Manners, Deference, and Private Property in Early Modern Europe

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Contents

This essay is an attempt to map out the rudiments of a theory of manners and formal deference and to demonstrate how such a theory can be usefully applied to certain long-standing problems in the historical sociology of Europe. It is also meant to demonstrate the continuing relevance of comparative ethnography for social theory—something which has been somewhat cast into doubt in recent years.

The historical problems I have in mind is how Max Weber's famous observations (1930) about how the rise of Puritanism was related to the emergence of a commercial economy in early modern Europe can be related to processes that other scholars have noted during that same general period, the rise of "puritanism" in its more colloquial sense, even in areas totally unaffected by Calvinist theology. I am thinking particularly here of the work of Norbert Elias and Peter Burke. Elias (1978:70—84) has made a famous argument that the sixteenth century marked the beginning of a broad "advance of thresholds of shame and embarrassment" throughout Western Europe, an increasing tendency to repress open displays of or even references to bodily functions in everyday interactions—a process which came to a peak around the end of the nineteenth century. Burke (1978:207) has noted that at this same time Church authorities throughout Europe were also engaged in a much more explicit campaign to "reform popular culture"—that is, to eradicate what they considered to be immoral elements in public life and ritual. English Puritans of the time spoke of both as part of the same "reformation of manners."

What I am going to do is take up certain rather old-fashioned ethnographic categories— "joking relations" and "relations of avoidance"—originally coined by European and American anthropologists to describe what they considered rather odd and extreme forms of behavior current in non-Western societies they studied; and I will use them to create at least the rudiments of a general theory of manners. This, I think, can make it easier to understand how these three processes—Weber's Calvinism, Elias's standards of comportment, and Burke's reform of popular culture—are really one and how all of them were part of the same historical process which brought about ideologies of absolute private property and the increasing commercialization of everyday life.

Taking this sort of approach might seem a bit idiosyncratic. Even anthropologists do not talk much anymore about "joking and avoidance." For most, such terms evoke memories of large dusty tomes about New Guinea or Nepal, full of pictures of people who seem to have been intentionally photographed in such a way that you could never imagine having a conversation with them, arcane diagrams and unlikely generalizations ("the Nayar say"). Like most contemporary anthropologists, I find most such old books a bit creepy, if only because they are so obviously products of imperialism. Certainly I would not dream of writing such a book myself. But I also think there are still things in those old tomes which can be of use to social theory. One of the reasons is because the people who wrote them were often confronted with practices they considered so odd and exotic that they lacked any Western rubric to fit them to. Living among a certain Melanesian group, say, a researcher discovers that a young man who happens to meet one of his cross-cousins on the road is expected to insult him and that in fact it might even be considered an affront if he does not. The researcher coins a term ("joking relation"). Another researcher, somewhere in Amazonia, discovers where he is that cross-cousins are expected to behave in what seems to be exactly the same way. Even the insults are similar. Something is clearly going on here.

If nothing else, in using terms like "joking relation," these people were not simply inflicting Western categories, raw, on the people that they studied. This is important because it seems to

me that much contemporary social theory—particularly theories which focus on the body as the primary locus of social power and experience (such as, Foucault 1982), B. Turner (1984), Feher (1989), Game (1990)—is doing exactly that. At the very moment that they have argued that broad comparative approaches are impossible and probably a form of imperialism, critics have also begun indulging in veritable orgies of Cartesian dualism (despite all protestations to the contrary, it is hard to see what sense the concept of body makes anyway without a mind with which to contrast it), assuming that this approach is somehow appropriate to describing the experiences of people whose perspectives owe nothing to Descartes or any of his influences. For this reason, this study can also be added to the growing literature criticizing the way "body theory" has been applied to anthropology (for example, Csordas [1994], T. Turner [1994, 1995]). But I do not want to think of it primarily as a criticism. I would hope this study's real importance is as a positive contribution, both to history and to provide the outlines of a broader theory of deference and its relation to the human person. The main advantage of taking a comparative approach, it seems to me, is that it provides the possibility of creating something more enduring.

JOKING AND AVOIDANCE, SUBSTANCE AND PROPERTY

In the anthropological literature, the expression joking relation does not really refer to a relation of people who joke with one another, for it refers more to a relationship marked by playful aggression. "Joking partners" are those people who are expected to make fun of one another, tease, harass, even (often) make play of attacking each other.[1] Relations of avoidance on the other hand are relations marked by such extreme respect and formality that one party is enjoined never to speak to or even gaze upon the other.

Some ethnographers (such as, Eggan 1937) have been known to use the term more loosely, describing a kind of broad continuum of types of interaction ranging from obligatory joking to relations of indulgent familiarity, then proceeding through relations marked by greater and greater formality and deference to those of extreme or literal avoidance. Used this way, joking and avoidance represent two ideal poles, and almost any relationship between two people can be placed somewhere between them. Whether or not they take this view, anthropologists have always seen joking and avoidance as clearly opposed modes of behavior. In fact, they seem in many ways to be logical inversions of each other. Where joking relations tend to be mutual, an equal exchange of abuse emphasizing an equality of status, avoidance is generally hierarchical, with one party clearly inferior and obliged to pay respect. One often hears the term joking partners in the literature, never "partners in avoidance." In avoidance relations, contact of any sort between the two parties tends to be discouraged: Such relations are full of stipulations about how the inferior party must not speak first or speak much or speak above a whisper, must not look the other in the eye, must never touch the other first or touch them at all, and so forth. Almost always, the inferior party must steer clear of any sort of reference to or display of such bodily functions as eating, excretion, sex, or physical aggression. One often hears of injunctions against seeing the other eat, touching her bed, behaving violently in her presence, making reference to excretion in casual conversation, and so forth. Emphases vary, but the general direction of such prohibitions remain surprisingly uniform throughout the world. And just as regularly, joking re-

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[1] For this reason using the term "joking relation" might seem a little deceptive, since this has little to do with humor—but I must ask the reader to simply bear this in mind. This is not a theory of jokes.

lations play up all that avoidance plays down: One hears constantly of joking partners engaging in sham fights and sexual horseplay, of lewd accusations and scatological jokes. In some cases, the aggressive element can become very strong: One hears also of joking partners privileged to throw excrement at one another or even wax-tipped spears.

The two stand opposed in other ways as well. Almost any description of avoidance, for instance, will make some reference to shame: Often it is said the inferior party is expected to have a general sense of shame in the presence of the superior party; if not, they are certainly expected to be ashamed if they break any of the rules. Joking between joking partners is, as the name implies, generally expected to be accompanied by much hilarity on the part of all involved. But it is important to emphasize that what goes on between joking partners is not simply humor; it is humor of a very particular kind, one which might justifiably be called "shameless," an intentional invocation of the very things that would be most likely to cause embarrassment in other circumstances.

One can also contrast the two on a more abstract level: in terms of what Lévi-Strauss calls "universalization and particularization" (1966:161). In avoidance or other relations of great formality, one generally does not use the proper name of a person to be shown respect but substitutes a kin term or other title. In our own society we do something very similar with first and last names. In either case the subject is, as it were, taken up a rung of the taxonomic ladder and is spoken of in a way that makes such topics more universal or abstract. Various bits of evidence confirm that this sort of abstraction is typical of avoidance and probably of formal deference more generally. Conversely, joking, along with less dramatic forms of familiarity, tends to focus on the particular, with references to idiosyncrasies, personal quirks—real or imagined—and so on. This is something that will become important later on, when I turn to the problem of hierarchy.

Most of what I have said is pretty much taken for granted in the anthropological literature on joking and avoidance. Rarely, though, have anthropologists taken up the question of why all this should be. Why should it be so common, in so many parts of the world, to have to avert one's eyes when in the presence of a king or one's mother in law? Why is it that if one meets a person before whom one must avert one's eyes, it is almost always also inappropriate to discuss bowel movements or sexuality? One of the few anthropologists who has even tried to offer a solution to this problem is Edmund Leach, who suggests that it is necessary to hedge areas like sex and excretion with taboo because they tend to obscure the division between self and other, body and external world (1964:40). This is a promising direction, I think, but hardly a solution in itself. After all, why should it be so important to maintain a clear division between the self and the external world in the first place? Presumably Leach does not mean to suggest this is some kind of universal psychological need, and if he is, he would certainly be mistaken because it is precisely these ambiguities that are emphasized, even celebrated, in joking relations. The joking body—if I may use the term to describe the human person as conceived within joking relations— is imagined, primarily, as a body continuous with the world around it. In this, it is quite similar to what Mikhail Bakhtin has referred to as "the grotesque image of the body." It is

> a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows itself, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus...

Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which it enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic: it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation (1984:317).

Hence the underlying logic of making a parallel between contact between people (looking, touching, speaking, striking, sexual relations) and eating, excretion, running noses, decomposition, open sores—all of which refer to different sorts of stuffs and substances passing into, and out of, the physical person, with contact between bodies and the world.

Still, it is not enough simply to say that the joking body is continuous with the world. All of the forms of interaction most played up in joking (and by Bakhtin)—eating, sex, excretion and aggression—imply a very specific kind of continuity. Joking partners tease or abuse one another; they toss insults, even missiles. At the same time, one hears again and again of joking partners privileged to make off with each other's possessions, and this sort of license is considered quite apiece with all the others. There is a sort of symbolic equivalence at play: an equivalence, one might say, between the taking of goods and the giving of bads. I would venture to say that this sort of idiom is a constant feature of joking relations—taking relations here in its broadest sense: relations "between bodies, and between the body and the world." Take for example the famous symbolic identification of sex and eating, familiar to any anthropologist. As Lévi-Strauss once pointed out (1966:100, 105—6), if one conflates sex with eating, then one can hardly see sex as an especially reciprocal activity. Eating something is inherently one-sided, whether the woman is pictured as devourer (as, say, in the case of vagina dentata motifs) or whether the man is. "In Yoruba," he notes, "'to eat' and 'to marry' are expressed by a single verb the general sense of which is 'to win, to acquire'" (1966:105).

But if the Yoruba language treats sexual relations as analogous to consumption or appropriation, other African languages frame it rather differently. In Kaguru, we are told, the term for intercourse can also mean "to insult, to abuse," "to behave obscenely before others." It is also the word used to describe the behavior typical of joking partners (Beidelman 1966:366). On the one hand, a taking of goods. On the other, a giving of bads. One could continue with this sort of comparison indefinitely. It certainly does seem to apply to all the principal ways in which the joking body interacts with the world (If eating is the taking of goods, excretion is the giving of bads) or between bodies (joking partners threatening cannibalism against one another or tossing dung are doing more or less the same thing).

It follows that joking relations are only ultimately egalitarian. Any given instance, from any given point of view, is not egalitarian at all. It is an attack. But since license between joking partners is reciprocal, such attacks can always be expected to more or less balance out in the end.

Here again, avoidance can be seen as an inversion of joking. At the level of avoidance, the body is closed, all orifices shut off and nullified; nothing flows either in or out. The body is constituted as a perfect, abstract, and self-sufficient thing unto itself, with no need for exchange either with other bodies or the world. Now, this sort of separation itself cannot imply a relation of hierarchy, simply because separating two things implies that there is no relation between them at all. But avoidance is ultimately hierarchical. There is, it is true, a certain mutuality in relations of avoidance. If I were standing before the Queen of England, I would not pick my nose

or crack a dirty joke; and I would expect the same from her. On the other hand, the burden of avoidance would definitely be on me, and it is appropriate that any sort of contact—conversation, eye contact, and the like—ought to be initiated by the person of superior rank. Further, if I were to pick my nose in the presence of the Queen or crack a dirty joke, I could fully expect to be excluded from polite society till the end of my days; but if the Queen did so in my presence, I would probably take this as a gesture of indulgent familiarity and perhaps reciprocate, though never quite so freely as she. Norbert Elias provides a telling quote from a sixteenth-century manual on manners:

> One should not sit with one's back or posterior turned towards another, nor raise the thigh so high that the members of the human body, which should properly be covered with clothing at all times, might be exposed to view. For this and similar things are not done, except among people before whom one is not ashamed. It is true that a great lord might do so before one of his servants or in the presence of a friend of lower rank; for in this he would not show him arrogance but rather a particular affection and friendship (1978:138).

By the logic of my argument, picking my nose before the Queen would be much the same as thumbing my nose at her: It would be a sort of joking attack.[2] It is my obligation then, to constitute her on the level of avoidance, as untouchable and self-enclosing; she, in her ability to initiate contact with me, is showing no such compunctions and constituting me more on the level of joking.

If this seems a tenuous interpretation, there are a lot of other types of evidence to back it up. Let me turn to an entirely different cultural milieu. In most Polynesian languages, the term *tabu* is used to describe avoidance relations, whether with one's father-in-law or with a chief. The word also means "set apart," "not to be touched," and, of course, "sacred"[3] However, it is the chief or the father-in-law who "have tabu" in relation to an inferior, that is to say, they are set apart, marked off and separated from the world—a world which includes, as a residual category, everyone else, including their subjects (or affines, as the case may be). The term has also had a curious history in modern social theory because Emile Durkheim, in his work on religion, used the Polynesian concept of tabu to come up with a universal definition of "the sacred" as that which is set apart from the mundane world, not to be touched; later, Erving Goffman (1956) borrowed Durkheim's concept in his analysis of everyday interactions in the modern West, arguing that in our own society the human person is ordinarily considered something sacred because he or she is hedged about by invisible barriers and is off-limits to others, not to be touched. He had, apparently without realizing, come back to something very close to the original Polynesian idea.

The body in the domain of joking, one might say, is constituted mainly of substances—stuff flowing in or flowing out. The same could hardly be true of the body in the domain of avoidance, where it is set apart from the world. To a very large extent, the physical body itself is negated, the person translated into some higher or more abstract level. In fact, I would argue that while

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[2] Again, I remind the reader that I am using the term joking here in a special, technical sense, meaning "along the lines of the sort of construction of human relations typical of joking relations"; hence, I do not simply mean "humorous."

[3] "Sacred" implies "not to be touched" in most European languages as well—a fact which Durkheim made much of—though I do not know how widespread this is elsewhere.

joking bodies are necessarily one with the world (one is almost tempted to say "nature") and made up from the same sort of materials, the body in avoidance is constructed out of something completely different. It is constructed of property. Now, I realize that this is a somewhat daring assertion. Not least, because what is considered property in the first place can vary a great deal from culture to culture. But I think one can make out an elementary logic in the idea of property that can be said to be more or less constant. Interestingly enough, that logic is very similar to the logic of avoidance.

Social scientists are usually content to follow the jurists and define property as a social relation, a bundle of rights and privileges in some object, held by a person or group of persons to the exclusion of all others. It is important to stress that this is not, fundamentally, a relation between a person and a thing. It is a relation between people. Robinson Crusoe (bourgeois individualist though he might have been) would hardly need to worry himself over property rights on his island, since no one else was there. However, it is hard to find a long, detailed ethnography that does not contain the word "owns" in quotation marks somewhere between its covers—that is, whose authors are forced to place the word in quotation marks because a word which otherwise refers to ownership of property is also used in other ways that make no sense by this sort of definition. Let me produce one fairly random example. In an ethnographic account of the Lau Islands of Fiji, Laura Thompson (1940:109—11, 126) notes that every aristocratic clan of those islands is said to "own" one species of animal, one type of fish, and one variety of tree. These species, she says, are tabu for them; to harm any member of them would be considered tantamount to harming their own selves. Far from having a right to exclude others from their property, these people are themselves forbidden to touch the things they are said to own. In fact, this is a fairly clear case of identification. A number of authors have pointed out how many languages lack any verb for unilateral ownership, simply identifying some object and some thing.[4] Even in English, a number of words used to imply ownership have a similar sort of reciprocity, including the most obviously possessive pronouns: One can say either "my secretary" or "my boss". The English word property itself has two meanings: that which I own, that is, some thing which takes on its identity from me and that which makes something what it is and gives it its identity ("it is a property of fire to be hot").

One might call this property in its semiotic mode, insofar as it serves mainly to convey meaning. But what I want to emphasize is that even here, one finds the same logic of exclusion. To return to the Lau Islands: Only aristocratic clans "owned" species of animals or bird. Commoner clans did not; they were referred to collectively as "owners of the land" (L. Thompson 1940). And as Marshall Sahlins (1981) has observed, there was a tendency to merge such Fijian "owners of the land" with nature and natural processes, to identify them with what Bakhtin calls "the material bodily lower stratum," the latter simply being the grotesque image of the body in its social incarnation. In other words, the aristocratic groups are set apart, marked off against a residual category which is more or less merged with the world. This is precisely the logic of avoidance.[5]

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[4] Tikopians for instance identify a man with a canoe by a term Raymond Firth translates as "linked", the same term that is used for, say, bond-friends

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) has made the point that totemic systems are not really about identity but analogy, that is, they are not saying clan X are like bears or clan Y like eagles but that the relation between clan X and clan Y is like the relation between bears and eagles. This is, of course, a very famous argument. However, in a later work (1966) he also noted that such totemic systems usually develop between groups that all share a roughly equal status

It can be much the same with individual persons. The word tabu again provides a convenient illustration. Ethnographers of the Maori of New Zealand[6] note that everyone was said to have had a certain amount of *tapu*. Or, almost everyone. Slaves had none (they were others' property); neither did most women (most women could not own property). Otherwise, the extent of one's tapu varied with social position. The higher up the social scale, the more tapu one had. A chief's tapu for instance extended to all of his possessions, which were all set apart, just as he was set apart, from the ordinary world; and it would be as dangerous for a commoner to touch the chief's things as to touch the chief himself. What's more, a great chief's tapu was so very powerful, his person was so sacred, we are told, that anything that did touch his person was as it were drawn into the charmed circle of his sanctity. "The pigs that were called by Hongi's name could never be eaten by other persons—such would be tantamount to eating him" (Firth 1959:345). His property was an extension of his person. If property is so closely related to avoidance and if these two principles of identification and exclusion really are so consistently at play (and I think they are), then is it really so daring to suggest that the person, in the domain of avoidance, is constructed out of property? Or, at least, of properties? The etymology of the word person is itself suggestive. As Marcel Mauss pointed out long ago (1968 [1938]), the Latin *persona* is derived from an Etruscan word meaning mask. Even when taken up in legal parlance as a term roughly similar to our word person, it still kept its implication of an abstract social being identified by physical objects, properties and insignia of various sorts. Slaves, and most women, had no personae for the same reasons that Maori slaves and women had no tapu.

Two important observations follow from all this. The first concerns exchange. Marcel Mauss (1954 [1927]) has also argued that in giving a gift, one is giving a part of oneself. If the person is indeed made up of a collection of properties, this is clearly true, but it is important to bear in mind that the self in question is a particular kind of self—that sort which is constituted on the level of avoidance. Gift giving of the Maussian variety is never, to my knowledge, accompanied by the sort of behavior typical of joking relations; but it often accompanies avoidance.[7] Second, insofar as it serves to construct a person in this way, a property need not have any practical use.[8] In ways, it is perhaps better that it does not. It simply needs to say something about its owner. This is a topic I have discussed at some length elsewhere (Graeber 1996), but here suffice it to say that the key thing is the existence of some larger code of meanings by which objects can do this, by which properties can be compared and contrasted. This need not be one of exchange value, although that is a salient example; and I would argue that it is no coincidence that the general-

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and makes the intriguing suggestion that, when one begins to hear that clan X really do resemble bears, it is usually because some element of hierarchy has entered in. If nothing else, this certainly seems to work for the Lau Islands.

[6] And the Maori seem to have been typical of Polynesian societies in this respect.

[7] Again, when I say that joking behavior never seems to accompany gift giving, I do not mean to suggest that it never accompanies *exchange*. It certainly does. The most obvious example is in some very common forms of barter; another, somewhat more obscure, can be found in certain forms of inter-village exchange said to be practiced by the Yanomami of Venezuela (Chagnon 1968): One group enters the village of the other, making every sort of mock threats—threats which the latter are expected to ignore with casual aplomb—and then begins to demand items of property—demands which the latter cannot refuse. Their demands are only limited by their knowledge that their victims will later have the right to come to their village and do the same. The interesting thing here is that we are dealing with a sort of mirror image of Mauss' formula, not the reciprocal giving but instead the reciprocal taking of goods. That it should be accompanied by behavior that smacks of joking then should hardly be surprising.

[8] When Shakespeare's Henry V refers to France as another jewel for his crown, he is expressing perfectly the equivalence of ornaments or insignia and what we like to call "real property," in terms of signification.

ization of exchange value as a medium for social relations has been accompanied, in Europe, by a generalization of avoidance. But I will have to return to this argument a little later on.

Before moving on to hierarchy, I should probably throw in a point of clarification. In treating joking and avoidance relations as extreme poles of a continuum which includes everything from playful familiarity to behavior at formal dinners, I do not mean to imply that all behavior must necessarily partake of one or the other. I certainly do not mean to suggest that all relations of respect imply subordination; even less, that all relations of intimacy involve some element of competition or aggression. What I am describing, rather, is a logic that—while it may come into play in some way or another in any social relation—is at best only one aspect of it. There are always other logics. I have said nothing, for example, of what anthropologists call "relations of common substance," in which an entirely material idiom of bodily stuffs and substances can be seen as the basis for the bonds of caring and mutual responsibility between human beings.[9] Sexual relations, after all, need not be represented as a matter of one partner consuming the other; it can also be imagined as two people sharing food.

ON HIERARCHY

> The term "good," in most Greek thought, connoted above all a certain definite, though still essentially negative, characteristic. This is manifest in nearly all the Greek schools of moral philosophy which descended from Socrates—in the temper of the ideal Cynic, Diogenes, who needed and wanted nothing any other man could give him, in the ataraxy of the Epicureans, in the apathy of the Stoics. The essence of "good," even in ordinary human experience, lay in self-containment, freedom from all dependence upon that which is external to the individual (Lovejoy 1936:42).

> Tjaden hasn't finished yet. He thinks for a while and then asks: "And would a King have to stand up stiff to an emperor?"
> None of us are quite sure about it, but we don't suppose so. They are both so exalted that standing strictly to attention is probably not insisted on.
> "What rot you hatch out," says Kat. "The main point is that you have to stand stiff yourself."
> But Tjaden is quite fascinated. His otherwise prosy fancy is blowing bubbles. "But look," he announces, "I simply can't believe that an emperor has to go to the latrine the same as I have."
> —Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Hierarchy has become a very popular term in contemporary social science, though it is often hard to know precisely what any given author means by it. To say that a set of things are organized into a hierarchy, after all, is merely to say that they are ranked; there are all sorts of ways to rank things. The notion the term most immediately brings to mind is what might be called a "linear hierarchy," a way of ranking things, as along a ruler, as higher or lower than each other. The classic example of such a linear hierarchy is probably the Great Chain of Being, made famous by Arthur Lovejoy (1936). This was a system by which Medieval scholars tried to rank all living creatures from moss to slugs to humans and seraphim, according to the degree to which they

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[9] Which often accompany what Marshall Sahlins [1972] has called "generalized reciprocity."

were believed to possess a rational soul. Lovejoy points out that it is critical to such a system that there can only be one criterion of ranking; as soon as others are introduced, the whole system will tend to dissolve into confusion (1936:56-57ff).

When an anthropologist refers to a social hierarchy, however, she is likely to be working with a very different implicit model, one less resembling the Great Chain of Being than the sort of taxonomic hierarchies that botanists or zoologists employ, which are sometimes referred to as hierarchies of inclusion, since each level encompasses those below: Lions are a kind of cat, cats a kind of mammal, and so on. Levels are higher insofar as they are more encompassing and abstract and have a greater level of generality. This is obviously quite different from a linear hierarchy, but rarely do social scientists make a clear distinction between the two. Some, like the French anthropologist Louis Dumont—the man who is probably the most responsible for popularizing the use of the term hierarchy to begin with—quite consciously argue that no distinction should be made: that when social categories are ranked, it is always on the basis of greater generality and inclusiveness.

Dumont's arguments on hierarchy go back to his work on the Indian caste system, and the fourfold division of the varnas; it might be useful to take a glance at his formal analysis of this system to show some of the problems this approach can introduce. Actually, his formal analysis (Dumont 1970:67) is quite brief. He begins by describing a simple linear hierarchy, in which Brahmans are considered purer than Kshatriyas, Kshatriyas purer than Vaishyas, and Vaishyas purer than Shudras. However, after saying this, he immediately proceeds to explain that this ranking is worked out through "a series of successive dichotomies or inclusions," thus implying the existence of a taxonomic hierarchy instead:

> The set of the four varnas divides into two: the last category, that of the Shudras, is opposed to the block of the first three, whose members are "twice-born". These twice-born in turn divide into two: the Vaishyas are opposed to the block formed by the Kshatriyas and the Brahmans, which in turn divides into two (1970:67).

Now, I ask, is it really useful to look at this as a series of inclusions? It seems to me it would be much more useful to look at it as a series of exclusions. The Brahmans, the group at the top, see themselves as set off from all others as particularly pure and holy. From their perspective, all the others form an undifferentiated mass, shading into each other and even into non-human creatures in so far as all lack the purity of Brahmans. However, from the point of view of the next highest group, the Kshatriyas, the more relevant opposition is that which sets both them and the Brahmans apart against another residual category, which is again relatively impure. Then comes the opposition between twice-born and others, which would include both Shudras and Untouchables, who are so base they fall out of the fourfold scale entirely and are entirely ignored by Dumont in his analysis. And so on.

Probably it would be best to describe all such linear hierarchies as "exclusive" rather than "inclusive." The logic, it may be observed, would then be much the same as that of avoidance, since the higher group is set apart from a residual category composed of all the others. If so, it may be easier to understand how social scientists can get away with fudging the distinction between two different kinds of hierarchy as if they were the same; and that is because any actual social hierarchy will tend to combine elements of both. There are always higher and higher levels of inclusion (from household to lineage to clan to tribe or from household to parish to borough

to county), but there is also a series of ascending, increasingly exclusive, groups who gain their exclusive status by being able to make a claim that they represent the whole at every level.[10] Linear and taxonomic hierarchies, thus, tend to be superimposed.

Let me return once more then to the traditional lineage system of the Maori. On the one hand, their society was ideally organized according to what anthropologists would call a segmentary lineage system—a taxonomic classification of social groups. Every household belonged to a lineage, every lineage to a clan, every clan to a tribe. Each of these groups had its representative—called a headman or chief, in the literature—and who was also said to "own" everything that belonged to his lineage, or clan, or tribe.[11] Needless to say, the higher up in the taxonomic hierarchy the representative, the more tapu he was said to have. But it is here that things become interesting, since (as I have pointed out) it is precisely in the notion of tapu that the element of exclusion comes back in. What this means is that the greater the purview of any given representative, the more inclusive the group he was seen to represent and the more he himself was set apart from everyone else, including other members of his own clan or lineage.[12]

A moment's reflection will make it clear that something along these lines happens almost everywhere where society is organized into more and more inclusive groups. If those groups have representatives (barons, dukes and kings; mayors, governors, and presidents), then those representatives will also be set off against those they represent as members of more and more exclusive categories of people. The higher the group they represent in the taxonomic hierarchy, the more abstract and universal they themselves are seen to be; hence, the more they are set off against the world—including those they represent.

It is easy to see how this logic could eventually lead to something like an ideology of social class. But it might also help explain some otherwise rather odd consistencies in the way people think about class. How often, for instance, does one hear the upper classes of some society or other described as being more refined and elegant than those below them, finer in features, more tactful and disciplined in their emotions? Or that the lower orders are cruder, coarser in features as in manners—but at the same time more free with their feelings, more spontaneous? Most people seem to consider it a matter of course that upper and lower stratum of society should differ in this way (if they think about it at all, perhaps they write it off to conditions of health, work, and leisure) or at least, that they should be represented so. In fact, such stereotypes even recur in times and places—say, much of early Medieval Europe—where the upper stratum could equally well be represented as a gang of heavily armed thugs extorting protection from a population of helpless farmers.

It is at this point that one has to move from the role played by joking and avoidance in the dynamics of personal relations to the way a whole social class or stratum marks itself off from those it considers below it by the way its members conduct themselves towards one another. Norbert Elias has written at some length (1978) about the courtesy manuals that Medieval lords

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[10] True, different systems lean more or less heavily to one side or another. The Indian caste system, certainly, presses down very hard on the linear side: the Nuer segmentary system, to take a famous example, leans with equal weight in the opposite direction. But I doubt one can find any society based entirely on one principle and not the other.

[11] "Ownership" in this sense generally had little to do with any kind of rights and duties.

[12] In linguistic terminology, one would say the higher up he is, the more he is an unmarked term: standing for not only "man," but "household," "clan," "tribe," and so on. This does fit quite nicely with my observations about avoidance and universalism (moving upwards on the taxonomic hierarchy). But it makes *tapu* a somewhat paradoxical process: the marking of the unmarked.

and ladies used to set themselves off from their subjects. These manuals are, he argues, primarily concerned with encouraging their readers to repress bodily functions (at least in the presence of their fellow), the control of both natural impulses and violent emotions—and, as I've mentioned, the maintenance of a certain "threshold of embarrassment or shame." In other words, we are dealing with something along the lines of avoidance behavior or, anyway, behavior expected in situations of formal deference. The difference of course is that these standards were expected to be, at a certain level, mutual; in observing them, one was not setting the other person off from the world (a world which included one's own deferential self), so much as setting both off from those whose interactions were assumed to lack such refinement. And all this is quite explicit in these manuals, which constantly warned that one should not behave like a peasant or an animal.

The tendency to see the common people as bestial was itself perfectly in keeping with the notion that standards of comportment were a way for the aristocracy to constitute themselves on a level of avoidance, over and against "a residual category more or less merged with the world." The same attitude was to be seen in literary stereotypes of the peasant as "barely human monster" (LeGoff 1978:93) and in Medieval art, in which

> Man was frequently depicted as part of nature: images of animal-men and plant-men, trees with human heads, anthropomorphic mountains, beings with many hands and many legs, recur over and over all through antiquity and the Middle Ages, and find their most complete expression in the works of Breughel and Bosch (Gurevich 1985:53).

The author does not note this—it hardly needs be said—but the "Man" he is referring to is Common Man; bishops and duchesses were not depicted as half tree.[13]

However, what is really interesting about these images of an undifferentiated material world of bodies and substances is that it did not simply represent the point of view of the aristocracy. Mikhail Bakhtin, for instance, in his famous study of Rabelais (1984), has shown that there was a powerful strain in Medieval and Early Modern popular culture and popular imagery which took all of the qualities typically invoked by the elite and their representatives to denounce the lower stratum of society—lust and drunkenness, bodily functions, the monstrous and grotesque—and affirmed and celebrated them instead. Since this tendency found its highest elaboration in festivals like Carnival, Bakhtin calls it "the carnivalesque"; but he also argues it pervaded popular culture, setting the tone for everything from charivaris to folk tales, miracle plays, and the spiels of itinerant quacks and medicine peddlers or the remarkably intricate idiom of obscenity and verbal abuse typical of the Medieval market place. Bakhtin sees grotesque imagery of this sort as often posed in direct opposition to the stuffy, overbearing, and hierarchical "official culture" of the time, a form of resistance against the static, lifeless asceticism that the church and civil authorities foisted on the masses.

Bakhtin was clearly on to something. But it seems to me that he drew the lines between what we now call high and low culture a bit too sharply. One of the virtues of the view of hierarchy I have been trying to develop is that no such sharp line need be drawn. Were the grotesque elements in the work of Bosch or Brueghel derived from popular culture or from the elite's notions

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[13] One could go on from here to speak of legal notions, which described peasants as being "owned by the land" as much as the other way around, or for that matter the etymologies of words still in common use today: The Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, has it that the English word "clown" is derived from a Germanic root meaning both "peasant" and "lump of earth" ("clod" has the same derivation).

of what the common people were like? Is there any real need to ask? After all, it was not only peasants and journeymen but merchants, monks, and barons who took part in Carnival. If the emphasis in Carnival was quite clearly on the joking body—on sex, gluttony, violence, and gay abuse—perhaps what we should really be asking is what all this meant to the different participants and whether it was always the same thing.

What evidence there is implies there was a fairly wide continuum between two extreme points of view. For the loftiest, Carnival was an indulgence for the masses, a chance for them to play the fool and give vent to their base and sinful natures. Some of the more reflective developed a kind of functional theory: Let the commoners work off a bit of steam, even play at turning the world upside down for a day or two; and it will make it easier for them to endure their lot during the rest of the year.[14] Even a minor knight or master craftsmen might often have taken part, half with a feeling for fun and half with one of veiled contempt. To the lowliest, however—and even many of the not so very lowly—the joking element could seem genuinely subversive, which is apparently true of the carnivalesque as a whole.

Given the argument that I have been developing, it is easy to see at least two different ways how this might be. The first is quite simple. Joking relations are played out in an idiom of attack: the taking of goods and giving of bads. In the popular culture of the time, this idiom was often used for implicit political effect, a good example being the folk tales in which young peasant lads so often outwit their superiors, always (as Robert Darnton points out in 1984:59) making a point of both getting whatever goods they are after and humiliating an adversary: "The clever weakling makes a fool of the strong oppressor by raising a chorus of laughter at his expense, preferably by some bawdy stratagem. He forces the king to lose face by exposing his backside." So it was too in with satiric *charivaris* and other varieties of "rough music." Bakhtin (1984:197) sees the uncrowning and debasement of the Carnival King as a more universal attack, one directed against the very principle of hierarchy itself.

This last instance moves closer to the second subversive element in joking—which I think is also by far the more profound. In Carnival, not only was hierarchy temporarily suspended or reversed, but the whole world was reconstructed as a "Land of Cockaigne," as the saying went, a domain in which there was nothing but bodies happily partaking of the world and of each other. Bakhtin implies that the grotesque, that joking and laughter, was a sort of universal solvent of hierarchy: that by representing a world of joking bodies and nothing more, the very fiber was stripped out of the structures of official culture so that even its loftiest pinnacles inevitably came crashing to the earth. Given the categories I have been using in this essay, this makes perfect sense. If one rejects the principle of avoidance altogether, hierarchy cannot exist. In a joking world there are only bodies, and the only possible difference between them is that some are bigger and stronger than others and that these bigger and stronger bodies can take more goods and give more bads. And the implications of that for a view of the contemporary social order, and particularly for the moral standing of the high and mighty of the world, need hardly be pointed out.

As always I must point out that I am aware that things are more complicated than this; I am dwelling on one particular aspect. For instance, there was an element in Carnival which

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[14] Burke (1978:199—204) notes that the metaphor of "letting off steam" began to be employed the moment it was technically possible; before that, the preferred metaphor was letting off pressure in a wine cask. Even at the time, though, many objected that. as safety valves go, popular festivals made extraordinarily poor ones, considering how many genuine rebellions grew out of such festivities (see Berce 1976; Burke 1978; Davis 1980).

stressed not joking struggle but an idyllic Golden Age, an important element in social criticism both among Church thinkers and popular rebels, which harked back to classical themes (cf. Cohn 1970). Still, the analogy with joking relations is a useful analytical tool,[15] if for no other reason because it opens up all sorts of interesting possibilities. This is especially true when one moves from public ritual to everyday practices. Bakhtin himself drew attention to the language of the marketplace (1984:145—95) and popular idioms of abuse and obscenity in Medieval and Early Modern Culture. Would it really be going too far to suggest that this involves something very similar to the reconstruction of the world on the bodily level that occurs in Carnival? If so, this would be a perfect example of the practices of the lower strata apparently reinforcing the images and stereotypes entertained by the upper, though with diametrically imposed intent. And, finally, this would not seem to be an isolated phenomenon. There are societies aplenty in which the lower classes do seem to employ obscene language more freely or at least more openly and consistently than the more privileged ones. It is hard to escape the impression that this is, in effect, a kind of subversion—at least to the extent that it asserts an intrinsically subversive view of the conditions of human existence.

THE GENERALIZATION OF AVOIDANCE

So far, I have been describing two different ways of looking at the human person: either as a collection of bodily substances ultimately continuous with the world surrounding it or as an abstract set of properties set apart from that world.[16] These are certainly not the only possible ways of conceiving the human person; but they can always, it seems, be expected to emerge in situations of hierarchy and formal deference.

At this point, I can return to Norbert Elias' argument about the "civilizing process" in Europe (1978 [1939]), and Peter Burke's notion of the reform of popular culture (1978:207—43). Elias' observations are mainly based on comparing primers used to instruct children in different periods of European history, beginning in the twelfth century and ending in the eighteenth and nineteenth. What he discovers is a continual "advance in thresholds of embarrassment and shame" over time, an increasing demand to suppress any public acknowledgment of bodily functions, excretion, aggressiveness, death, or decay—in fact, any or all of those things which are typically thought to be embarrassing or shameful within relations of avoidance. The most interesting aspect of Elias' material, from my own perspective, is how behavior which Medieval courtesy books represented as shameful only if done before superiors (say, blowing one's nose in the tablecloth), gradually came to be represented as embarrassing even if done before equals, then inferiors, and finally, as behavior to be avoided on principle, even if no one else is there.[17] In my terms, one might say that avoidance became generalized, in the sense that principles of behavior which once applied mainly to relations of formal deference gradually came to set the terms for all social relations,

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[15] Anyway, it strikes me that it can be more potentially revealing for the analysis of rituals such as Carnival than, say, Victor Turner's notion of liminality and communitas often thrown around so very casually that their use can stifle further discussion more than encourage it.

[16] Each entails its own characteristic notion of exchange: in joking relations, an abusive (or mock-abusive) exchange of substances in one, a benevolent (or mock-benevolent) exchange of properties in the other.

[17] Even before medical science was able to produce arguments of "personal hygiene," Erasmus was warning children to restrain their manners even in private because angels could be watching.

until they became so thoroughly internalized they ended up transforming people's most basic relations with the world around them.

Now, Elias himself is mainly concerned with the role of feudal courts and the courtly aristocracy. If there was any motor driving the change, he suggests, it was the state's increasing monopoly on the legitimate use of coercive force which compelled courtiers to contain their aggressive impulses and thus introduced a general principle of self-control. But he also suggests that it was in fact the moment when these new standards expanded outside the courts and began to affect the nascent bourgeoisie that they began to be fully internalized psychologically. This expansion was something that largely occurred in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, a time when one first finds middle-class reformers who denounced the polished artificiality of courtly manners. These reformers claimed courtly manners act mainly to make invidious distinctions and place some people above others and held up their own standards of comportment as more honest, moral and spontaneous—and therefore, fit to be adopted by society as a whole (Elias 1978:42—50).[18]

Burke's "reform of popular culture" was part of this same movement. Essentially it came down to an attempt, largely on the part of middle-class religious authorities, to improve the manners of those below—most of all, by eliminating all traces of the carnivalesque from popular life. Burke lists among their targets "actors, ballads, bear-baiting, bull-fights, cards, chapbooks, charivaris, charlatans, dancing, dicing, divining, fairs, folktales, fortune-telling, magic, masks, minstrels, puppets, taverns and witchcraft" (Burke 1978:208), to name a few. In England, Puritans actually called their campaign a "reformation of manners"; in its name they went about shutting down ale-houses, enforcing laws concerning sexual morality, and most of all, outlawing popular modes of entertainment like May poles, morris dancing, and Christmas revels. In Catholic Europe, counter-reformation authorities were conducting analogous campaigns. Such campaigns almost always generated a great deal of opposition but overall were remarkably successful.

The role of the middle classes, I think, is crucial. The middle classes, in this period, essentially means "those sections of the population most thoroughly caught up in the commercial life of the times," not only merchants and shopkeepers but prosperous farmers and urban craftsmen. It is notorious, for instance, that this was the stratum most attracted to English Puritanism (Tawney 1937:20; Hill 1964; Wrightson 1984). They were also the people whose lives were most dominated by relations of private property, which is also crucial, since according to the terms I have been developing here, a generalization of avoidance would be a process in which everyone in society came increasingly to be defined by the logic of abstract, exclusive properties. One might well imagine that, as social life among all classes of society came to be shaped, more and more, by the logic of the market, the manners once typical of the commercial classes would tend to be generally adopted too.

The question, then, is: Are there any ethnographic precedents for something like this happening? Have there been cases where the spread of exchange relations has led to different standards of daily comportment? Let me try to answer this briefly before returning to concepts of the person in Early Modern Europe. One thing the ethnographic evidence makes abundantly clear is that when relationships between two people, or two groups, are defined primarily around exchange

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[18] Elias' idea of the "civilizing process" is pretty unabashedly evolutionist and has been widely criticized as such. Others have also pointed to Elias' undue attention to courtly circles and his neglect of Puritan and other middle-class ideas as a crucial flaw in his analysis (1978).

(and not, say, by idioms of common substance) they have a strong tendency to also be marked by rules of avoidance. The classic example is relations between affines, particularly when two families are locked in extended cycles of marriage payments.

Where rules of avoidance do exist and have been broken, very often some sort of formal exchange is required to set things straight. MacAllister (1937:131) recalls the case of a Kiowa—Apache man who accidentally bumped into his mother-in-law, a person he was forbidden ever to touch. To make up for it, it was arranged for the two of them to exchange horses. According to Roy Wagner (1967:176), something similar is common practice among the Daribi of New Guinea, where a man should never even cast eyes on his wife's mother. But should he happen to do so by accident, the two have to meet and exchange male and female goods of equal value before they can go back to their former situation. Clearly, in neither case are we talking about a punishment or compensation; for both parties ended up with things of exactly the same value as they had before. Rather than being a matter of reparations, it appears to be a simple matter of repair. Two people have come into contact who should not have done so. The resulting rift in the shell of avoidance can only be patched up by means of an exchange because the act of exchanging goods itself transposes relations from the level of bodies and substances and back to that of abstract properties again.[19] More often, if there has been a violation of the rules of avoidance, a minor fine is levied on the lower-status party (the one on whom the burden of avoidance lies). But even here, the fines are more than simple recompense: The very act of giving them also acts to restore relations to their appropriate level of abstraction. And the same goes for fines levied for actual damage to the person or property of others, or for that matter, affinal payments—in fact, for all those varied kinds of transaction which typically knit together to form what anthropologists refer to as a "gift economy".

Even more interesting for present purposes is what happens to a society when such networks of formal exchange become so important that they could be said to be the main institution setting the terms of social life. In such societies, everyday standards of interaction often begin to resemble what would in other societies be considered mild avoidance. I am not the first to make note of this phenomenon. But earlier anthropologists seem to have lacked a language with which to describe it. Some appealed to Weber. Margaret Mead, for instance, said the Manus of the Admiralty Islands of New Guinea were practicing "a kind of capitalism", which, she said, was rooted in an ethos of asceticism and self-denial (1930, 1934, 1937). Alfred Kroeber spoke of the "entrepreneurial spirit" of the Yurok Indians of California, which he said arose from something like a Puritan ethic (1925, 1928). To the modern ear, such terms really do not seem appropriate. If New Guinea fisherman can be capitalists, the word capitalism loses most of its explanatory power, and one would have to come up with an entirely new term for the heads of joint-stock corporations employing large numbers of clock-punching wage laborers. But I do not think it would be wise to dismiss such authors' insights out of hand. What the Manus and Yurok did share was something quite reminiscent of Western ideas of private property, along with a shell money which functioned as a kind of currency. Property could be bought and sold according to an abstract medium of value. Both were also societies in which the exchange of property was one of the main ways in which relations between people worked themselves out—even, some-

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[19] There are parallel cases which do not involve a breach of avoidance but other kinds of bodily contact considered too intimate for the relation in which it occurred. In the New Hebrides, "Sodomy between two genealogically related men is regarded as incestuous. However it is not viewed too seriously, as the punishment inflicted is that both parties must kill and exchange two pigs" (Corlette 1935:486).

times, relations between the closest kin. Much of the commonplace drama of daily life seems to have turned largely on who had been given what, who owed what, who accepted what from whom. And significantly enough, it is most of all within relations most mediated by exchange that asceticism was most in evidence. "Sex," the Yurok dictum had it, "drives away money."[20] It was as if within such relations, the human person itself had to be hedged around with exclusive restrictions as severe as those surrounding property.

All these examples suggest that there can, indeed, be relations of avoidance that are not immediately concerned with constructing hierarchical relations between people or even with setting one class off against the rest of society. When two people exchange horses with one another, they are marking their equivalence as persons by identifying themselves with two possessions of equivalent value. Similarly, in the Manus or Yurok cases, it was the existence of money—an abstract system by which the value of just about any piece of property could be compared—that made all persons comparable as well. In contexts involving exchange, persons were defined by what they had. Since money made all property at least potentially equivalent, then people were as well. And the actual process of exchange meant that in practice, people were constantly establishing such temporary equivalences.[21]

All this tends to confirm that the most important area to look at in Early Modern Europe is not so much Elias' court society—which was always mainly interested in setting itself off from the rest of society—as the emergence of regimes of private property, commercial exchange, and of a class of people whose lives were so organized around it that they had begun to internalize its logic of exclusion as a way of defining their own social persons.

In fact, the ideals of private property emerged slowly and unevenly. This was particularly true when the property involved was land. Under a feudal regime, almost any plot of land had more than one owner. Usually, there were different levels of ownership. When those came into conflict, legal theory of the time almost always recognized the most inclusive level to have the ultimate claim. The claims of a village community, for instance, took precedence over those of a plot's actual holder. Feudal tenure meant title to a piece of land tended to be parceled out along a graded hierarchy of owners: While a simple husbandman might have had effective possession of a plot and a local knight or baron effective control over its disposition, jurists still insisted that true dominium, or absolute ownership, belonged only to the King, since the monarch represented the highest and most inclusive level of all.

All this may have been in keeping with the hierarchal principles of the time but did little to assist in the development of a market in land. In England, most land only became freely disposable after the first great wave of enclosure movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In an open field system, a farmer might have exclusive right to grow wheat on a given plot but would have to open his own fields after the harvest to anyone in the village with sheep who wished to graze them on the stubble and had to take down his fences during the agricultural off-season. With enclosure, fences were replaced by hedges and walls that make clear the owner's right to exclude other members of the community from it at any time. In other cases enclosures involved bounding off stretches of meadow or forest that had always been considered part of the village common and vital to the survival of landless or poorer villages who had long been

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[20] For Manus parallels, see Mead (1934:191, 308).

[21] Obviously, it was unusual for any two individuals to be exactly equivalent in worth at any given time, but they were inherently capable of being so.

accustomed to exploiting these kinds of common lands. Ownership of enclosed land did not depend on membership in any larger group; but was an exclusive right of access held by a single owner "against all the world" (Thrupp 1977; E. P. Thompson 1976); hence, it could be freely bought and sold. Such land was, effectively, private property—even if it took the law some time to fully recognize this, since jurists were not willing to officially recognize a dominium belonging to anyone but the King until around the time of the Restoration (Alymer 1980).

The phrasing here—"enclosure," "against all the world"—is certainly suggestive of the logic of avoidance. It is much harder to determine the degree to which these new definitions affected people's common sense about the nature of the individual, society, or the relation between the two. But not, perhaps, impossible. At least one historian, C. B. MacPherson (1962), has suggested that by the seventeenth century the principle of individual, exclusive private property had become so broadly accepted among ordinary English people that popular politicians could invoke it as the basis for making claims of natural rights and political liberties. MacPherson is most famous, perhaps, for his arguments about assumptions about property underlying the political theories of Hobbes and Locke; but his most interesting material is drawn from the Levellers, a radical political fraction in Cromwell's New Model Army during the English Revolution. In 1646, for instance, Leveller Richard Overton wrote in his tract, *An Arrow Against All Tyrants*, that:

> To every Individual in nature is given an individual property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any: for every one as he is himself, so he hath a self propriety, else could he not be himself, and on this no second may presume to deprive any of, without manifest violation and affront to the very principles of nature, and of the Rules of equity and justice between man and man… Every man [is] by nature a King, Priest and Prophet in his own natural circuit and compass, whereof no second may partake, but by deputation, commission, and free consent from him whose natural right and freedom it is" (in MacPherson 1962:140—1).

In other words, a man's[22] person—his body, like his chattels—were his exclusive property; and therefore he had the absolute right to exclude "all things hurtful and obnoxious" from it. Even the king could not trespass on this right. This was perhaps the first political evocation of the principle that (as Goffman put it) the human person was sacred. The fact that, by the time of the English revolution, such an argument could make sense to an audience of common soldiers shows that the concepts of private property had indeed played a large role in reshaping popular conceptions of the person. And, as MacPherson notes, this doctrine—he calls it "possessive individualism"—became the basis of notions of political freedom that emerged at the time and have remained the foundation of prevailing theories of the rights of man to the present day (1962:142—159).

MacPherson's arguments inspired a great deal of debate (Laslett 1964; MacPherson 1973:207—23), but this fundamental insight has never been seriously challenged. Modern individualism was not only an ideology which developed through the rise of the bourgeoisie but emerged first and foremost through metaphors of property. The assumptions already implicit in authors like Hobbes and Locke became more explicit in the doctrines of British Mercantilists and French Physiocrats and eventually became the basis of political economy: that private property was a natural institution because its logic predated the emergence of any larger human society; that,

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[22] Overton clearly did not mean to include women or, for that matter, servants. There is some debate as to whether the Levellers even meant to give wage laborers the franchise.

in fact, society itself had to be created because of people's need to safeguard their property and regulate its exchange. Where an earlier, hierarchical view assumed that people's identities (their properties, if you will) were defined by their place in society, the assumption was now that who one was was based on what one had, rather than the other way around.[23]

One is ultimately left with the view of the world one still finds in economics text books, which takes it for granted that human beings are bounded, autonomous beings whose identity is determined by what they possess and whose mutual intercourse is assumed to consist primarily of exchanging such possessions with one another according to the principles of rational calculation. It is a view of human society which has formed the backbone of most subsequent social theory, which as developed either on its basis or in reaction to it. It is also based on a way of imagining that the human person is in almost every way analogous to how the person is imagined in avoidance.

EDUCATION AND THE FATE OF YOUTH

So far, I have been trying to make a case that it was the emerging commercial classes of Early Modern Europe that first embraced the notion of reforming society by reforming its manners and that the standards of propriety they embraced were ultimately rooted in ideologies of private property. I also suggested that, insofar as projects of reform were successful, it was largely because the market and commercial logic were increasingly setting the terms of social life among all classes of people. Attempts to close down alehouses or ban mummers' plays, after all, could only achieve so much and tended to create a determined and resentful opposition. The more lasting changes were on a much more deeply internalized level. Here some of Elias' material is particularly revealing. In 1558, for example, an Italian courtier could still write:

> For the same reason it is not a refined habit, when coming across something disgusting in the street, as sometimes happens, to turn at once to one's companion and point it out to him.
> It is far less proper to hold out the stinking thing for the other to smell, as some are wont, who even urge the other to do so, lifting the foul-smelling thing to his nostrils and saying, "I should like to know how much that stinks," when it would be better to say, "Because it stinks I do not smell it" (Della Caso, *Galateo*, in Elias 1978:131).

A hundred years later, most readers would probably have found the very notion of behaving this way about as revolting as people would today. But how does one go about explaining changes on this level—in people's most spontaneous, visceral reactions to the world around them? It is one thing to say that there is a logical connection between manners and regimes of property and quite another to understand how such changes actually took place.

The obvious place to look is in the education of children. Elias' material, for example, is almost exclusively drawn from manuals intended to instruct youth. What I am going to do in this section, then, is provide a very brief sketch of ideas of education and the public role of youth in Medieval and Early Modern societies, a sketch which I think makes clear why the emergence of a regime

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[23] Elias himself notes (1978:42—50) how thoroughly embedded these ideas had become in the common sense of the middle classes most dedicated to the reform of manners.

of wage labor should almost inevitably have led to projects of social reform. It is not exactly an explanation but does lay out the outlines of what a full explanation might be like.

In the Middle Ages, just about everyone who did know how to read had learned their letters at least partly from "courtesy books," which were produced in remarkable numbers. The first were in Latin, and meant to educate the clergy and perhaps the higher nobility. By the fourteenth century, however, vernacular courtesy books, catering to an increasing demand for literacy among the less exalted nobility, as well as many of the merchants and tradesmen in the cities, had become common (Nicholls 1985:57—74).[24] As Philippe Aries remarks, these books often covered a wide variety of topics, ranging from advice on cutting one's fingernails to advice on choosing a suitable wife, and also had a strong tendency to mix precepts on how to eat at table with those on how to wait at table. This latter is significant, for the period when young people were learning manners was almost always the one in which they were also expected to be in domestic service.

Aries cites a late-fourteenth century account of England, written by a traveler from Italy:

> The want of affection in the English is strongly manifested towards their children; for after having kept them at home till they arrive at the age of seven or nine years at the utmost, they put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the households of other people, binding them generally for seven or nine years. And these are called apprentices, and during that time they perform all the most menial offices; and few are born who are exempted from this fate, for everyone, however rich he may be, sends away his children into the houses of others, whilst he, in return, receives those of strangers into his own (from *A Relation of the Island of England* [apparently anonymous], cited in Aries [1962:365]).

Though "the Italian considers this custom cruel[,] ... insinuating that the English took in each other's children because they thought that in that way they would obtain better service than they would from their own offspring," Aries suggests, realistically enough, that "the explanation which the English themselves gave to the Italian observer was probably the real one: 'In order that their children might learn better manners' (1962:365).

This particular Italian observer seems to have spent most of his time in large towns; but this picture appears, in its broad outlines, to have been true of the countryside as well, not only in England but across much of Northern Europe, from the High Middle Ages onwards. Young men and women were expected to leave home at a fairly early age—if not by nine, then certainly by their early teens—and spend the next ten or fifteen years in "service"—which basically meant, as wage laborers living under the roof of their employers. Rural youths for instance were usually hired at local fairs and worked for a year's term before receiving their wages. Others were placed by their parents, though most often with masters whose social position was somewhat higher than their own: a husbandman's son in the family of a yeoman, a yeoman's daughter as a maid for a minor member of the local gentry, and so on (Laslett 1972, 1977, 1983; Wall 1983; Kussmaul 1981).

This condition was expected to last until the age of twenty-five or even thirty: in part, because no one was expected to marry until they had accumulated enough resources to set up an independent household of their own. Wage labor, in other words, was basically a lifecycle phenomenon; and "youth" or adolescence, the period during which one accumulated the resources

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[24] The literate class and the courteous class tended always to be one and the same.

to establish oneself as a fully mature, autonomous being. It was also the period during which one learned one's future trade. Even farm service was, in effect, a form of apprenticeship.[25] Servants in husbandry—no less than dyer's or draper's apprentices, or for that matter knight's pages— were in training, and though the technical know-how one picked up in such circumstances was undoubtedly distinguished in the abstract from more commonplace matters of deportment and propriety, the process of learning them in practice was more or less the same.[26]

In the Middle Ages and, if anything, even more in the Early Modern period, idioms of youth and age were the most common way that people had of talking about authority. It was a commonplace of Renaissance theory that aging was a long process of the drying-out of the body; that young people were as a result dominated by their "animal spirits" and, hence, prone to violent lusts and passions and every manner of excess; and that it was only when a man reached about the age of thirty, when physical strength began to decline, that his soul or powers of reason (the two were considered more or less the same thing) was deemed capable of overcoming them (Thomas 1971:208—10, 1976). Thirty was also the age at which his first child should be born, thus establishing once and for all his social persona as a settled householder and full member of the community, with all the responsibility that entailed. "For young men to command," on the other hand, "was against the 'law of nature': they must obey until they had achieved mastery of their baser desires" (Brigden 1982:37—38). Incapable of autonomy, they had to be kept under the watchful eye and firm hand of some mature master—one, ideally, who was not a kinsman, since kinship was thought to somewhat compromise authority—for their energies to be put to proper use.

It should be clear enough how all this relates to the logic of joking and avoidance. It's not just that youth were considered unformed: Their typical vices were the carnal ones of violence and debauchery. They were by nature riotous, rebellious against the legitimate authority of their elders. Mature men, on the other hand, were rational and self-contained, the masters of autonomous, bounded, self-sufficient households. But the notion that service had an educational value added a complex play of theory against practice to this relatively straightforward way of representing things. In any relation of avoidance, the burden of avoidance is always on the inferior party. Masters may have been seen as more refined or disciplined in their spontaneous comportment (they had better manners), but still it was their servants who had to perform the acts of formal deference.[27] In practice, it was by such acts and by respectful obedience before their masters,

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[25] It's not so much that "apprenticeship and service were confused" as Aries puts it (1962:366—7) than that they were never really distinguished to begin with.

[26] It would be interesting to examine the institution of Medieval and Early Modern service in the light of the anthropological literature on initiation, particularly the kind which involves "fictive kinship" Of one Sort or another. The study of *compadrazgo* in Latin America provides some obvious parallels: Although authors such as Wolf (1966) highlight the way such ties create linkages of patronage across class lines, symbolic analyses (see Gudeman 1971; Bloch and Guggenheim 1981) stress the division between the female domestic and male public domains, which in Western culture have generally presented in terms of the spirit and the flesh. I have already mentioned that in Europe, most youths served masters of a marginally higher social class. As for the symbolic aspects, Aries notes that the age of "seven or nine"—the age at which the Italian author of the above-cited account of English habits claims most families sent off their children to the houses of strangers—was "in the old French authors ... given as the age when the boys leave the care of the womenfolk to go to school or enter the adult world" (1962). The opposition of spirit and flesh—or anyway, something very much like it—was also at play in the very definition of "youth" itself.

[27] An obvious parallel is the career military officer who is never obliged to stand as stiffly or salute as smartly as recruits have to do to him but is still seen as reflecting in his ordinary bearing a more "military" comportment than they.

that servants constructed masters as higher, more abstract beings at the same time as they were gradually internalizing those same disciplined compartments, ultimately in order to pass on to the status of master themselves.

On the other hand, it is equally important to stress that in the Middle Ages, the manners of youth were not utterly rejected. They had their place, which corresponded almost exactly to the place of the carnivalesque. Natalie Zemon Davis (1975) goes so far as saying that young men were considered to have a kind of communal "jurisdiction" over the domains of sex and violence which were considered their natural spheres of activity. In France, every village or urban quarter had its "youth abbeys" which not only provided the basis for the local militia but were responsible for putting on satirical charivaris to mock immoral villagers as well as to organize celebrations like Carnival. In England the organization was less formalized (Capp 1977), and youth leaders, such as the famous Lords of Misrule who presided over Christmas revels, tended to emerge only during certain moments of the ritual calendar, although the principle was much the same.

The existence of this ideology of youth and age had a profound effect on how changes in the organization of production, in the Early Modern period, were perceived. In a typical Medieval town, the majority of young men were apprentices and journeymen in the employ of an older master craftsman. Ideally, any apprentice could expect to become a master himself and a full member of the guild someday; and it was for this reason that guild regulations limited the number of apprentices a master was permitted to take on. But the more capitalist relations came to dominate a given industry, the longer a journeyman would have to wait before being able to achieve full adult status, a wife, a household, and a shop of his own. In the meantime, he would continue working for wages for his master. The result was that a large part of the workforce, men in their thirties and forties, found themselves living in a sort of suspended social adolescence. In the end, many began to abandon the ideal of autonomy entirely, marrying young and resigning themselves to the status of permanent wage laborers. With the enclosure movements and rise of commercial agriculture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of the rural poor were left in much the same position.

All of this happened so gradually, though, that the underlying assumptions people had about the meaning of wage labor need never have been seriously called into question. Traditionally, wage labor had been no more a permanent state than was adolescence—it was, in fact, the means by which adolescence was overcome. Even after it had become a permanent status, it was still imagined as a process of transformation. In the eyes of their employers, the laboring classes were not so much undisciplined and carnal by nature (a joking residue, a base stratum whose vices could be held out as evidence of those employers' own innate superiority) as rambunctious adolescents who needed to be disciplined and reformed through carefully supervised labor. Casting things in this way at least makes it easier to understand why the actual social struggles which surrounded the commercialization of English society and the emergence of a proto-bourgeoisie took the form that it did: to a large extent, endless quarrels over the place of youth in the community, and struggles over popular festivals and entertainments. Let me return briefly here the Puritan "reformation of manners" in Tudor and Stuart England.[28]

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[28] See Stone (1968), Thomas (1978), Hill (1975) for further discussion.

ENGLISH PURITANS

English Calvinists ("Puritans" was in fact a term of abuse) were mostly drawn from the "middle stratum" of their communities, the one which, as I've said, was most thoroughly caught up in the emerging national market. They were also the prosperous householders who employed the largest numbers of local youth as servants. The retreat of the aristocracy from rural life, along with much of the gentry (Stone 1965; Laslett 1965:180—1) left these people in a strategic position in most villages which they were quick to take advantage of. Godly reformers circulated pamphlets and bibles, pooled funds to hire preachers, and tried as best they could to win control of both the borough and the parish governments. As churchwardens and magistrates, they began stripping away everything they found distasteful in traditional worship. Bells no longer tolled at funerals; corn was not thrown at weddings; bagpipers and fiddlers were to have no part in religious ceremonies (Thomas 1971:66–67). Most of all, their attacks were aimed at calendar festivals, especially carnivalesque rituals like Christmas and May Day, and the ongoing festive life of the village green.

As Keith Thomas points out, such attacks were also attacks on the public place of the young in village culture:

> What were the campaigns for the Reformation of Manners if not attempts to suppress all the great obstacles to the subordination of youth: holidays, when the young people were released from their masters' supervision; theatres, to which they flocked to be corrupted; alehouses, which threw them into disorder, there being "many drunkards short of twenty years old"; gaming, "a pernicious thing and destructive of youth"; maypoles, which encouraged "the rout" in their insolency towards the "ancient and the honourable" and taught "young people impudency and rebellion"; dancing, for "where shall young men and maidens meet, if not at the dancing-place?"; sabbath-breaking, by "servants and … the younger sort"; and all the annual rites of misrule when youth temporarily inverted the social order? (Thomas 1976:221)

But concerns about youth were already becoming hard to distinguish from those concerning class. One constant complaint in Puritan tracts was the multiplication of impoverished households: The problem, in their view, was that young men and women were abandoning domestic service and marrying early, despite the fact that neither had the resources to support a proper family. This concern was matched with one over "masterless men"—with the independent poor, the murky and disordered world of hawkers, beggars, minstrels, and vagabonds—who in an ideal society should all be assembled under the domestic discipline of the godly, who would direct them in labor as in prayer (Hill 1979; Wrightson and Levine 1979).[29]

The more radical Calvinists developed a utopian vision in which authoritarian families were the only hierarchical organization that really needed to exist. The ideal community would be governed by an assembly of elders who were simply the heads of larger households. In New England, where Puritans were actually in a position to put some of these ideals into practice, the chief

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[29] I note in passing that the notion of reforming the lower strata was a bit difficult to reconcile with Calvinist doctrine, which encouraged most heads of household to at least the strong suspicion that their charges were predestined from the start to go to hell (cf Hill 1964). But this merely underlines how much the project itself—of defining a social class in terms of a stage in the life cycle—was inherently contradictory.

men of a community were given legal authority to place any young man and woman determined to be living alone in an "unruly household" as a servant in the households of more respectable elders—by force if necessary (Morgan 1944:45—47, 85—89). In other words, the Puritans did not see any distinction between projects of social reform directed at the lower classes and the process of educating the youth. The two categories were not fully distinguished; they formed, as it were, a kind of unruly residual, the solution in either case being the imposition of domestic discipline. In their ideal society, anyone without the means or discipline to support a family should be incorporated into a larger household to work under the pay and careful direction of a disciplined master who would also be responsible for their catechism and moral instruction.

As one might imagine, this vision, or the prospect of reducing collective ritual life to a mater of sermons and bible reading, did not inspire uniform enthusiasm among parishioners. English villagers seem to have had a particular aversion to being preached at. "When the vicar goeth into the pulpit to read what he himself hath written," observes one Stephen Gardiner in 1547, "then do the multitude goeth straight out of church, and home to drink" (Thomas 1971:161). And once called so into question, everyday habits like stopping off at the local alehouse after a day's work or piping on the village green became overt political issues. May Day celebrations (the English equivalent of the continental Carnival) became perhaps the greatest single particular focus of contention.

> The village maypole, Richard Baxter tells us, was near his father's house at Eaton Constantine, "so that we could not read the Scriptures in our family without the great disturbance of a tabor and pipe and noise in the street." Baxter often wanted to join the revelers, but he was put off by their calling his father a Puritan. The phallic maypole was for the rural lower class almost a symbol of independence of their betters: Baxter's father "could not break the sport," even though the piper was one of his own tenants (Hill 1964:184).

In some cases they lead to open confrontation:

> A Star Chamber case for 1604 tells how a group in the country parish of Alton, Southam, procured a minstrel and danced on Whitsunday. When the constable and church warden tried to arrest the musician, they were overpowered by his supporters who moved him to another part of the village, locked him in a house and, posting one of their own number on the roof to keep watch, continued to dance merrily on the lawn to the strains of the music that came out through the open window (Wright 1935:299).

It's hard to say how often such occasions led to outright violence (most of our sources were written by Puritans who referred to ordinary church ales as "heathenish rioting"), but riots did occur and not only over economic issues like enclosure.

Usually in any community in which a cadre of Calvinist zealots attempted to reform society, there were also village notables—tradition—minded ministers, minor gentry, prosperous yeoman farmers—who saw them as fanatics and prigs: "precise fellows," "busy controllers," as they were often called, who were determined to undermine the ancient ways. Such men often found themselves the unofficial leaders of anti-Puritan factions and could be found holding court at the local

alehouse or hosting a dance in their cottages each Sunday, as surely as the godly themselves would be at their sermons (Hunt 1983:150–1; Collinson 1983:408–9).

> The conflict between Puritans and "honest good fellows"—or, from the Puritan point of view, between the godly and the profane—divided virtually every parish in southern England. In Wiltshire and Dorsetshire in the 1630s it was the custom in many parishes to balance the factions by choosing one Puritan and one "honest man" as churchwardens. This conflict was far more ubiquitous and intense, I would argue, than antagonisms based explicitly on social class or even economic interest (Hunt 1983:146).

Though one suspects these other issues were usually entangled in the larger one, Hunt has also suggested that what was really at issue was a conflict between two very different images of community (1983:130—6). The Puritan one I have already described. The one that rose in opposition to it was less clearly articulated but seems to have been largely based on the ethos long implicit in the very popular festivities and rituals which had now been thrown so starkly into question. As a result, opposition to Puritanism followed the same dual nature as Carnival itself: the same combination of joking aggression and idealistic utopias.

At its simplest, opposition to the Puritans might be simple mockery: disruptive catcalls during sermons or catechisms, rude dramas improvised late at night at the local alehouse. If someone could come up with an excuse to carry out a charivari against one of the Saints, then that was best of all: there was the common suspicion, after all, that behind their fastidious exteriors, Puritans were really utterly depraved (Hunt 1983:145). Finally, as festivals like May Day became political issues, their subversive side was played up more and more. It was in the sixteenth century, for instance, that plays and ballads about Robin Hood began appearing in May games throughout England (Wright and Lones 1938, II:230–1; Hutton 1994:66–67).

Alongside the abuse there was also a more utopian side. Festivals had once been moments to define a community of equals. Now, after they had been pulled out of the fabric of everyday life and challenged from above, that definition began to acquire a whole new meaning. Like carnivals on the Continent, they came to commemorate a golden age when, it was imagined, equality and physical happiness were not yet things of the past. Festivals were times for merrymaking; once, all England had been merry. Note the way in which the expression "merry England" was originally employed: "I perceive you are a Puritan outright, you are one of those new men that would have nothing but preaching. It was never a merry world since that sect first came among us" (Collinson 1983:1). "The simple sort, which cannot skill of doctrine, speak of the merry world when there was less preaching, and when all things were so cheap, that they might have twenty eggs for a penny" (Hunt 1983:148). Or even: "It was never merry England since we were impressed to come to the church" (Thomas 1971:151). In later centuries Tory politicians would make the maypole and merry England into nostalgic, sentimental images in support of reactionary politics. In the sixteenth century, this imagery was nostalgic—and even, in a sense, reactionary—but the implications were very different. It reflected, for instance, the constant complaints over the loss of "good neighborhood," of the solidarity and mutual aid—seen especially in the sharing of food or the collective charity of churchales, soulales, and the like—that people assured each other had been the universal rule in those abundant days before greedy yeomen and Calvinist preachers conspired to destroy it. As time went on, the past came to look more and more like the Land of Cockaine.

In 1647, a group of dissidents and young servants from the newly founded Puritan colony of Plymouth, Massachusetts, abandoned their households to join the local Indians and set up a sixty-foot Maypole to celebrate their newfound independence. The elders of Plymouth immediately sent out a military expedition to have the pole ripped down and the ringleaders arrested.

PERSPECTIVES

I began this essay by arguing for the continuing relevance of comparative ethnography. The advantage of terms like joking and avoidance, I suggested, was that they are in no sense projections of existing Western categories on other cultures; in fact, the people who first coined the terms were under the impression that they were dealing with something with no parallel in their own societies. Nonetheless, the implicit logic they reveal can indeed be applied back to patterns of formal deference and hierarchy anywhere—in Western societies as much as any other. The first section of the essay was thus largely concerned with developing the outlines of such a theory. I began by distinguishing two ways of defining the human person, either as a collection of substances intrinsically continuous with the world and with others or as a collection of abstract properties set apart from it. In joking (by which I mean here, such behavior as is considered typical between joking partners), relations between bodies are at least playfully hostile; but in the case of relations of common substance they can take on a more idealistic, even utopian color. This came out particularly strongly in my analysis of hierarchy and its mock dissolution in the carnivalesque, where whole groups are set off against the world. I also suggested that carnival is not simply a matter of inverting hierarchy but of challenging its very basis by invoking radically different ways of conceiving the world—even if in the eyes of superiors, in which case the very act of challenging hierarchy in this way will often serve to provide more evidence of their own superiority.[30]

The second half of this study focuses specifically on the relation of manners and property: the "generalization of avoidance" of the title. Rather than review this argument again, let me end with a note of comparison. A skeptical reader, faced with exotic terms like joking and avoidance may well ask if all I am doing is to introduce yet another level of jargon to an already crowded field. In fact, I have been consistently trying to avoid setting up my terms in such a way as to make it easy for others to borrow the terms in any unthinking, automatic fashion (hopefully, not at the cost of future obscurity). Still, it would not hurt to provide a little demonstration of how much of a difference these terms can make. Let me illustrate this by comparing my own analysis with the work of Louis Dumont, whose arguments about the nature of hierarchy I rather cavalierly dismissed in section 2.

Dumont conceives hierarchical societies, most of all, as holistic ones. A social hierarchy is a system whereby different groups are ranked in relation to a whole.[31] If one group is ranked higher than another, it is always because it is the one that represents the totality to which both of them belong. According to Dumont, hierarchy is about inclusion (it is just that, in a sort of Orwellian sense, some are a little more included than others). To speak of exclusion in a hierarchical society is meaningless. It only makes sense in an individualistic society, in which the assumption is that everyone has an equal right of access to whatever good things there are, simply on the basis of

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[30] Though in fact, these perspectives, available to anyone, can all be invoked in different contexts.
[31] He also seems to assume that all holistic systems must be hierarchical, but this is another issue.

their individuality. The American "color bar," according to Dumont, is an ideology of exclusion and, as such, has nothing in common with hierarchy. It is a fundamentally different type of thing. Therefore, there can be no real continuity between a hierarchical order and an individualistic one; they are divided by a fundamental historical break (Dumont 1971, 1986).

My own insistence that social hierarchies are always combinations of inclusion and exclusion has entirely different implications. First of all, one need posit no absolute break between the two periods. Take Puritan ideology for example. It was clearly hierarchical; only, in place of the endless gradations characteristic of a feudal system, one is left with a minimal hierarchy of two or perhaps three levels: women, children, and servants were encompassed within the personality of the householder; and in all but the most radical versions, householders were encompassed by the King or state. Neither was the Puritan concern with "the darker parish" and floating population of "masterless men" fundamentally different from contemporary concerns with an immoral and overly fertile In fact, as some historians of the time have noted (Hunt 1983), Puritan opinions on this subject—that the problem of poverty had nothing to do with real wages but was rooted in the poor's own lack of morality and self-control, their unwillingness to create proper families— have an uncanny resemblance to those employed by American conservatives today. Rather than hierarchies being swept away, it is more as if the hierarchical residual has been squeezed down, its imagery becoming all the more intense having been so.

This leads to my second, and final, point: that any attempt to create a genuinely egalitarian ethos on the basis of principles ultimately derived from formal deference is impossible. There is a fundamental contradiction here. The logic of setting an abstract being apart necessarily involves setting it off against something; in practice, that always seems to mean creating a residual category of people—if not some racial or ethnic category, then workers, the poor, losers in the economic game—who are seen as chaotic, corporeal, animalistic, dangerous. By this logic, for instance, North American racism is not the great exception to the possessive individualism on which the country is founded—an anomaly which for some reason never seems to go away— but something essential to its nature. In the current political climate, in which "the market" is considered synonymous with democracy and freedom and in which its proponents are therefore proclaiming the right to "reform" everything and everyone on earth, this is a point we might do well to bear in mind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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