...'

Thus 'it was far less its Parliament, its liberty, its publicity, its jury, which in fact rendered the England of that date so unlike the rest of Europe than a feature still more exclusive and more powerful. England was the only country in which the system of caste had been not changed but effectively destroyed...' (Ancien Regime, p.89)

Every word of De Tocqueville, which was echoed by many others including Montesquieu, and reflected in the writings of philosophers, travellers like Arthur Young, etc. seems justified.

Thus I stood, finding England a strangely market-penetrated, contractual, individualistic society long centuries before the C18. I rejected those like Polanyi who seemed to believe that the 'modern' economic system was born in the early C19, or Dumont, who believed that *Homo Aequalis* was only conceived in the time of Mandeville.

It was therefore with amazement that I read reviews of Dr Clark's work which suggested that he believed England to be a 'traditional' 'ancien regime' society up to the 'watershed' of 1828-32.

Let me first summarize Dr Clark's thesis in an oversimplified way.

Basically, the story is as follows. There was no 'revolution' in the C17 (political/ideological) or in the C18 (industrial), just gradual changes with continuity. Thus the outstanding features of the society were that a) it was 'old' rather than 'modern' 'traditional' or 'ancien'.

b) this had several characteristics. Firstly it was still basically very hierarchical. There was a prevailing 'aristocratic ethic', a 'dynastic idiom', 'patriarchalism' and 'paternalism'. Thus we are told that 'many of the patriarchal characteristics of social structure, so well described for the C17 by

Laslett can thus be found through much of the C18 as well.' (English Society, p.69) The aristocracy were still very powerful, the monarchy still divine, 'the attempt to argue the divine right of Kings continued.' (English Society, pp.121ff)

c) secondly it was still Christian, religious. Dissent and agnosticism were rare, religion and law and politics were combined, 'the patriarchal, hierarchical, confessional state found its language not in rights, but in writs...' (English Society, pp.191-2) , this was a 'unitary and confessional State...' (English Society, p.93) Thus 'In ancien-regime England, the mass of the population was organised...not be political parties but by churches...' (English Society, p??).

With immense erudition and considerable wit, Dr Clark demolishes the older view of a Lockian, contractual, bourgeois society, and repaints a picture which reminds me of what I thought I had just demolished for the C14-C15.

It is an eerie feeling. I had been rolling back 'ancien regime/traditional' etc. through the medieval centuries and then find it popping up again bright and splendid in the eighteenth century, behind my back.

If the C18 was a 'lost world', when was it 'lost'? In 1828-32. Dr Clark admits that modern historians had tended to miss this revolutionary change. For instance 'modern parliamentary historians...have usually seen no great discontinuity in 1832. A modest but not revolutionary number of men received the vote...Magnates continued to hold sway in elections...' (English Society, p.409)

But if we look more widely, 1828-32 was the great divide. The main change was a new and successful onslaught on the two central features of the 'ancien Regime', the aristocracy, and the 'confessional State', the Anglican Church.

There seems some muting of the argument in his later book in phrases such as 'If a profound discontinuity is to be diagnosed, it is better located in 1828-32...and...more profitably analysed under the category rebellion...' (Revolution, p.81)

But I think that there is still in Dr Clark's wise picture of 'ancient as opposed to modern', of a religious-aristocratic world that was dominant in Europe and then was smashed in various places - France first, then England, and so on.

The puzzle is wider than merely a diametric conflict between his and my interpretations, for it is also between almost all those who lived at the time and thought deeply on the subject - e.g. Tocqueville/Montesquieu, the Scottish philosophers etc. and Dr Clark.

*What is Dr Clark's method which leads him to these conclusions?*

This can be analysed at *two levels*: in the more conventionally historical way what he does is to take certain strands of what is thought to be the 'traditional' world before 1660 or whenever, and try to show that they were not destroyed in 1688, 1714, by the industrial revolution or whatever.

Often this is extremely effective and his account of the continued power of the aristocracy, of the church, of monarchy etc. seems pretty convincing to a non-expert like myself, and also a useful corrective to a tendency to make the C18 *too* progressive.

Occasionally one can see that he is scraping the barrel; thus to try to suggest that the C18 was as magical/witchcraft infested etc. as earlier centuries and e.g., that Keith Thomas only accidentally



stopped his book on *Religion and the Decline of Magic* in 1700, is far-fetched. Or again, the evidence on duelling or the touching for the King's Evil, really does his case very little good. Neither was a conspicuous feature of the *ancien regime* in 1828 and magicians and witches were similarly thin on the ground.

But it is a useful counterbalance. The *mistake* seems to be that in trying to minimize the other elements - the Lockian, commercial, limited monarchy, individualistic etc. he has distorted the picture.

He seems to believe that to prove that there was a great deal of wealth and power in the hands of the large landowners, or that the Church of England was a continuing force is enough to lead us to classify England as 'traditional', 'ancien regime' etc.

That this is not a necessary sequitur is superbly shown by De Tocqueville. He anticipated both of Dr Clark's main points. He readily conceded that in some ways England was the most 'aristocratic' of countries in Europe. He argued that throughout Europe and particularly France the nobility were being impoverished and their power was slipping away, but 'The contrary was only met with in England. In England the old noble families which still existed had not only preserved, but also had largely increased their wealth...' (Ancien Regime, p.86)

As for religion, 'Speaking generally, it may be said that in the C18 Christianity had lost a great part of its power in all the continent of Europe; but in most countries it was rather ignored than violently attacked...' (Ancien Regime, p.158)

The one exception was according to De Tocqueville England, which was surprisingly pro-religious, for example, as Clark documents in detail 'Great political parties, as always in free countries, found their interest in uniting their cause with that of the Church...' (Ancien Regime, p.163)

Yet De Tocqueville, as we have seen, found no difficulty in arguing that despite, or even partly *because* of these aristocratic/religious elements, England was not only different, but also far from 'ancien regime'.

What De Tocqueville was able to show was that things can *both* change *and* remain the same, and that there are many forms of hierarchy and integration in the eighteenth century.

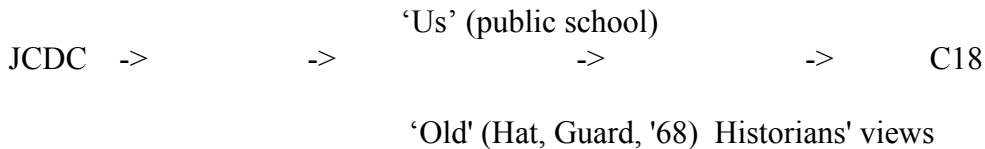
The second level at which we can analyze Dr Clark's work is in his use of models. As Weber argued, the historian is always using terms which imply models, always comparing; the only question is how far he thinks about these and how explicit he makes them. Let us look at Dr Clark's use of models.

Dr Clark begins his *English Society* by saying that 'This is a revisionist tract...it begins the attempt to outline an alternative model of English society under the ancien regime...' (p.1) As far as I know he does not use the word very often again, but it is clear that he is implying models. But what are they? With what specifically, is he comparing the C18 in order to be able to use words like deferential, hierarchical, 'confessional State', 'patriarchal', etc.

What is clear is that Dr Clark is *not* comparing it in any detailed way to other societies at the time. If, for instance, some precision had been wanted for the term 'confessional State', one might have looked at Portugal or Spain in the C18 and the relations between the Holy Office of the

Inquisition and the Crown. This might have made Dr Clark pause before he used the phrase 'confessional State' for England. But apart from the odd aside, which is usually not entirely convincing - such as 'the differences between the powers of the monarchy of Louis XIV's France and James II's England were more theoretical than real' (Revolution, p.170) , no attempt is made along these lines.

So what is the comparison? There seem to be two axes which could be represented thus:-



Let me explain what I mean. In a number of amusing passages, Dr Clark sends up and shows the weaknesses of the Old Hat, Old Guard, Class of '68, historians. But *they* are really his masters because much of his work is a polemic against them. They were united, in seeing the C18 as Lockian, bourgeois, irreligious, 'pudding time' etc.

He tests their propositions and finds that they have in many ways overdone it, and he violently reacts to the other extreme. The world was not as Plumb, Thompson, et al. painted it...therefore, conceiving that the only alternative to their vision is the traditional 'ancien regime' model, he rebounds in that direction.

I shall return to this, since I have at times felt the same urge to refute my masters but this is a recipe for curing some of the mistakes of one's predecessors, not necessarily for escaping from the wheel. One often makes as many, if different, mistakes. The trouble is that one is using the past as a pawn in an intellectual game with other historians, and it is the past that suffers.

A *second*, more implicit, model is developed by contrast to one's own life experience with that of the period being studied. Dr Clark is very well aware of this method in previous historians. He has many sensible observations on the subject:

'Historians have, as a profession, carried their own class-perspective back into the ancien regime...(English Society, p.10)

Reading back the revolutions of 1968 was particularly blatant: 'This intrusion of modern reference into scholarship by a particular cohort of historians was curiously marked.' (English Society, p.10)  
 'Provincialism was the new insight of an age reacting against central planning...' (Revolutions, p.112)

Seeing England, as the revisionists did, as little different from Europe, was a reflection of contemporary political changes. '...in an age of European integration, they were encouraged for a variety of reasons to question the Whig assumption that English society was...profoundly different from its continental neighbours.' (Revolution, p.318)

Or, more loftily: 'It is understandable, however, that socialist or liberal doctrine should seem vital and important to men who are themselves contemporaries of the Russian Revolution or of Mr Asquith.' (Revolution, p.324)

The prescription which Dr Clark suggests to detect this is that 'the historian's own historical location must be diagnosed if any of us are to imagine that we can transcend it in even the smallest degree...' (Revolution, p.324)

I have not noticed much formal self-diagnosis by Dr Clark, and it would be impertinent to my host to undertake too much here. But there are some revealing asides.

Basically, Dr Clark sees C18 England as 'Christian, monarchical, aristocratic, rural, traditional and poor.' Every word of this cries out for an explicit comparison - but what he means by 'rural', 'poor' etc. is soon revealed, for the point of the characterisation is that modern historians of the 1960s and 1970s could not understand this world, share its world view, because they came from a society 'indifferent to religion, hostile to authority and rank, urban, "plural" and affluent.' (English Society, p.9)

How then can Dr Clark understand it? Does he not also come from such a society? The only escape, other than Weberian model-building or true comparison, must presumably lie in the fact that Dr Clark somehow feels that while, presumably, he cannot avoid relative affluence, and urbanism, he is not as hostile to authority or indifferent to religion as those historians who got it wrong.

If this is a legitimate inference, and if it is legitimate to tease Dr Clark by applying the same labelling technique he has applied to gleefully to others, 'Old Guard' etc., it begins to look as if we have to add to his list what one might call the 'Old Etonian' model of the C18.

I have been through all these schools: Having been to a minor public school, and hence starting with such a life-view, then being taught by the 'Old Guard' in the 1960s, in Oxford, then being specifically one of the 'Class of '68 (I was at LSE in '68), then become a Revisionist in the mid 70s, and then gone back to the 'Old Hat' liberalism of the continuity school, I suddenly realize what Dr Clark's C18 reminds me of. A British public school.

Change a few words - monarchical for Headmaster, hierarchical for year groups, patriarchal, for fagging, deferential for deferential, aristocratic for the school prefects, and the whole thing, soaked in Anglicanism, the true 'confessional State', and we have it all.

This is perhaps what Dr Clark has implicitly in mind?

But joking apart, it seems that while destructively doing a great deal of good and providing a highly readable and amusing synthesis of much recent research, Dr Clark's work is not a satisfactory alternative.

*So where now?*

It may sound curious after all that I have said, but I believe that the two theses of *Individualism* and of a persisting *Ancien Regime* can be integrated in a way that *does* offer an improvement. I will tentatively suggest two strategies to achieve this.

The first is for both Dr Clark and myself to concede that there is not merely a binary choice between 'capitalist' and pre-capitalist', 'Modern' and 'Ancient', 'New World' and 'Old World'. I find it easy to see how such thinking has distorted Dr Clark's analysis and forced him to lump together England with the rest, merely because it is different from 'us'. But I think that the same in a different way is probably true of some of my work.

If one accepts that England was unique in the C13-C18 in being *neither* like other continental countries (except Holland), but also *not* as individualistic or capitalistic as we are now, one has 'formation x', as yet unnamed.

Once one has accepted this, what are its features?

2. Here one might be accused of cheating, but I think that the reason for the diametrically opposed views of historians and their rapid wobbling back and forth over the last hundred years is that England was *all* the things it was said to be. If one develops the idea of paradoxical statements *both* of which are simultaneously true, one could create a list of paradoxical features.

Let me give an example of what I mean: in a review of Keith Thomas' *Man and the Natural World*, I started as follows:-

'England in the 19th century presented the inquiring foreigner with a series of strange paradoxes. It was the most urbanised country in the world, yet the one where the yearning for the countryside was most developed. Its anti-urban bias was shown in the prevalence of parks, the ubiquity of flower gardens...and the emphasis on rural values in the Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite movements. England was the most industrialised country in the world, the one where animal power was least used and where animals were consequently no longer central to production. Yet it was the country where the concern for animals was the most developed, expressed in creative literature and art, in concern for animal welfare and in the widespread prevalence of pets. England was still almost the most carnivorous of all societies; yet it was the most concerned with arguments for vegetarianism. England was a country in which man and animal had become separated, nature had been subdued and distanced. Yet it was in England that Darwin finally linked man and nature through the theory of the evolution of species. In sum, England was the most developed capitalistic society, where man lived in a largely artificial landscape, yet it was in England that respect and love for the wild, the wet and the non-artificial was most developed.' (Review)

Now if we take this extraordinarily paradoxical attitude back in England, we can see over the ages a series of paradoxes, some of which Maitland drew attention in the most and *yet* least centralized etc.

England was the most *monarchical* of governments, but a country where the Crown was under the law and, as Montesquieu put it, 'their laws not being made for one individual more than another, each considers himself a monarch; and indeed, the men of this nation are confederates rather than fellow-subjects...'

It was, as Dr Clark points out, a land where there was singularly little difference between the mentality of town (English Society, p.70) , which could lead one to argue with equal confidence that it was the most rural of societies, or the most urban.

It was in many ways the most religious of societies, as Dr Clark points out, in that there was little vicious attack and a great deal of conformity to the Anglican church. But again it could be argued that the vapid non-confessional nature of Anglicanism allowed everyone to go their own way, or again to quote Montesquieu, 'with regard to religion, as in this state every subject has a free will, and must consequently be...conducted by the light of his own mind...the number of sects is increased...' (Spirit)

Or again, with *Individualism*; in many ways it was by far the most individualistic society, in that private rights, particularly in property, were highly developed. On the other hand, there were few societies where the individual was so tightly bound into a social structure based on money, deference, a strong law etc.

It may be bland, it may be helpful, but I think that starting from the same spot, and taking very different roads, it could be seen that these two theories are the warp and the woof of a very peculiar society and *complement* rather than *confront* each other.

(5600 words)